

A THEOLOGY OF HOPE FOR PASTORAL CARE:
REFRAMING LIFE'S LOSSES IN THE CONTEXT OF GOD'S FUTURE

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DEDICATION

This project is dedicated to my son, Zach who, in his eight years of fighting against cancer, demonstrated uncommon courage; to my wife, Jenny, who patiently cared for him during all those years, and who has gracefully walked the journey of recovery with me since his passing; and to our daughter, Megan, who gives us hope for the future.

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ABSTRACT

This project begins by suggesting that the question posed by the Hebrews in exile—“How could we sing the Lord’s song in a foreign land?” (Psalm 137)—is descriptive for individuals who experience loss. In the experience of loss, the securities of a life one has known, even of God’s place in that world, the tacit understandings of what Jeffrey Kauffman calls “the assumptive world,” have been lost and there is uncertainty how, or if, one can continue to keep, much less regain, hope in its wake. The project addresses this critical question by developing a theology of hope based primarily on the work of Jürgen Moltmann. Three consolations of Christian hope are offered including: (1) God’s intention to be in solidarity with us; (2) God’s promise of resurrection possibility; (3) Our response of new engagement in the world based on God’s hope for the present and future. The project then suggests that this theology of hope may be used in a pastoral care setting to help individuals advance in the hope-making process. Using Dori Baker’s four steps of story theology, the project provides a method for individuals to share life’s losses and to name the personal consequences of one’s experience of loss, but then turns in the final two steps (experience far and going forth) to introduce the foundational consolations of a theology of hope to suggest that one may begin to reframe life’s losses in the context of God’s promise of resurrection possibilities. The project concludes by drawing from other contemporary theologians, including Flora Keshgegian and Ellen Ott Marshall, in acknowledging that the journey to new hope may happen more haltingly, circuitously and incompletely than Moltmann’s linear-progressive vision of hope development. Nevertheless, the project contends that in the critical move from mournful plea to personal agency—a move made in cooperation with God who lives in compassionate and hopeful solidarity with us—God’s promise of resurrection possibility offers therapeutic value in assisting the grieving, and those

who assist the grieving, to begin the process of recasting the seemingly dead-end occasions of loss in the more hopeful light of God's promised future.

CHAPTER I. INTRODUCTION TO CONTEXT AND CONCERN: SINGING THE LORD'S SONG IN A FOREIGN LAND

By the rivers of Babylon—there we sat down and wept when we remembered Zion. On the willows there we hung up our harps. For there our captors asked us for songs, and our tormentors asked for mirth saying, “Sing us one of the songs of Zion!” How could we sing the Lord’s song in a foreign land?¹

A. An Archetypal Story of Loss: Israel in Exile

Psalm 137 remembers an occasion of deep sorrow in Israel’s life. Recalling a time during the nation’s nearly sixty years in foreign captivity, the Psalmist describes the pain of trying to sing a familiar and happy song of faith in an unfamiliar and God-forsaken place. The facts matter in the telling of their story. Even though Israel has lived through other difficult times—brutalized as Pharaoh’s slaves in Egypt, lost in a wilderness in search of a promised land—this occasion of loss is unique. From Abraham’s maiden journey, through all the years of slavery, to Exodus, to journey, to claiming a promised land, Israel, though sometimes doubting its eventual destiny and the truth of God’s promise, had been a forward-leaning people. Their orientation to life had been one of search, and quest, and journey—life marked by an anticipation of a promise not yet realized, of a journey that was unfolding.

The period of exile was a unique occasion in Israel’s life. Now Israel was faced with finding what it had once found. Its orientation to life was now no longer one of quest but reclamation. Beginning around 597 BC and for sixty years until the Persian Empire defeated the Babylonian army and Cyrus issued an edict that Israel could return to its homeland and rebuild its Temple, Nebuchadnezzar and his successors held Israel captive. Through a series of three deportations likely ending with the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem, the one-time conquering and chosen people of God were now slaves as they had been in Egypt. Israel’s

¹ Psalm 137:1-4. All biblical quotations in this paper are taken from the New Revised Standard Version, 2010.

occasion of loss had a name. It was forced exile. Their loss was not imagined. It was rooted in the real facts of history. During their sixty years living in exile, generations remembered the stories of God's great mercy enacted in the lives of their ancestors through the Exodus, but it was not their experience. If God still had mercy for Israel, the people of the exile would once again have to apprehend it as promise, but not yet reality. The Psalmist's lament in Psalm 137 echoes a mournful longing not only for place and time, but also for remembered experience of relationship with God.

In time, of course, the Temple would be rebuilt and the people would return home, and insofar as life can ever be the same after sixty years of sustained anguish, Israel's loss was not permanent. And yet, it is the deep meaning of Israel's present circumstance that matters to the Psalmist. The writer's lament addresses the very real hardship of present experience. In the present, there is no easy talk of reassurance that God is faithful and that God has a history of making things right in the end, that what the people need to do is pray, sing and wait patiently. Instead there is raw anger and outrage, and exasperation, and then, as one being emotionally spent, there is troubled introspection, and doubt, and a loss of confidence, and insecurity, and palpable apprehension that things can ever be made right again.

Israel's march into exile meant the disruption of every aspect of normalcy. Families were torn apart. Communities were closed. The symbol of Israel's corporate identity, the Temple, was burned to the ground. Painful as these experiences were, even more painful were the spiritual implications of these facts. If the Temple was tangible, concrete proof of God's continued presence, now there was confusion as to where God might be found with certainty. If a homeland was evidence of God's promise, now the covenant of promise was called into question. If the covenant was thought to be inviolable, now the permanence of all things

between God and Israel was open for negotiation. And if the foundations of Israel's relationship with God were called into question, there was considerable anxiety as to what the future would bring. When and how would their pain end? Was their pain interminable? And in this indeterminate interim time, how could it be possible to sing a joyful song of praise to God?

B. Seasons in the Spiritual Life

Walter Brueggemann calls this time in Israel's life one of disorientation.² Here the life of Israel is marked not by order, and certainty, but by relative chaos and uncertainty. In times of orientation, Israel could sing with a clear and steady voice. Now it could barely muster the energy to sing at all. In times of orientation, the patterns of life unfold with a pleasing rhythm. Here, in exile, there is no predictable pattern. There is discord, incoherence, disequilibrium, and disorientation.

At first glance, those who read the Psalmist's lament might be tempted to call this occasion in Israel's life an aberration, an anomaly—a dark period that occasionally comes to some of us, but is neither the dominant nor the inevitable narrative of the faithful. Or, they might be tempted to trace the cause of Israel's demise, as Israel later did, to a protracted period of disobedience during which Israel resisted God's prophets and received their predictable and just punishment. The pain of loss is no less real, of course, but there is at least comfort in maintaining the illusion that experiences of loss and subsequent darkness and suffering can be avoided altogether if one learns to follow certain rules of right behavior.

And yet, such experiences, for whatever reason, whether circumstances we can control or ones that come to us haphazardly, randomly, unexpectedly, do not appear to be avoidable

² Walter Brueggemann, *The Message of the Psalms* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Press, 1984), 51, 74-77.

anomalies. In fact, as Brueggemann suggests, the message of the Psalmist is enduring in the Church because it teaches a spirituality that resonates with all seasons of life: times of orientation when we can see forward without hindrance, and times of disorientation when we are plunged into some darkness and cannot quite believe what we have always known to be true about God, followed providentially by periods of reorientation when we reclaim a certainty about the truth of God's place in our lives. Though some in the Church may want to emphasize those periods of the spiritual journey where God is obviously present, in times of normalcy or new beginning, God is also present in those times when God may seem most absent, in times of dark disorientation. All seasons of human experience are part of the spiritual journey, even especially the seasons we may try to avoid. Life in God's presence is not always one of joy. "Life is also savagely marked by disequilibrium, incoherence, and unrelieved asymmetry," Brueggemann writes. Yet strangely, "It is a curious fact that the Church has, by and large, continued to sing songs of orientation in a world increasingly experienced as disoriented."³

And this, I contend in this project, is precisely how the Church may teach the anguished to resolve the particularity of their losses: Honestly and unreservedly, speaking the full range of human emotion in God's presence, lifting up one's grievance uncensored to God; and also insistently and boldly like the Psalmist in Psalm 137, emphasizing to God that things have gone horribly wrong, that the resulting pain is intolerable and, therefore, unacceptable, and that it is incumbent upon God to intervene so that order might be restored; yet also expectedly and hopefully, waiting for the possibility of God's renewed activity.

The value of Psalm 137 as a model for reclaiming hope in a time of loss is not that it prescribes a neat little summary of rules leading from here to there, from disorientation to reorientation, from despair to renewed hope. The value is in the process which it suggests. The

³ Ibid., 51.

Psalmist believes that what begins in mournful lament will likely end in renewal. And yet, the Psalmist also acknowledges that the process must be engaged, and that what is wrong about life will not be immediately righted. As Brueggemann writes, Psalm 137 is a word for those who are in it with God for the long haul, who accept, if even begrudgingly, that the journey leading to restoration will take time.

And yet, the words of Psalm 137 maintain an implied impatience which amounts to a spirited refusal to accept that this is the end of the story. God has not brought Israel this far only to abandon her in captivity. This robust emotion becomes the impetus to search for a new experience of hope in God. There is grief today but there will be cause for rejoicing tomorrow. Israel is stuck in a wasteland of foreign and godless rule, but it nurtures a vision of a day when it will experience new normalcy. It is emasculated by the iron chains of captivity, but it will summon the resolve to rise up, if even savagely in its imagination, to participate in the solution to its troubling predicament. As such, the Psalmist suggests a defiant hope. The Psalmist's words strike an unmistakably raw tone. There is too much at stake to shrink into passive piety. Israel is beaten down, but it will not abdicate or resign itself. Here is a description of a necessarily tenacious, demanding, unbending hope: a faithful hope, an enduring hope, a resourceful hope that intends to see the lifting of its present darkness.

C. Remembering Other Stories of Loss

I begin this project with a reflection on the deep pathos of the Psalmist's lament, because it offers a rich description of the complicated process that many whom I have served as pastor have lived and are living. From the inception of their various losses, replete as they inevitably are with the resulting emotions of sorrow, anger, fear, anxiety, disbelief, disillusionment,

numbness, shock, and confusion to the even messier and complex middle stages of exhaustion, tempting resignation, and despair, to an eventual place of healing in whatever form that healing comes, the people of my parish live the experiences of the Psalmist's lament. Like Israel, they too have experienced the loss of something or someone they could never have imagined. They cry out loudly for their loss. And in their cries they speak of sadness or terrible mourning. They sometimes speak of complete disgust and total indignation. Or sometimes they retreat to corners of self-pity. But coupled with their great candor is an equal insistence that the reality of their present circumstances not be the end of their life story even if they cannot be sure how those stories will unfold.

Richard⁴ the singer has been diagnosed with cancer of the throat. "The beast" as he and his wife call the cancer, threatens to take something valuable from him—not just life, but quality of life and a part of his self which has long defined him. He can hardly believe the brutal regimen of chemotherapy and radiation. There is considerable hope that the treatments will eradicate, if not cure, the cancer. But presently it is hard to swallow; he has lost a sense of taste; he is left to whisper, and he is tired most of the time. It is time to begin planting the seeds of another backyard garden. He always does. But now, as the winter winds of February howl, he is told by his doctor to be patient and to wait for the treatments to kill the cancer and for his body to recover from the effects of the treatment. There is no certainty at this point about what might be permanent or transient, whether for example he will be able to sing like he used to, or whether or not surgery might still be needed. He can only wait.

Mary's husband was sentenced to a life-time of jail for his crimes. She is a young mother of a two-year-old. She has just begun her career in ministry. When the sentence was announced, she declared that her life was over. Her anger continues to boil and her sense of betrayal is deep.

⁴ The names listed in this section have been changed to protect anonymity.

Her future is clouded with unresolved issues. She does well to work and be a mother. Questions about whether or not to remain married to the man who betrayed her, and if she does divorce him, the reality of being a single parent, and what path her career might take from this point forward are still too difficult to process at this point in her recovery.

Jill was shot in the head by an angry boyfriend years ago. In those first days after the surgery to remove the bullets, the family feared she would not live. They were appalled by the brutality of what had happened to her. Some questioned why God allowed such a horrible thing. She is alive today but significantly changed by her experience. Physically, she carries the scars of her injury. Her vision and hearing are impaired. Her gait is sometimes unsteady. Occasionally she has difficulty remembering or finding the right word. She has made tremendous strides. I remember many days when I listened as she questioned if her new life was worth living. But recently I went to her art exhibit. Her thoughts are no longer consumed in toxic anger. Today she imagines images of beauty.

Pam was diagnosed with breast cancer a few years ago. She bravely consented to a double mastectomy in order to pre-empt the possibility of any further development. Then the cancer which began in her breast took root in her bones. Her primary doctor insists that her condition can be managed, but her life is filled with frequent treatments, chronic, sometime disabling, fatigue, and persistent pain. She works hard to maintain a good spirit to continue her career and to invest herself in her two pre-teenage boys. But the reality of her diagnosis is a persistent drain on her spirit, and sometimes she wonders if her doctor's optimism is true. She has more questions than answers now. Will she live to see her boys grow to adulthood? Will she be able to maintain the strength to keep working? What might happen to her family if she is not able to contribute financially? Will her insurance company continue to approve the treatments

her doctor orders? Is her illness causing debilitating, long-term effects on her children and marriage? And, where is God in all of this? Years ago she was an active leader in the church. She attended worship regularly and sponsored a high school youth program. We have talked some. More than once she has asked tough questions about her faith and God and what meaning to make of her illness.

Grace is going through a long and painful divorce proceeding. Neither lawyer indicates any willingness to accommodate the other's demands. This is her second marriage. He was the main source of their income. Now the house is in foreclosure. There is a heated custody battle over the one son they had together. A judge has made provisional arrangements for the son to spend time with each parent. But the parents disagree about how their son should be cared for and twice arguments have turned into dangerous episodes of domestic violence. Over a two-month period she has presented herself with deep bruises to the head and arms. Although she cannot predict how the court proceedings will end, she knows that in the near future she will have to move from her home of fourteen years, leave the part-time job she has enjoyed for nearly four years to find full-time employment and yet still likely lower her standard of living while learning to live alone. Her outlook on life vacillates between anger for the unfairness of what has happened to her, to deep sadness for having lost the family that she did not know was at risk, to having considerable fear about what the future will bring and whether she will have the requisite resources both financial and emotional to navigate an uncertain path.

Olivia gives care to her chronically ill husband. He has frequent fevers, persistent infections, generalized and excruciating pain, early stage dementia, increasing periods of confusion, multiple conditions that require a finely balanced regime of medications, and an anger that sometimes spills out in hurtful ways. For the last two years she has managed his care with

great skill. She intuitively knows the subtle signs of his conditions and anticipates what care he will need. She has great inner fortitude and an amazing capacity to rebound from long periods of high personal demand. But her exhaustion is cumulative, and she has begun to acknowledge that her husband is never going to be well and that his condition is slowly worsening. The complexity of her life is compounded by her daughter's recently failed marriage, inability to find a job to support herself and her three children, and a rather sudden decision to accept a job several states away, leaving mom, and her daughter's ex-husband, with whom she has had a long adversarial relationship, to care for the kids. Now Olivia drives the oldest child to a school miles away, even though her husband fusses that she spends too much time taking care of them. She understands that her grandchildren, and especially the oldest one, now in adolescence, has been forced to move three times in the last year, and is too fragile emotionally to make another mid-year change. Her husband's health and life are uncertain. Her ability to continue paying for health insurance and costly medications is in question. Her daughter's decision is untenable in the long-term. The development of her grandchildren is clouded.

Each of these life stories is unique. And yet, as a pastor, each of them features striking similarities. In a variety of ways all of them have been dislocated by some changing aspect of their lives. For reasons ranging from a diagnosis, to a failed marriage, to acts of violence, to a partner's crime, to a family member's decision to move away leaving the children, each of them has experienced significant loss. For some of them it is still too early to know if the loss will be permanent or temporary. For some of them the initial loss is already precipitating additional losses. For some the experience of loss, whether temporary or not, has already irreversibly, for better or worse, changed their outlook on life. But for all of them, and perhaps most significantly, their respective losses have challenged their confidence in the experience of God—

of how God is in relationship to them and what they might expect of God today and in their futures. Many of them have been life-long Christians. And yet, because of their circumstances they have been forced to rethink the fundamentals of their faith and to consider how they might be in relationship to God in the future. Even more, they wonder what their future will be.

D. Pastor as Agent of Hope

Insofar as hope points to the future, and of the possibility of God's creative restoring agency in that future, the matter of hope and how hope might be nurtured and strengthened, seems essential to my place as pastor in the lives of all those whose stories I have told. Andrew Lester writes that the root dilemma emerging from each instance of loss, "the most profound feeling, the most intense pain of the bereaved, lies in the loss of future stories."⁵ The projection of themselves into the future, in the context of their present experiences of disorientation, often presents a crisis of faith. The crisis is precipitated by the disorienting turn in their lives, but it may also be further exacerbated by what Jürgen Moltmann⁶ suggests are two possible forms of hopelessness: presumption, which assesses the landscape of loss and presumes to know how God must act to provide safe passage to new orientation, but how when God does not act in ways that are expected, turns to disillusionment with God; or despair, which assesses the landscape of loss and preemptively decides that the situation is too complicated for even God to resolve, and so therefore, loss lapses into spiritual resignation.⁷

⁵ Andrew Lester, *Hope in Pastoral Care and Counseling* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995), 50.

⁶ Jürgen Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, trans. James W. Leitch (London: SCM Press, 1967), 8. Moltmann draws this interpretation from Joseph Pieper in his treatise *Über die Hoffnung*, 1949.

⁷ Søren Kierkegaard, *The Sickness Unto Death*, 35-42. Kierkegaard might possibly name what Pieper calls "despair" a "despair of necessity," a form of despair in which a person loses sight of possibility whether relating to God's power or a person's capacity for self-agency. Kierkegaard would also add another form of hopelessness: "the despair of possibility" which looks to the future with an unreasonable sense of possibility forgetting the limits of one's finitude, in which case hopelessness may have less to do with the actuality of one's future and more to do with one's extremely flawed, overly optimistic outlook on life.

For the sake of this project, I also note that the dilemma of faith described as the experience of broken future stories is not only a personal phenomenon. It is also manifested in the church's corporate experience. In fact, during the one-year period during which this project was conceived, my congregation has experienced no less than four major instances of disorientation. A long-time and beloved minister voluntarily resigned to take a new position. A member of the church was released from federal prison for sex offenses with a minor and, with his wife's apparent consent, indicated an interest in returning to the church. A member of the church, increasingly transparent about her alternate sexual orientation, applied to serve as one of our church's volunteer youth sponsors. Two months later, possibly as a consequence of all that had happened before, a significant reduction in pledges to the general fund necessitated hard discussions about real cuts to the new year's proposed budget, release of staff, and a decision to relocate the church's contemporary worship service to the main campus. Each of these events heightened the congregation's anxiety about the church's future story. Significant foundations of congregational hopefulness—a beloved and successful pastor, disagreement about the place of both sex offenders in the church and openly gay members in leadership, and a subsequent and ongoing battle over the primacy of two core values (the safety of our children and the mandate to forgive, extend grace and accept all people) along with a threat to the congregation's financial viability—were challenged, diminished, weakened, fundamentally threatened, and in the aftermath the church began to experience a need for renewed hope about God's place in our church.

My social position in this project on hope is four-fold. I am senior pastor to a congregation of nearly 300 active members, having served in this capacity over ten years. In the context of the personal stories described above, I pray with, minister to, and listen to my

parishioners as they tell their stories. Assuming what Eugene Peterson names as the “pastoral work of pain-sharing”⁸ I neither minimize nor try to avoid the hard reality of what they face. I do not offer easy answers or even answers at all. I encourage my parishioners to speak deeply, with emotional rawness, about their circumstances. As Peterson writes about the work of pain-sharing, I “engage them in their suffering.” In the context of the corporate narratives, the ones described above that place my congregation in a period of disorientation, I act as a primary agent of hope.⁹ Frequently, since the onset of my congregation’s occasions of disorientation, I have intentionally preached on the subject of Christian hope suggesting that as God has been with our church for so many decades, God will continue to fashion a future for us. In reports to our congregation’s official Board, I frame the issues of challenge before us as opportunities for God to lead us and for us to demonstrate faithfulness. And as time passes and the church continues to survive the difficulties of severe theological disagreement, change, and threats to financial solvency, I suggest that our capacity to keep moving forward, however haltingly, is evidence that we have not been overcome by what we feared in the beginning would irreversibly hurt us. Drawing from more than twenty-five years of ordained ministry in a variety of settings, I ask my congregation to see present circumstances in the larger context of God’s time and remind them that experience has taught me that the Church has a great capacity to survive, even manage finally to flourish, despite seasons of hardship.

My role in this regard is to draw out the possible theological meaning of our experience. We face change. Change is a part of the experience of our growth as a faith community. The

⁸ John Claypool, *Five Smooth Stones for Pastoral Work* (Atlanta, GA: John Knox Press, 1975), 93ff.

⁹ Donald Capps, *Agents of Hope: A Pastoral Psychology* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2001), 26-27. Capps argues that as agents of hope, pastors help facilitate a capacity for discernment—helping people in the congregation develop a “more discriminating understanding of what desires are likely to lead to a more hopeful life and which ones are likely to contribute to a life of despair.” Capps has personal pastoral interaction in mind. I use this phrase to describe the more public role of pastor.

church is as Jürgen Moltmann suggests an exodus community. We face disagreement of core values. Our disagreement is a sign of our passion to understand the Gospel. We face issues of sexual orientation and criminal behavior that our ancestors did not face. But these issues give us new ways to imagine forgiveness and acceptance, and to struggle with the delicate balance between unmerited grace on the one hand and ethical accountability on the other; between being a community of “resident aliens”¹⁰ on the one hand with a distinctive identity and one of inclusivity, diversity and hospitality on the other. If we struggle with these seemingly contradictory values, it is because we must.

E. Pastor as Wounded Healer: This is My Story¹¹

I serve as pastor and theologian. Those are my official roles. But for the purpose of this study, I serve as parent and survivor. At precisely the same time I officially accepted the call to be the congregation’s senior minister, I also learned that my son had recurrent and widely spread brain cancer. He was first diagnosed July 3, 1995. Subsequent to a long regimen of chemotherapy and radiation, he experienced a nearly six-year remission. But in July 2001, shortly after receiving the call to my present congregation, the surgeon recommended that he undergo surgery to remove what appeared on scans to be active cancer in both the brain and spine. Following the surgery we understood that his chances of survival beyond one to two years were very slim. It was with this new information (information that I fully disclosed to the congregation) that I began my present ministry September 4, 2001.

¹⁰ Stanley Hauerwas and William Willimon, *Resident Aliens* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1989), 12. The main contention of the book is that the Christian community is necessarily at odds with its surrounding culture, that in this sense, we live as “aliens” in a foreign land—in the land but not defined by its mores.

¹¹ Metaphor used by Henri Nouwen in his book of the same title, *Wounded Healer* (Garden City, NY: Image Books, 1979), xvi.

By December, Zach's cancer had spread further. By the following spring, based on a series of new scans, his oncologist indicated that he had possibly one year to live. In what I now understand was part hope against hope and denial, we made provisions for him to be seen and treated by a new set of doctors in New York. He died at a hospital there, June 4, 2003, less than two years after having begun my ministry. My family's mourning was deep and extended. It is fair to say that from the beginning of my ministry I was defined by my son's illness and eventual death. I was seen not simply as senior pastor and preacher, teacher and resident theologian, but rather as the pastor who had a very sick son, and then upon his death, as a pastor and pastor's family in grief. While I now understand that my circumstance in many ways distracted and hindered me and significantly affected the typical period of beginning that a congregation and new pastor share, I also know that my experience with my son's terminal illness and death, afforded me a unique pastoral currency. Frequently, in making hospital visitation, in presiding at funerals, in addressing issues of loss, members commented that I must know the pain of loss more deeply than anyone. This particular role as mourner-in-chief was my primary designation for at least five years following his death. This designation began to change slowly, especially as I began my Doctor of Ministry studies in January 2008. For the first time the congregation began to see me not as a father who mourned the loss of a child, but as pastor who was prepared to invest himself in the future. It has been almost eight years since his death. In the pulpit I draw fewer illustrations from those dark years and in turn many of the people who shared those years most closely with me speak less of them. Some of the staff members who lived those years with me have left. Now, more recent stories of personal loss consume our congregational prayers and discussion. This transition from pastor-centeredness to congregational-centeredness was symbolically illustrated this past Advent season. For all the years since our son's passing,

members of the church have given a poinsettia in his memory. This year they did not. I took that as a welcome sign that in the church's mind I had successfully navigated the process from a spiritual season of disorientation to new orientation. No longer a pastor largely defined by his loss, I have new freedom to draw with discretion upon my experiences of loss, grief and suffering without those experiences being the center of attention.

F. The Help and Hindrance of Being Wounded Healer

That I continue to draw from those experiences in the implementation and writing of this project is both a help and a hindrance. Having experienced deep loss, I am Henri Nouwen's "wounded healer," or John Claypool's "fellow struggler"—one who has experienced what I set out to understand and describe. Passages from Nicholas Wolterstorff's book, written as personal journal following his son's death, spoke to me deeply in the first days following my son's death and, though they are painful to read today, I remember that they gave expression to a depth of emotion that was honest and necessary:

There's a hole in the world now. In the place where he was, there's now just nothing. A center, like no other, of memory and hope and knowledge and affection which once inhabited this earth is gone. Only a gap remains The world is emptier. My son is gone. Nothing fills the void of his absence. He's not replaceable. We can't go out and get another just like him.¹²

Because of my personal experience, I understand and accept the necessity of angry, raw lament. And I have no illusion that in all our lives, for a variety of reasons, we will inevitably be brought to occasions where life will hurt us so deeply that we will instinctively be moved to speak of life as darkness. My own experience of loss helped me realize that I had constructed parameters around certain aspects of my life. Some aspects, I believed, were vulnerable to loss or change,

¹² Wolterstorff, *Lament for a Son* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1987), 32-33.

and some were immune. When my son died, I realized that in my adult life I had held God to an unspoken agreement: I would expect to be tested in my life of commitment to the Church, but God would never allow one of my children to be taken from me. When he died, I realized that my faith had been partly founded on illusion. I learned that nothing and no one in my life, not even my own life, was invulnerable. This hard lesson enables me to be more fully present with those who experience the first shock waves of unimaginable loss.

This experience has also sometimes been a hindrance. In ministering to those who, for instance, have been newly diagnosed with cancer, I tend to project my experience onto their experience—to be tempted to call into question the doctor's early optimism, to read between the lines of what doctors tell their patients in efforts to bolster hopes at the onset and the reality of what normally ensues in the long run. My experience has taught me that acute illnesses, especially cancer cases, become chronic ones that have cumulative effects, so that what begins as clear protocols to treat a single, identifiable disease often turns to more complicated and, from the patient's view, unanticipated challenges to manage secondary conditions; and an understanding that there are important differentiations between curing the illness and managing it, that remissions that are achieved are not necessarily permanent; that when doctors speak of the percentages of successful treatment, or survival statistics, they often speak in terms of five-year periods of time. Yet, in the beginning this is precisely not what a patient needs to hear from their pastor even though it is likely to be the truth of the matter. It is to say that I have some difficulty praying the expected prayers for healing with honesty.

This is also true in those times when I minister to those who have lost loved ones. In the early stages of grief, members of the family, especially primary caregivers, typically experience a sort of short-term feeling of well-being—peace, comfort, the strength of a focused community,

determination to bear up. Yet, inevitably over time these first experiences of euphoria and determination give way to longer, more lonely feelings of loss and sadness and of the heartbreaking realization that the loss is permanent and that life, whatever it will be, will be different. It is here in these later stages of loss recovery that I believe the real work of hope-making begins. It is here that I contend that authentic hope has the possibility of emerging, in the places of what Martin Marty calls a ‘wintery spirituality’—not only in the conventional places where “a person can best display the fulfilled soul by jumping up and down” or in singing songs “to shout the language of abundance and life.”¹³ Additionally, they must also know a means to address the periods of God’s seeming “absence when doubt pleads for time, when despair intrudes, when death scourges.”¹⁴ It is exasperating that on occasion as pastor I must sometimes refrain from challenging those who experience loss to incorporate both light and darkness, affirmation and doubt, presence and feelings of absence, joy, and shades of despair, into the fullness of an authentic faith.

G. The Critical Question: Expectations of Christian Hope

The question at stake in this project is not whether or not people need a Christ-shaped hope. The stories in this chapter and many more like them point to the critical need for it. Nor does this project set out to question the efficacy of the Church’s resources to confer hope. The Church has at its disposal, and in my congregation routinely practices, the varied pathways to hope. In reading and meditating on Holy Scripture, the truth of God’s will to be in long-term

¹³ Martin E. Marty, *A Cry of Absence: Reflections for the Winter of the Heart* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1983), 5. Here, Marty argues for the importance of wintery spirituality not as replacement for a summery spirituality, but as a necessary corrective. In fact, both forms of spirituality have their places in the life of faith. If summery types cannot contemplate the place of God in absence they will not be suited for the long haul; similarly, if wintery types are never able to accept the affirming presence of God in darkness they will not endure.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 10.

relationship with us is reaffirmed. In the rituals of weekly worship, God's presence is enacted and remembered. In the celebration of the Lord's Supper, God's mysterious presence becomes visible and concrete. In the gathering of the community, those who feel the solitary burden of loss join with those who share similar burdens, demonstrating a witness to faithfulness, not only to their contemporaries, but to the saint whose stories we remember in this place. Through prayer we give expression to our inmost thoughts and anticipate God's hearing of them. In song, we give voice to the full range of emotion that marks our faith journey—from experiences of grace that continue to amaze us to others that reveal the persistent fears that bind us and for which we seek renewed courage.

In my experience as pastor, the pervasive question that needs answering is whether or not in seeking God during times of loss, we are willing to learn and to accept the hope that Scripture teaches that God promises to give. Here, the question of hope in times of loss becomes a question of expectation. What, in times of loss, can I expect God to do for me? What in times of loss does God expect of me? In what forms do I expect my faith in God to console me?

In his theological reflection following the death of his daughter, John Claypool remembers a question a Jewish rabbi asked him about six weeks following his loss. They met in the hallway as he was making hospital rounds. The friend paused to say how sorry he was and then, Claypool says, "he caught me off-guard by saying, 'I want to ask you something . . . Did God do anything for any of you in the midst of all that circumstance?'"¹⁵ Claypool writes that he believed he heard his friend to say, "Is there anything we can attribute to the divine that took place in this awful experience through which you just came?"¹⁶ He writes that he had no

¹⁵ John Claypool, "What Can We Expect of God?" in *This Incomplete One: Words Occasioned by the Death of a Young Person*, edited by Michael D. Bush (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2006), 47.

¹⁶ Ibid.

immediate answer, but the question provoked deep reflection which eventually led him to offer an answer: Yes. God was with me. And God did help me and my family and my daughter, but not in ways that I would have preferred, nor in ways that I immediately understood.

C.S. Lewis writes of this same experience. Following the death of his wife, Lewis explains a fundamental issue of faith and hope in loss: “Not that I am (I think) in much danger of ceasing to believe in God. The real danger is of coming to believe such dreadful things about him. The conclusion I dread is not, ‘So there’s no God after all,’ but ‘so this is what God’s really like. Deceive yourself no longer.’”¹⁷ In the process of grief recovery, Lewis eventually comes to the realization that the problem of his theological anguish in grief is not God’s inadequacy, but his flawed view of God’s consolations. Thomas Attig, who reflects on Lewis’ recovery, contends that his experience suggests a normative process from grief to hope—that what is at stake is a process of theological rehabilitation “involving nothing less than relearning the world of our experience”¹⁸ (and of God’s place in it). Lewis writes that in the beginning he could “describe a state; make a map of sorrow.” Later, he accepts that the journey from grief to hope is an ongoing process with few directions. Nevertheless, Claypool offers an outline of what can be expected of God suggesting that God’s presence is not manifest in one way or another, but in a variety of ways: as answer to prayer for a miracle, as a summons to collaborate with God in finding an answer, or finally, perhaps most frequently, in granting a sufficient grace to endure.¹⁹

This project sets out to articulate a theology of hope for pastoral care that begins with the assumption that relearning who God is for us in times of loss is an important piece of the process

¹⁷ C.S. Lewis, *A Grief Observed* (New York: Bantam Books, 1976), 5.

¹⁸ Thomas Attig, “Relearning the World: Making and Finding Meanings,” in *Meaning Reconstruction and the Experience of Loss*, edited by Robert A. Neimeyer (Washington, D.C.: American Psychological Association, 2001), 33.

¹⁹ Claypool, “What Can We Expect of God?” in *This Incomplete One*, 50-51. Claypool hints at this in his exposition of Isaiah 40: 29-31. In, *The Hopeful Heart* (New York: Morehouse Publishing, 2003), 33-61, Claypool gives a definitive point-by-point description of what can be expected of God.

in claiming Christian hope. And yet, I also contend that relearning our expectations of hope is rarely gained prior to the experience of loss, in part because the Church tends to privilege rituals of summery spirituality and because one cannot know truly what is needed of hope until life's actualities declare the necessities of it. It is gained, if it is at all, in the process of searching for it in the context of loss. One of the contributions of this study is to articulate conditions, a possibly optimal venue—a sacred space and permission in this space—whereby a fuller experience of hope can be gained. This project makes the additional assumption that a lot of what is posited as hope is something less than what Scripture teaches God promises. It is perhaps optimism, or an enchantment with the power of one's own positive thoughts, or the fortitude one has to maintain a spirit of magnanimousness, or else some form of theology that believes in the magical equation of salvation proffered in Psalm 1, that those who live obediently are guaranteed blessing.

We clergy are culpable of a deficient sort of hope, too. In fact we frequently practice our call as if extended seasons of loss are unhealthy lapses of an otherwise sturdy faith. If a parishioner cries through the hymns having recently lost a loved one, we clergy often feel constrained to resolve the anguish by offering some inane practical solution. If a person's musings seem too dark, we often consider ways to "cheer them up." If the words of anger are too raw, we try to redirect them to more acceptable forms of expression.

I remember speaking to a group of minister's in training about ways that they might be better purveyors of hope. I began with some words by Victor Frankl, that suffering is a part of life. I traced the steps of Jesus from baptism to the cross and offered a provisional outline of a theology of the cross as the building blocks to a mature expectation of hope suggesting that God is with us not only as resurrected one, but as crucified one, too. When I was done, a participant raised his hand and asked me for practical advice on how to help a parishioner get over his

sorrow so that he could begin attending church again. I gave as much practical advice as I could.

On the way home I scolded myself for not taking the opportunity to ask the would-be pastor:

“Has it ever occurred to you to ask your parishioner why he is unable to attend worship? Could it be that he wants to be in worship, but that he cannot resolve the spiritual dissonance between the reality of his feelings and tone of celebratory worship that he knows is normally offered on Sunday morning? Could it be because he feels like crying through the hymns, but he knows the discomfort this would cause others? Could it be that in his pain he cannot imagine Sunday morning as a place where he can express his honest thoughts and feelings? Maybe the solution to your pastoral concern would be to assure your parishioner that he does not have to become well before he returns, or to understand that his place in life is not one of deficiency, but an occasion to learn to experience a deeper hope.” And if time had permitted, I would have also gone on to tell him that the greatest spiritual help I received in my time of loss was the time, the sacred space, a colleague of mine gave me to say exactly what was on my mind. I should have told him that instead of trying to imagine ways to “fix” your broken member, you should learn new ways to either leave him alone or let him be to you who he is at this point in time. I would have pointed out to him that his practical questions of worship attendance were likely not his parishioner’s concern. “Give him sacred space,” I might have said, “to speak with the honesty of C.S. Lewis,” who commented on the need for community but not on its expectation:

I find it hard to take in what anyone says, or perhaps, hard to want to take it in. It is so uninteresting. Yet I want others to be about me. I dread the moments when the house is empty. If only they would talk to one another and not to me.²⁰

²⁰ Lewis, *A Grief Observed*, 1.

Or consider Nicholas Wolterstorff, who wrote that the will to share another's suffering is better than the eloquence of any word and always more healing than any attempt to console the pain away:

If you think your task as comforter is to tell me that really, all things considered, it's not so bad, you do not sit with me in my grief but place yourself off in the distance away from me What I need to hear from you is that you recognize how painful it is. I need to hear from you that you are with me in my desperation.²¹

H. Recovering Hope

What emerges in my study is a description of a process that lends itself to a recovery of, or fresh experience of, biblical hope. It begins, I contend, with an honest description of the magnitude of the precipitating event. As I have suggested, Walter Brueggemann's identification of the three occasions of life in faith illustrated in the book of Psalms including orientation, disorientation and reorientation, describes a beginning point for the process of regaining hope. The urgency for a rebuilding of hope begins at the depths of disorientation. An adequate theology of hope has to incorporate this experience into the journey of faith. It is not outside or in addition to faith. It is the substance of faith to ask difficult questions about the meaning of life and God in our lives. Jeffrey Kauffman's notion of the meaning of loss as the surrendering of an "assumptive world," provides a possible way to understand the work of hope's processes. Kauffmann writes, "the assumptive world is the only world we know and it includes everything we know or think we know. It includes our interpretation of the past and our expectations of the future."²² Therefore the work of regaining hope requires letting go of one's expectations about life and God in this life and learning to see how, despite our losses, God is still active in them.

²¹ Wolterstorff, 34.

²² Jeffrey Kauffman, ed., *Loss of the Assumptive World: A Theory of Traumatic Loss* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 2.

While Kauffmann offers this concept as a new way to understand the psychological processes of traumatic loss, I use the concept as Kenneth Doka frames it in his article on “Loss and the Spiritual Assumptive World.” In the context of faith, what is lost is a set of assumptions about how God may have been expected to act, either to preempt the occasion of loss, or to be present in the moment. Loss, in this regard, eventuates in a crisis of faith. The driving question is not so much to define why God allowed the suffering, but to ask how God may continue to be present in healing ways.

The process of reclaiming of hope then moves to a work of relearning. Jerry Sittser, for instance, refers to his occasion of loss as resulting in the “amputation of the familiar self.”²³ The willingness to enter this process is not automatic. It comes sometime after the rawness of first mourning, but according to Sittser, “finally we reach the point where we begin to search for a new life, one that depends less on circumstances and more on the depth of our souls. That in turn, opens us to new ideas and perspectives, including spiritual ones.”²⁴ This study was implemented with a group of people in my congregation who had, I believed, worked through the first stages of emotional processing, and now were ready to reflect on the possibility of a new way of understanding their losses in the light of God’s promised future.

I. Conversation Partners Regarding Christian Hope

My intention during this six-week period of study together was not only to practice a particular method of hope recovery (reframing broken future stories), but also to offer a new way of understanding our experience of hope in times of loss. I drew from Jürgen Moltmann in *Theology of Hope*, who speaks of Christian hope as a belief in God’s promised future (for

²³ Jerry Sittser, *A Grace Disguised: How the Soul Grows Through Loss* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1995), 69-79.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 78.

individuals, the Church, and all creation), and also from Moltmann in his later work *The Crucified God*, that God suffers with us. I drew from Flora Keshgegian in her work *Time For Hope: Practices for Living in Today's World*, who writes that our sustained belief in God is not necessarily dependent on discovering some great redemptive purpose in our suffering and who also offered consolation that grief is not wasted time on the way to finding God in the future, but that even in the midst of our present suffering, we can anticipate experiences of God. And yet, I also drew from Victor Frankl in his memoir *Man's Search for Meaning*, who argued that at least part of hope is a decision to choose to find hope despite the circumstances of one's losses. I drew from William Lynch in his work *Images of Hope: Imagination as Healer of the Hopeless*, in suggesting that if hope can be understood as a belief in what is not yet seen (Hebrews 11:1) then part of the process of reclaiming hope requires the imagination to envision what might be possible. And finally I drew from Ellen Ott Marshall in her work *Though the Fig Tree Does not Blossom*, who writes that in negotiating the inherent tension between the difficult realities of our lives and the joy of what God promises, we have a responsibility to actively collaborate with God in fostering the hope we pray to God to find.²⁵ And in using each of these theologians, I tried to teach that: 1) The fact of suffering does not negate the presence of God. Suffering and presence are not mutually exclusive; 2) Though we tend to equate hope with Christ's resurrection, we may also equate hope with God in Christ's crucifixion; 3) Deliverance from the pain of loss is not the only form of salvation Christian hope promises; 4) Neither the past (what has been), nor the present (what is), is all there is. In Christ's resurrection there is always the possibility of re-creation—of order being fashioned out of the elements of chaos. And though

²⁵ In fact, Marshall is not alone in arguing the responsibility of a theology of hope. Moltmann writes that in making us dissatisfied with the present arrangement, Christian hope calls us to do something to change the present order. And certainly Keshgegian repeats the theme in her book that fostering hope is as much a new way of being in the present moment as waiting for God to dramatically reorder things.

hope may not necessarily end in our discovering some great meaning to the purpose of our suffering, we may at least discover the consolation of God's presence despite our loss.

J. Journey to New Hope: Claiming our Losses, Imagining New Beginnings

We begin our journey from loss to new hope, from disorientation to new orientation, by naming our grievance with all of its emotional rawness. In doing this we acknowledge the significance of a full-throated lament to God. We continue the journey towards healing by recognizing the bias of our expectations of God and in understanding our need to re-learn the place of God in our losses. But we move finally to healing by claiming a new-found capacity to act hopefully. The will to act is a response to God of whom Scripture teaches, life not death, blessing not curse, creation not chaos, is God's ultimate intention. As we begin to realize the capacity to imagine new possibilities in our lives, the full healing power of hope begins to take root.

CHAPTER II. THEOLOGICAL ANALYSIS: AN ANSWER TO JESUS' CRY OF DERILECTION

*Our faith begins at the point where atheists suppose that it must be at an end.
Our faith begins with the bleakness and power which is the night of the cross,
abandonment, temptation and doubt about everything that exists!*²⁶

*It is the dialectical knowledge of God in his opposite which first brings heaven
down to the earth of those who are abandoned by God*²⁷

A. A Question: What Helps?

In Albert Camus' novel *The Plague*, the Algerian city of Oran is overcome by a bubonic plague. The epidemic begins slowly. A concierge dies of a sudden and violent fever. Later it is discovered that some rats have died in the city streets. While an autopsy of their cremated remains is performed, a local hospital, in measured response to the possibility of the beginning of an outbreak, sets up a quarantine unit. Within days the unit is filled to capacity. Now, finally, city authorities begin to understand the scope of the disease.

Camus uses the tragic setting to explore an assortment of possible human responses. How will the town's residents respond to deadly and pervasive tragedy? Will they resign themselves in complete despair? Or will they find a source of strength to respond with courage, cooperation, and compassion?

The responses are varied. Some, including two town doctors, Castel and Rieux, work to provide both human relief and remedy. A city official is paralyzed by denial. Dr. Richard, chair of the Oran Medical Association, tries to calm city nerves by referring to the disease as "a special type of fever." Some, including a character named Cottard, try to kill themselves. Several others

²⁶ Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, trans. R.A. Wilson and John Bowden, 36. Moltmann quotes H. J. Iwand from his unpublished work, *Christologievorlesung*, in speaking about the scandal of Jesus' cross.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 28.

resort to various plans of escape—some in order to make a profit, others to escape the inevitability of dying of the disease.

But it is through one of the town's priests, Father Paneloux, a respected Jesuit priest, that we hear the Church's perspective on the tragedy. Father Paneloux gives two sermons.²⁸ In his first sermon, Paneloux tells the congregation that the plague was given to the city as a form of severe punishment from God for their disobedience. The plague is a scourge meant to wake the town's back-sliding people to new spiritual alertness. Paneloux offers some consolation saying that while God has intentionally brought the scourge upon the city's people, God is also willing to help the faithful get through this tragedy. Paneloux, including many of his outspoken parishioners, believes that Christian faith and medical science are mutually exclusive. One must choose to find hope in faith or faith in the promise of medicine, but not both.

Yet, Paneloux's own theology seems to increasingly fail him. For most of his career as a priest, Paneloux has spoken with fiery dogmatism. His theology is based on the conviction of his much learning. But when Paneloux sees more and more people die, and particularly when he stands at the bedside with Dr. Rieux as a city official's young son dies, Paneloux's dogmatism begins to soften. His theology once preached so confidently in his first sermon to the congregation, now seems to fail him as he watches the slow, agonizing, violent death of Othon's son.

When for the third time the fiery wave broke on him, lifting him a little, the child curled himself up and shrank away to the edge of the bed, as if in terror of the flames advancing on him, licking his limbs. A moment later, after tossing his head wildly to and fro, he flung off the blanket. From between the inflamed eyelids big tears welled up and trickled down the sunken, leaden-hued cheeks. When the spasm had passed, utterly exhausted, tensing his thin legs and arms, on

²⁸ Albert Camus, *The Plague*, 2nd ed., trans. Stuart Gilbert (New York City, NY: Vintage Books, 1991). Sermon one is given as the plague begins to sweep the town, Part 2, 92-98; sermon two is given at a Men's Mass, as the plague draws on and is significant as the Father's theology is tested through his experience of a civic leader's son's tortuous death, Part 4, 222 ff.

which, within forty-eight hours, the flesh had wasted to the bone, the child lay flat, racked on the tumbled bed, in a grotesque parody of crucifixion.²⁹

Finally, Father Paneloux must do something. He cannot simply preach theological dogma, nor dispense sermons on the wrath of God. So, as the boy lets out a “long, incessant scream” the Father prays words much like Jesus’ cry of dereliction from his Cross, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” But if God hears, if God is present, God gives no indication, as the child continues to suffer:

Paneloux gazed down at the small mouth, fouled with the sores of the plague and pouring out the angry death-cry that has sounded through the ages of mankind. He sank to his knees, and all present found it natural to hear him say in a voice hoarse but clearly audible across the nameless never-ending wail: ‘My God, spare this child!’ But the wail continued without cease.³⁰

The child eventually dies. Yet in a post-mortem conversation with Dr. Rieux, a clearly shaken Father Paneloux persists in justifying God’s love by suggesting that despite revolting moments of suffering, “we should love what we cannot understand.” Dr. Rieux, though an atheist whom we learn goes to the weekly service of prayer only because he figures it is too innocuous to hurt, now voices the novel’s most forceful, articulate protest against the Father’s “blind faith” conviction:

No, Father. I’ve a very different idea of love. And until my dying day I shall refuse to love a scheme of things in which children are put up to torture.³¹

Eventually, Paneloux seems to come to the realization that a Christian faith which cannot offer a God with passion is of no use to those who suffer. His conversion to a more pastoral view is gradual. He begins to join in efforts to treat the dying in hospitals. Now rather than

²⁹ Ibid., 215.

³⁰ Ibid., 217.

³¹ Ibid., 218.

speak about death, he experiences death, and the novel's narrator says of him, "his face bore traces of the rising tension in his thoughts."

In his second sermon, Father Paneloux speaks less emphatically, more compassionately. The narrator notes that this time Paneloux speaks to the church not with the dogmatism of the second person "you," but with the shared feeling of the first person plural "we." Paneloux still insists that we must accept those things of God which we cannot understand, but the narrator states that "the sermon had displayed more uneasiness than real power." Months later when the priest dies, Camus suggests that he dies not of the ravages of the plague, but of a broken heart and a lost faith. Paneloux, Camus seems to say, still mouths the words of his earlier theology, but they seem to ring a little more hollow with the sound of a faith that one is bound to preach but cannot quite believe.

It was not Camus' interest, of course, to develop a theology of hope, nor any religious theology. Camus was interested in teaching an absurdist philosophy of life that suggested that there was no apparent reason or meaning to any occasion in life, least of all suffering, but that in our efforts to cope, we are compelled to pose different theories. For Camus the Church's viewpoint, offered through Father Paneloux, is one way we may try to make sense of human tragedy.

I do not agree with the theology Camus gives Father Paneloux to preach, but his novel raises good questions about the relationship between Christian faith and human tragedy. What is the best that can be humanly expected in times of great tragedy? What is the appropriate human response? Where is God in such times? Specifically, where is God when the innocent suffer? Where is God when Mr. Othon's son dies? What does it suggest about God's omnipotence that many die and that in response to our best prayers, the suffering continues and the sick die? Is it

necessary to attribute suffering to some design of God? Does suffering have to make sense? Does God care about us in such times? If so, how does God express that concern?

I believe that a construction of a useful theology of Christian hope begins not with a discussion about the eventual experience of victory over life's tragedies, but with the experience of suffering itself. Any experience of God's transcendence must somehow help us make sense of the occasions of profound human suffering. The problem of Christian faith and human tragedy is not necessarily that we experience suffering. That we experience death, or tragedy, or that we suffer, young and old, is less troubling to the Christian faith experience than that we lose sight of God in those sufferings. Therefore, unless a theology of hope can assist us in finding God in those dark, suffering places it is unlikely that we will ever persist in our faith journey long enough to experience the joy of his resurrection. Christian theologies of hope that try to help by redirecting our attention from darkness to those places where God is obviously present—in spontaneous instances of goodwill, in little glimmers of light, in well-meaning prayers, in songs of joy sung despite profound feelings of heartache—ultimately fail, in fact, may hinder us, from finding God precisely where we may have lost sight of him. If God is lost to us in the darkness of our suffering, then it seems logical that we must begin a reconstruction of Christian hope by going back to, or remaining in, the darkness in order to find God where we may have lost God. It

is for this reason, I believe, that Dietrich Bonhoeffer, writing from a German prison cell in the months before his execution wrote, “Only the suffering God can help.”³²

B. Holocaust: the Failure of Human Progressivism

In reflecting on his experiences as a citizen of Nazi Germany, as a German soldier and later as a prisoner of war, Jürgen Moltmann made a similar conclusion: the only way to develop an adequate theological response to the atrocities of the Holocaust was to imagine a presence of God that was in consoling companionship with those who suffered. As a citizen of Nazi Germany, Moltmann was overwhelmed by guilt and inconsolable grief over the crimes of his country and of the ways that he and others had, by their inaction and failure to make a stand, been complicit in the tragedy of so many deaths. As a reluctant recruit into an anti-aircraft battalion in February 1943, Moltmann was deeply affected by the death of one of his friends who was killed during a bombing raid on the city of Hamburg. In the immediate aftermath of the bomb’s destruction he cried out to God, “Where are you?”³³ Later, as a prisoner of war in Belgium, a British chaplain gave Moltmann a Bible. And as he began to study the Bible he was particularly drawn to Psalm 39. The Psalmist’s emotion struck Moltmann as the kind of honest emotion with which he could relate and which gave expression to the deep emotion he was

³² Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works, Volume 8: Letters and Papers from Prison* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress Press, June 2010), 479. Bonhoeffer is executed April 9, 1945, in a Flossenbürg, Germany concentration camp. It is believed that Bonhoeffer wrote these words in July 1944 while he was being held prisoner in a Berlin prison. The fuller context of Bonhoeffer’s quote, which is cited in abbreviated form in Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, 47, demonstrates that Bonhoeffer and Moltmann share a common understanding about the nature of God as one who reveals God’s self precisely where and when God may seem to be absent: “God consents to be pushed out of the world and onto the cross; God is weak and powerless in the world and in precisely this way, and only so, is at our side and helps us. Matthew 8:17 makes it clear that Christ helps us not by virtue of his omnipotence but rather by virtue of his weakness and suffering. This is the crucial distinction between Christianity and all religions. Human religiosity directs people in need to the power of God in the world, God as *dues ex machina*. The Bible directs toward the powerlessness and the suffering of God; **only the suffering God can help**” (emphasis mine).

³³ Jürgen Moltmann, interview by Barbara Rossing, “*God’s Unfinished Future: Jürgen Moltmann Biography*.” www.trinitywallstreet.org/webcast/video/profiles/biographies/gods-unfinished-future-jurgen-moltmann-biography. Trinity Church, 74 Trinity Place, New York City, NY.

experiencing. In his interview with Barbara Rossing, Moltmann said that that the words of Psalm 39 “gave me the words of my own suffering.” Moltmann was then drawn to Mark’s Gospel, particularly Jesus’ cry of dereliction.³⁴ Here finally was the sort of God who could understand his own sense of brokenness and abandonment.

Moltmann’s experience of grief over the Holocaust, joined with his new awareness of biblical literature, provided the context for a driving theological question: “How could something so horrible happen?” How, given the darkness of Auschwitz, was it now possible to think about the future? Moltmann’s experience of his friend’s death, and Father Paneloux’s crisis of faith at the death of Othon’s son were the impetus for deep theological introspection about the experience of specific tragedy—the kind of personal experience of tragedy that moved the discussion from mere theory to an explanation of how, in the face of personal pain, one could explain the meaning (or apparent absence of) the events of one’s life.

Moltmann’s answer is a Christo-centric hope— a hope based thoroughly on the work of God in Jesus Christ, in his crucifixion and his resurrection. In his crucifixion, God demonstrates a will to be in companionship with us in our times of suffering. In his resurrection, God points to a future where there was no future, to possibilities of life where only death existed. Though Moltmann’s theology of hope emphasizes the transcendent possibilities of God in God’s future, Moltmann emphasizes that it is the resurrection of the crucified Jesus that makes Christian hope relevant to the suffering. Christ and his future, though decisively declared in his resurrection is still a work in progress. The contingencies of life still bear down hard on the Christian community. There is still pain and loss. God is with us in those times of life. Yet, in Christ’s resurrection the Christian community knows that the present arrangement is not final. God’s promise of resurrection continues to unfold.

³⁴ Mark 15:34.

C. Theology of Hope for Pastoral Care: Three Provisions

Moltmann's theology of hope with its emphasis on both resurrection promise and suffering companionship suggests three provisions which may be useful in offering a theology of hope for pastoral care, especially for those who are experiencing loss. The first provision is Moltmann's interpretation of the pastoral implication of Christ and his crucifixion, which suggests that God is affected by and joins us in our suffering.

The second is Moltmann's interpretation of the pastoral implication of Christ and his resurrection which suggests that despite the brokenness of one's present circumstances, there is the possibility of a new future. Neither the past nor the present is determinative.

The third is Moltmann's insistence that a proper Christian response to the in-break of God's future is one of active engagement—an ethic of protest against present circumstances of brokenness through choosing to take responsibility to participate in bringing about God's promised future. This protest ethic is based on the life and ministry of Jesus who though proclaiming God's Kingdom and suggesting that this Kingdom had already come (Luke 4:16-21)³⁵ nevertheless announced his intent to bring about the more complete fulfillment of God's Kingdom. This intent characterizes the Kingdom with a certain restlessness and dissatisfaction.³⁶ In our times of personal loss we take on the character of Jesus in taking concrete action to make the change that in Christ we believe is possible. We work for the new future that God promises.

³⁵ Jesus begins his public ministry by telling the folk in his home-town synagogue that he is the servant described by the prophet Isaiah. Jesus thereby announces his intent to be God's advocate for the poor, the captive, the blind and the oppressed. As long as conditions persist in keeping these people in positions of disadvantage and powerlessness the work of God's Kingdom will not be complete. To the end of righting the wrongs of society that keep some in poverty, the work of God's Kingdom will be de-stabilizing, revolutionary and ultimately transformative. Those who choose to follow Jesus share in this work.

³⁶ Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, 183. In this light, Moltmann describes Jesus' resurrection as *promissio inquieta*—God's impatient, restless promise, with God in Christ actively at work to bring about the future promise in a world where it does not yet exist.

These three provisions will be both critiqued and augmented by other theologians including Flora Keshgegian, who revisions Moltmann's view of time that privileges future possibilities, to one that privileges process and acknowledgment of present actualities³⁷; Victor Frankl who suggests a "tragic optimism" that acknowledges the suffering of the present, but for survival's sake also continues to believe in the possibilities of the future³⁸; Ellen Ott Marshall who adds to Moltmann's argument for praxis as response to the solidarity in suffering and future promise of Christ's resurrection by reflecting on hope as an "ethic of responsibility"³⁹; Dorothee Soelle who also adds to Moltmann's discussion of hope as Christian engagement in the sufferings of history by reflecting that "struggle is the source of hope," adding that "there is no hope that drops from heaven through the intervention of God"⁴⁰; Warren McWilliams who summarizes the historical development of what he notes is a relatively new 19th and 20th century interest in the passability God⁴¹; and David Jensen who deepens Moltmann's discussion of God's solidarity with suffering humanity and the Christian community's call to share in the world's sufferings with his emphasis that Christian hope is not exclusively, not even primarily, a private experience but one that is realized in the social and cosmic aspects of God's creation.⁴²

³⁷ Flora Keshgegian, *Time for Hope: Practices for Living in Today's World* (New York City, NY: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2006), 38-43. See especially chapter 3, "Are We There Yet? Rethinking the Journey," 74-95.

³⁸ Viktor Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning*, 10th ed. (New York City, NY: Washington Square Press, Inc., 1967), 94. Also, Frankl adds to Marshall's argument that hope implies the suffering one's responsibility for those who wait, in his impromptu "sermon" given to his fellow inmates as the reality of their imprisonment deepens (104).

³⁹ Ellen Ott Marshall, *Though the Fig Tree Does Not Blossom: Toward a Responsible Theology of Hope* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2006), xvi, 12. Marshall speaks of the ethic of Christian hope as "disposition of continuous negotiation" between reality and faith's ideals.

⁴⁰ Dorothee Soelle, *To Work and to Love: a Theology of Creation*, specifically chapter 13, "Created for Hope" (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 161.

⁴¹ Warren McWilliams, *The Passion of God: Divine Suffering in Contemporary Protestant Theology*, with particular attention to McWilliams's chapter 1, "Jürgen Moltmann: *The Crucified God*" (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1985), 13-20. Also discussion of *axiom of apatheia*, 39.

⁴² David H. Jensen, *Living Hope: The Future and Christian Faith* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010), 130ff.

D. Natural versus Moral Tragedy

Moltmann's theology of hope poses a fundamental difficulty for the purpose of this study. This study is interested to develop a theology of hope in offering pastoral care to those who suffer personal loss most often the result of natural tragedy (loss and suffering as a result of disease or acts of God). Moltmann is primarily concerned to understand how hope is maintained in the face of moral tragedy. While the consolations of Moltmann's theology of hope are widely applicable to all who suffer (God's presence in our suffering and promise of new future), there is a difference in both response and scope between the audience addressed in this project and the audience addressed in Moltmann's work. As noted earlier, Moltmann developed his theology of hope in response to the moral evils of the Holocaust. His theology, therefore, leads to the necessity of a public (political) response to the problems perpetrated by the structures of an unjust society for both victims and members of the Christian faith community—the Church, or what Moltmann calls the “Exodus community.”⁴³ As such, Moltmann's notion of Christo-praxis tends to focus on political responses to larger societal concerns. It is less clear how Moltmann's ethic of protest might be effective in dissipating the pain of personal grief.⁴⁴

And yet, despite these limitations, the meaning of Moltmann's theology of hope suggests clear applications in offering pastoral care to those who suffer personal loss. Whether the suffering has its origins in moral or natural tragedy, the promise of a new future and of God's

⁴³ Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, 311 ff.

⁴⁴ In developing his theology of hope, Moltmann is less concerned to understand the origins of moral evil—to answer why, for instance, humanity could instigate such hateful acts or why God would allow humanity to perpetrate such hateful acts. For Moltmann it is enough to say that: 1) God's work of creation is unfinished and therefore not all that God will make it; 2) humanity has free will to either choose or reject relationship with God, and therefore, has the capacity to act in ways that are not consistent with God's purposes; 3) therefore the “how” question is of greater importance than the “why” question. For Moltmann, in light of Auschwitz, the question is not “Why did God allow this to happen?” Rather, “How in the face of this great tragedy is God present and what is a faithful response given this tragic reality?”

presence in our suffering are still applicable. Every kind of suffering benefits from both God's presence and God's promise of transformation. As for Moltmann's ethic of protest, this study will adapt the notion as one of personal theological imperative to act and not be acted upon in the face of tragedy—to partner with God to contribute to one's recovery by taking initiative to move beyond the paralysis of self-pity. In this way, Moltmann's Christo-praxis will suggest the theological necessity of personal accountability in the process of recovery from loss.

E. Foundations of Hope for Pastoral Care

1. Solidarity

Since, then, we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast to our confession. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who in every respect has been tested as we are . . . —Hebrews 4:14-15



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⁴⁵ “*And Jesus Wept*,” statue just west of the Murrah Building Bomb Memorial site in Oklahoma City. 168 people, including 19 children under the age of 6 years, died in the blast at 9:02 a.m., April 19, 1995. Go to <http://stjosepholdcathedral.org/> for more information about the meaning of the statue.

In one way the statue illustrates perhaps Moltmann's most useful contribution to a theology of hope for pastoral care. The statue shows Jesus in an obvious posture of suffering. Jesus is either weeping tears of great sorrow or he is holding a hand to his face in disbelief. Behind him stands the western wall of a memorial site built in memory of the devastation that was unleashed by a terrorist's bomb on the morning of April 19, 1995. On the inside of the granite wall leading to the memorial site's entrance, the numbers 9:02 are etched. Across the reflection pool, on the exit wall, the numbers 9:03 are etched. Between the two walls stand 168 neatly spaced marble chairs. Nineteen of the chairs are smaller than the rest, and these chairs represent the 19 pre-school children who were killed in the blast. Each of the 168 chairs is a silent witness to the story of that horrible day. In the dark of night, they are illumined so that even in darkness we will see and remember their story. The memorial site's two walls symbolically encase a single, tragic moment in time, and teach that so much can be lost in so little time. They teach that life is sometimes like this: fragile, and fleeting, and vulnerable. "Jesus Wept" was erected within a year of the bombing. The title refers to the words in John's Gospel that in response to the grief of those who mourned the loss of his dear friend Lazarus, "Jesus wept." (John 11:35). St. Joseph's Catholic Church put the statue there as a sign of Jesus' solidarity with those who suffered the pain of such a senseless tragedy.

Yet, despite the simple elegance of the statue, it diverges in one fundamental way from Moltmann's concept of divine solidarity. The statue pictures Jesus turning away from the specter of all that has happened behind him. He weeps, perhaps, because what has happened is so horrible, so dark and destructive, that even he cannot bring himself to look at it. The destruction is an offense to the beauty of Creation. Or perhaps Jesus turns away in disgust—a sign that whoever is to blame for the destruction, it is an affront to his divine sensibility. And

here, perhaps, is an illustration of the kind of traditional theism that suggests that God maintains God's omnipotence precisely by choosing to stand apart from the tragedies of human history. In fact, Moltmann will argue just the opposite: that God chooses to demonstrate omnipotence not by remaining aloof but by voluntarily standing with humanity in its sufferings; Moltmann's God will not look away. God looks with Jesus down from the Cross at the people gathered around him. God sees Jesus' mother, Mary, and other women, who bear the burden of the Son's death. God sees the Roman soldiers in their cynicism as they carry out another execution.

While the notion of God's solidarity with the one who suffers, revealed to us in the Cross of Christ, is one of the consolations of the Christian faith, Moltmann is first of all concerned to interpret what the Cross means about the nature of God. What sort of God is revealed to us in Christ's cross? Is God affected by the suffering of Jesus? And if so, how? Where is God when Jesus lets out his cry of dereliction? Where is God when we suffer? How Moltmann answers these questions forms the basis of his doctrine of God.

Jesus' Cross is a sign of God's unity, God's solidarity, with a suffering world.⁴⁶ In Jesus' cross the Church becomes relevant to the problem of suffering. But how is this so? Moltmann's distinctive view of God involves two important theological developments.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, 24.

⁴⁷ Richard Bauckham, *The Theology of Jürgen Moltmann* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1995), 15-16. Bauckham cites three developments. Yet it seems that Bauckham's third theological development, that Moltmann rejects economic (function-specific) Trinitarian views that confine God to matters of divinity, and Jesus to matters of humanity, is implied in Moltmann's first development "*Mutual Indwelling*." The point here is that just as God shares in the suffering of the Son on the Cross, so the Son also shares in the sovereignty of the Father. In making this point, Moltmann refutes a final claim of the "axiom of apatheia" which suggests a suffering God is something less than divine. *The Crucified God* remains sovereign despite choosing to suffer with Christ and suffering humanity. Immanence and sovereignty are not mutually exclusive. In fact God demonstrates God's sovereignty by exercising divine prerogative to experience human suffering.

(a) Shared Passion: God and Son

Moltmann begins by developing a Trinitarian interpretation of the Cross as one which is shared between the Father and the Son. It is not only the Son who suffers and dies. It is God who also suffers with the Son. The Son suffers the abandonment of the Father on the Cross. When he cries for a sign of the Father's presence in the moment of his death on the Cross, the Son experiences God-forsakenness, but in "Trinitarian language that emphasizes the inter-subjective relationship between the divine persons."⁴⁸ God experiences the real grief of losing the Son to death on a Cross. Moltmann also adds that the sufferings of the Father and Son are both real and active. They are real because the Son actually experiences the pain of God's abandonment and the Father actually experiences the pain of the Son's death. But their sufferings are also active and not passive. The Father and the Son voluntarily choose to accept their sufferings as a way of offering salvation to those who suffer.⁴⁹ The Son's sufferings, for instance, are not the result of a tragic twist of fate that he passively accepts. They are rather the result of his intention to live as he lived in order to be in solidarity with us. Likewise, the Father's suffering is the consequence of choosing to abandon the Son. Moltmann interprets the meaning of the Father's intentions through the Son's cry of dereliction by rephrasing Mark 15:34 to say, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken thyself."⁵⁰ Yet, despite the actuality of their respective sufferings, the choices of the Father and Son have efficacious implications. In choosing to experience the real suffering of the Son's death (grief), the Cross "represents God's acceptance of what is sick and ugly. God takes it in and heals it. Through his abandonment by

⁴⁸ Ibid., 15.

⁴⁹ Moltmann thinks of salvation as liberation from the sufferings of life.

⁵⁰ Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, 151.

God, the crucified Christ brings God to those who are abandoned by God (anguish).”⁵¹ In the Cross, heaven and history intersect.

(b) Suffering God

Moltmann’s doctrine of God’s nature necessitated a second theological development: the notion of divine passability. If God demonstrates a capacity to experience the grief of the Son’s death, then Moltmann believed that it also follows that God is capable (in fact, chooses) of experiencing pain and, in a larger sense, is also capable of being affected by the sufferings of Creation (our sufferings). Here Moltmann challenges the foundations of classical theism which speak of God and God’s divinity in terms of omnipotent, omniscient, immutable and impassible. For Moltmann, Bonhoeffer’s observation that “Only the suffering God can help,”⁵² is especially important. Only a suffering God can love. And if God cannot love us, then God is irrelevant not only to the victims of Auschwitz, but also to all victims of subsequent sufferings.

Moltmann believed that the doctrine of impassability contradicted the Bible’s fundamental assertion that God is love. In John’s Gospel, for instance, God sends the Son into the world in order that the world might know who God is and be in relationship with God. As John 3:16-17 teaches, God is primarily a God of love. This loving character of God is communicated through no less than seven signs in John’s Gospel.⁵³ In each of these signs, God is at work in Jesus to reveal God’s intention to bring life and wholeness to provide those things that will sustain wholeness of life. In doing so God overcomes fear, suspicion, doubt, apathy, hopelessness, resignation, social isolation, impossible obstacles, chronic illness, even death. God demonstrates Godself as one of love who will to be in relationship with humanity. And because

⁵¹ Ibid., 46.

⁵² Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, 479.

⁵³ John 2:1-12 (Cana); 4:46-54 (child healed); 5:1-18 (lame man healed); 6:1-15 (bread); 6:16-21 (stormy seas calmed); 9:1-41 (sight given); 11:1-57 (Lazarus raised).

God is one of love, God must also be capable of affection for humanity. God must be able to suffer with, be moved by, and enter into the full range of human emotions. Moltmann believed that if God is not able to suffer, then God is not capable of genuine love: “Were God incapable of suffering in any respect, then {God} would also be incapable of love.”⁵⁴ Apathy and love are mutually exclusive. God cannot remain apart and be involved in the concerns of humanity. The fundamental nature of God necessitates that God have the capacity to be moved, affected by, the human predicament.

(c) Pastoral Implications

Moltmann’s doctrine of God’s passability forms the foundation for one of the pressing theodicy questions: “Where is God when I suffer?” The question supposes that the occasion of personal darkness is so impenetrable that either God is not present (for God is light), or God cannot be seen. The doctrine of passability offers consolation to the suffering one by affirming that God is both present and in companionship with the sufferer. God’s presence does not promise to answer why there is suffering.⁵⁵ But it does offer to be in relationship while the suffering is experienced. The promise of Jesus’ words is realized, “I will not leave you orphaned.” (John 14:18). For those who give care to those who suffer, the doctrine strengthens the efficacy of the ministry of presence. Simple presence, without any concern to give answers to the mystery of suffering, takes on sacramental meaning. Just as the crucified God’s presence helps heal us, so our presence becomes the means by which God brings healing to others. Solidarity with another in suffering mitigates the pain of suffering.

⁵⁴ Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, 230.

⁵⁵ Flora Keshgegian, *Time for Hope*, 111. Keshgegian criticizes Moltmann’s linear view of time which she claims moves too expectantly towards God’s *telos*, agrees with Moltmann: “Asking the ‘why’ question is ultimately fruitless for the victimized.” Also, John Claypool in *Five Smooth Stones*, 93, writes that the goal of presence is to “engage” the suffering, not to explain it or minimize it.

The doctrine of passability widens the scope of God's presence in our lives. In contrast to a theology of glory that speaks to the triumphalism of God, God is now trusted to be found in every occasion of life. When Camus' Father Paneloux prays to God to deliver Othon's son from the plague, but the child dies, God, despite Dr. Rieux's protest, is present nevertheless. God suffers the pain of the child who dies, just as God shares the child's parent's experience of their loss. When a bomb blast claims 168 lives in Oklahoma City, God is affected, as the statue portrays, by the pain of what has happened. The meaning of God's presence is described metaphorically in John's Gospel: "{God's} light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it." (John 1:5). This light of God's presence shown on the eve of Jesus' passion, even though, as Martin Buber writes, the night was experienced as "the eclipse of God."⁵⁶ Through faith God is present with us even though the experience may seem to contradict any possibility of God's presence. Moltmann recalls a horrific scene in Elie Wiesel's *Night* to dramatize this point:

The SS hanged two Jewish men and a youth in front of the whole camp. The men died quickly, but the death throes of the youth lasted for half an hour. "Where is God? Where is he?" someone asked behind me. As the youth still hung in torment in the noose after a long time, I heard the man call again, "Where is God now?" And I heard a voice in myself answer: "Where is he? He is here. He is hanging there on the gallows. . . ."⁵⁷

The efficacy of God's suffering presence is understood in two ways. One, God helps us in our suffering moments not only because God is present, but also because God shares our experience of suffering. In fact, as Hebrews 4:11 suggests, God experiences our suffering as a suffering that God has already experienced in the Son's passion. Before Othon's child died, before my child died of cancer, before Dietrich Bonhoeffer was executed, before Timothy

⁵⁶ Jürgen Moltmann, *In the End—The Beginning: The Life of Hope*, trans. Margaret Kohl (Minneapolis: First Fortress Press edition, 2004), 80. The reference is to Jesus' anguish as described in Luke's Gospel (22:42-44). Luke suggests that Jesus' anguish is exacerbated not only by the inevitable test of faith which awaits him, but also by the pain of his disciples' emotional and spiritual abandonment. He asked for their companionship, their intercessory pray. Instead they slept.

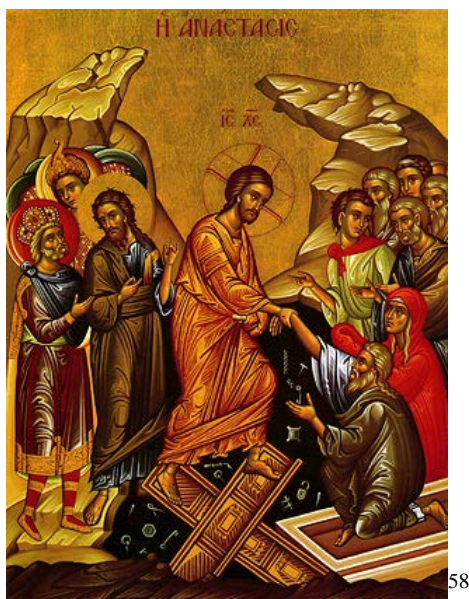
⁵⁷ Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, 273-74. Drawn from Elie Wiesel, *Night* (New York City, NY: Bantam Books, April 1982), 61-62.

McVeigh destroyed the lives of many in Oklahoma City, before the child died an agonizing death on the gallows, God experienced the grief of losing the Son, God's own son—Mary and Joseph's first-born. It is out of the depth of this shared experience that God's presence helps. Two, God's solidarity helps because it is one of loving presence. God's essential character is one of love. As John's Gospel states, God sends the Son for love's sake, not to bring condemnation but to offer a way to restored wholeness. God's presence is not punitive, demanding, or overbearing. It is gentle, caring and restoring.

2. Promise: a Way Forward

I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us. —Romans 8:18

Behold I make all things new. —Revelation 21:5



There are several variations of the Eastern Orthodox icon Anastasis pictured above, yet each of them tells the same story. The risen Jesus comes to claim those who died having been faithful to the Father and having waited for the coming and the return of the Father's Son. In the

⁵⁸ Icon of the *Anastasis*, provided by *Theologic*, found at http://lent.goarch.org/holy_pascha/learn/

icon, Jesus tramples the Gates of Hades shattering the doors that keep its residents imprisoned and scattering its keys. The utter darkness of the world below is illumined by the golden and glowing presence of Jesus' cross. His cross, after all, is the means by which the world's great darkness has been overcome. The "Light of the World" (John 8:12) comes to shine in every corner of life and death. His coming is a truly momentous occasion. As Matthew's Gospel says, the effect and meaning of his death and subsequent resurrection are unmistakably powerful. At the moment of and in the aftermath of his great work, the Temple's curtain, a symbol of religious permanence, is torn, and "the earth shakes and the rocks are split."⁵⁹ All that once seemed immovable is now moved. The power belongs to the risen Christ. He alone has power both to initiate and accomplish the overcoming of death. And so, with compassion, he offers his hand to both Adam and Eve that they might be lifted up from the tombs of their long waiting. These first sojourners, once cast from Paradise (Genesis 3), are now restored to full relationship with God through the risen Christ. They once wandered the earth in fear and shame. They bore the deep anguish of the death of a child. Almost from the beginning their lives were not all that they could have been—all that God imagined. But now they are lifted up into the embrace of the Son's restoring love. Here, despite their sin which for centuries had been the mark of all humanity's sin, is a second chance, a new lease on life, a chance to enjoy the abundance of God's new creation.

Behind them is their son Abel, dressed in a white robe and scarlet scarf, holding a shepherd's staff. The white robe that was stained by the blood of his brother Cain's murderous blow is now clean (Genesis 4). There is no fear or apprehension on his face. Instead he looks on with joy and peace. He seems to anticipate the moment as much for his parents as himself.

⁵⁹ Matthew 27:51-52.

Behind him are other saints. In their lives, they have known the pain and anguish of unfulfilled hopes. But they, too, wait and are assured of the Son's loving reach.

On the left hand of the risen Christ is John the Baptist. He lived his life faithfully. And yet scripture says, he died behind iron bars, consumed with profound doubt and asking, "Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?" (Matthew 11:3). John the Baptizer represents all of us who, though capable of great resoluteness, are nevertheless prone to deep doubts. The circumstances of life challenge our faith. God does not always speak or act in ways that we wish God might. And yet, the hand of salvation comes for John the Baptizer, too, as it does for those standing behind him in the picture: King David, who demonstrated great potential as a youth seizing a great depth of courage and slaying the giant (1 Samuel 17:48ff), but who also demonstrated great failure in his relationship with Bathsheba and her husband, Uriah (2 Samuel 11ff); and King Solomon, David's son, looking over his father's shoulder, who despite inheriting the great gifts of his father's legacy and, it is said, possessing extraordinary wisdom, wandered from God late in his life (1 Kings 11), and by his negligence set the stage for Israel's division and subsequent fall from glory. He too, is assured of Jesus' full pardon.

The icon is a powerful reminder that in his resurrection, Jesus comes to us to transform what has been broken in our lives: parents who have lost children, victims of injustice, terrible moments of weakness that have altered the course of our lives, doubt which has haunted us. Each of these occasions in life has threatened to keep us prisoners to our pasts and to cut us off from our futures. What happens in our lives cannot, of course, be undone. And yet, by the life-restoring power of his resurrection, no one who is willing to wait for him, is lost. In our sharing of his resurrection, the wounds of this life are not erased. Even Jesus still bears the marks of his crucifixion in the icon. And yet, the wounds of death no longer define him or us. Because of

Jesus' resurrection, the wounds of death are made symbols of his power to overcome every fear, every obstacle, and every doubt. As the *Anastasis* teaches, in faith, we are all crucified with him. And yet, because of his life, we all have the possibility of being raised with him, too.

The icon depicts what Moltmann wants to teach about the meaning of Jesus and his resurrection: that in his resurrection all that seemed to have come to an end is now offered the great hope of new possibility. In his resurrection the future is opened. There is consolation in acknowledging the crucified God's solidarity with us. When we suffer, we do not suffer alone. And yet, the sufferings of our broken lives are not the way our lives end. Jesus' resurrection offers God's great Promise. Jesus' resurrection is the decisive event in history that changes the narrative of what is possible.

Just as Jesus and his Crucifixion teaches us something about the nature of God, that God wills to be in solidarity with us in our sufferings, so Jesus and his resurrection also teaches us that it is God's nature to be Creator. Two characteristics mark the manner of God's promise to create: One, God fashions life in those places where there appears to be no substance from which to make life (*ex creator nihilo*), and two, God demonstrates divine power to make something from the broken pieces of human history in ways that we could not imagine or think possible (*nova creation*). In either case, Jesus' resurrection is understood as God's creative promise and power to make a new future. As will be discussed later in this chapter, God's promise is invitation to participate in the realization of God's new future. And yet the promise begins with Jesus and his resurrection. The resurrection of Christ is "an earnest pledge of *his* future."⁶⁰ For

⁶⁰ Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, 197. Emphasis mine. For God as *ex creator nihilo* see *Theology of Hope*, 16, where Moltmann begins to describe the premise of hope as God's power and intention to give the possibility of life from death (nothingness) and again, *Theology of Hope*, 195, where Moltmann refers to God's will to re-establish covenant with Israel not on the basis of anything Israel can do, but strictly on what God can accomplish ("Behold I will cause breath to enter into you, and you shall live," Ezekiel 37:5). For Moltmann's notion of God's promise as *nova creation* see *Theology of Hope*, 207, and again, 90ff.

Moltmann it is fundamental to a theology of Christian hope to make clear that the originating power of possibility is God's.

Moltmann points to three “catastrophe theology”⁶¹ narratives which illustrate the power of God to create life where there is no life: establishing a new covenant with Noah and his family in the aftermath of a great flood; restoring covenantal hope following a long period of exilic abandonment; proclaiming resurrection hope following the seemingly final events of Jesus' passion. For Moltmann each of these biblical narratives suggests a narrative of possibility in every present-day tragedy: what seems like a cataclysmic end is an occasion to look with hope to what God is at work to accomplish in God's future.

And yet, even in these grand occasions of new possibility, our experiences of God's future are incomplete. Jesus' resurrection, for instance, indicates the horizon of God's future, but it does not yet fulfill it. The Christian community lives in the interim period between the beginning of God's future in Jesus' resurrection and the promise of its consummation. Our experience of God's future is dialectical. It is already present and yet it is still in process. It is in some ways realized, and yet it is also anticipated. It is a promise, not a realization, that orients us towards God's future—enlivening our present and redeeming our past. It is the substance of an Easter hope that “shines not only forwards into the unknown newness of history which it opens up, but also backwards over the graveyards of history”⁶² It is a future that summons us to celebrate with hopefulness for what God in Christ has already accomplished in his resurrection, but it is also a provisional hope that calls for faithful patience as God continues to complete what God has already begun. It asks us to be restless in a world that contradicts God's great redeeming promises, and yet it also asks us to accept that God is with us in our sufferings.

⁶¹ Moltmann, *In the End—The Beginning*, 33ff.

⁶² Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, 163.

Moltmann says that what causes tension for the faithful who live in the present of God's future is not what we lack, but what we already have. In the resurrection we see what is possible but we must still contend with what is and this fills our present with great ambiguity and longing.⁶³ The Spirit "creates space. It sets in motion. It leads us out of narrow places into wide vistas,"⁶⁴ and confers life. The Spirit confirms in us the meaning of Christ's resurrection. It continually teaches us that the sufferings of the present can be different. In the face of every "no" of life—every hardship, every experience of death and loss and heartache—the Spirit urges us to say "yes." In spite of sickness, hardships, and infirmities, the Spirit opens the door to a life against death.⁶⁵ This inner conflict to choose life and not death, hope and not despair, is one that pervades all creation. As Paul writes to the Romans: "We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies." (Romans 8:22-23)⁶⁶

In the meantime, in this period between the already and the not yet future of God, we are called to remember the historical reality of Jesus' resurrection, be watchful for the occasions of God's creative presence, but in all things to anticipate what God's past and present mean for God's future. Here is a Eucharistic view of history that grounds its hope in recalling the future

⁶³ Moltmann, *The Spirit of Life: A Universal Affirmation*, trans. Margaret Kohl (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1992), 75.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 43.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 86.

⁶⁶ Note a rich connection between Moltmann's interpretation of the agency of the Spirit (OT *Ruach*, "to create space" and "to lead us out of narrow spaces"), and the Greek word *stenazo* translated "groaning" in the NRSV but which literally refers to the cry of one who is pressed in or squeezed by circumstances of life. To humanity's cry of being hemmed in by the hard realities of life, the Spirit comes to "create space." It is noteworthy that in Paul's letter the context of the Greek word *stenazo* is of labor pains, not death cries. It is for a fuller experience of God's future that we join with all creation in deep longing. Our hope is based on the promise of adoption, not separation; on relationship not abandonment.

implications of God's great work in Jesus' resurrection in order to celebrate the in-break of God's promise in the present.

(a) Implications for Pastoral Care

I think about the mother and daughter who come to the church to mourn the loss of husband and father. He had been acutely ill for over two years. In addition to kidney and heart failure, he had progressive dementia. Sometimes his level of pain was so high that no amount of pain management medication would work. In those times the effects of the dementia were worse. Recently, his daughter had taken a job several states away. Before she left they had a terrible argument, and he, in a fit of raging dementia, said some things to her and his wife that were particularly hurtful. In the next day or two she left without saying goodbye to him. She returned a couple of days before he died, but by then the effects of heavy doses of pain medication along with the deepening dementia left him largely incapacitated, unable to move, mostly unable to talk. His wife said that he and their daughter were able to reconcile. But as I stand there in the pulpit to give the funeral meditation, I see her lean into her mother's shoulder and begin to cry uncontrollably. There is something about the way she cries, the look in her eyes, the anguished look on her mother's face, that tells me that her tears are those of a daughter who comes to mark the death of her father from whom she never received blessing—still conflicted in her feelings about her love for him, still angry that their relationship never meant more than it did, still hurt deeply by some of the things he had said and done to her. Now, with his death, it strikes me that she cries at least in part because there is no more time to change their troubled history. As the service ends and we make our way to the graveside, I recall that the words I have offered usually bring comfort to the family. I talked about resurrection and God's

comfort. But the daughter, especially, remains inconsolable. What could a theology of hope offer her in this time of her loss?

Moltmann's theology of hope affirms the Christian doctrine of our participation in Jesus' resurrection. The father, having confessed his belief in Jesus Christ, receives the promise of life in God's presence. The daughter, having confessed her belief in Jesus Christ, will one day enjoy that promise, too. For her, Moltmann's description of life after death is especially meaningful: "I imagine that in death," Moltmann writes, "we come very close to that well of life from which we already here and now draw strength to live and to affirm life, so that those who have been injured, broken and destroyed can live the life for which they were destined, for which they were born, and which was taken from them."⁶⁷ One day, the daughter will enjoy the promise of coming into God's presence where her emotional injuries will be healed and she will know fully that destiny that God had in mind for her when she was born.

And yet, as Moltmann teaches, the daughter may begin to experience God's future promise today. This ending of relationship with her father has the feel of permanence. There is no more time to work things out, no more opportunities to talk and to understand and to forgive. Moltmann will remind her, of course, that in this ending point of her life, there is possibility for new beginning. The loss of her father in this life cannot be changed. But there is the possibility that his death does not have to be the end of her journey towards healing. God finishes what God begins. As Paul writes to the Philippians, "I am confident of this, that the one who began a good work among you will bring it to completion by the day of Jesus Christ." (Philippians 1:6). For the daughter this means that God is still active in her life to continue bringing to realization the things of

⁶⁷ Moltmann, *In the End—The Beginning*, 117.

abundance which God foresaw when she was born. God's creative, restoring, healing relationship with her is not finished. God begins, even now, to give her the blessing that she wanted but did not receive. God promises to take the anger and heal it. God promises to move her in the direction of a more deeply joyful life.

I suspect that Keshgegian describes Moltmann's promise of realized hope for her more profoundly. God is creative presence, Keshgegian says. Yes, God refashions our endings into new possible beginnings. And yes, God is not finished writing God's future story in our lives. But exactly how our future stories will be reshaped is still to be determined. We cannot imagine how God will heal us, make us whole. God improvises, Keshgegian says. And we, in relationship with God, improvise, too. We bring our fears, our trepidations to the tombs of life, the same way the women in Mark's Gospel bring theirs. (Mark 16:1-8)⁶⁸ What we cannot imagine is how God will intervene in our lives to change us. Nor can we imagine how we, in response to God's initiative will change. In Mark's Gospel the women receive the summons to go and find the risen Christ, not where they suspected he might be found, but where he had chosen to be found. The women respond to this new possibility with fear. They are not yet able to understand how God is opening up their future. We suspect that they finally chose to go and begin a new chapter of relationship with him. But their initial fear illustrates the indeterminate quality of all our relationships with God: what matters, Keshgegian suggests, is not that we always know what the next step will be, how we might experience God's offer of new possibility, but that we choose to begin the journey of discovery with God. As Moltmann's

⁶⁸ Keshgegian, 159. Keshgegian interprets the shorter ending of Mark's Gospel, the one found in most ancient manuscripts, to be a story not just of Jesus' resurrection, but one that points to the indeterminate, creative process of entering with free will into God's story future-making promise. The shorter ending says that in response to the young man's announcement that Jesus was alive and that he was waiting to see them in Galilee, the women "went out and fled from the tomb, for terror and amazement had seized them." The story ends inconclusively. We do not know what happens next. The story of the remainder of their lives in response to God's promise of a new, unexpected future, is yet to be written. Keshgegian says that this is the way it always is in a world with God. Nothing is final, neither with God, nor in our relationships with God.

theology of hope implies, ours is the responsibility to keep faith in God's promise, to look forward to its unfolding, to believe that it will happen not only in the life to come, but in unexpected ways now, to actively nurture an attitude of watchfulness.⁶⁹ If hope is founded on the work of God in Jesus Christ, then ours becomes the responsibility to live with a spirit of anticipation and not resignation.

God's promised future is not time-bound by this life. Though we experience the promise in part now, it continues, Moltmann suggests, into all of God's future, even to God's final Judgment. God's process of justification is a dynamic process. It begins in this world with Jesus' physical presence and healing, to solidarity through his cross with those who experience godforsakenness, to the liberation in his resurrection to those who carry the burden of pain and guilt. But the work of God's liberation continues into the world to come. This work of justification (of making the broken right again), "extends to the living and the dead and withdraws all claims from the power of evil It is fulfilled when 'the kingdom' is handed over to God, so that the goal is reached and 'God will be all in all.'"⁷⁰ God's judgment is one of creative justice, not a retributive one. It is a justice that leads to a "final redressing of the wrong that has been committed and suffered, and the final raising up of those who are bowed down."⁷¹

In this sense, truly nothing is lost to God: neither the past in all its painful remembrance, nor the present in its profound incompleteness, nor our efforts that have failed, nor our tiny

⁶⁹ Jürgen Moltmann, "Praying with Open Eyes," in *Loving God With Our Minds: The Pastor as Theologian*, edited by Michael Welker and Cynthia A. Jarvis (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2004), 196-197. For Moltmann, "watchfulness" is an attitude of hopefulness. The absence of watchfulness is illustrated by the disciples who fell asleep during Jesus' prayer of anguish in Gethsemane. Moltmann suggests that theirs was a "sleep of hopelessness"—of no longer believing that Jesus had resources to combat the challenges ahead of them. We share their sleep of hopelessness every time we become paralyzed in the face of unknown dangers.

⁷⁰ Moltmann, *In The End—The Beginning*, 76.

⁷¹ Ibid., 117. Moltmann also describes this concept of "creative justice" in an article entitled, "Justice for Victims and Perpetrators," *Reformed World* 44, no. 1 (March 1994): 7. Here Moltmann critiques the "true Reformation doctrine of justification" as one that focuses on the rehabilitation of the unjust, and so makes "Protestantism blind to the suffering of the victims and their passive sins." Moltmann argues that the "Reformation doctrine of justification and the present-day theology of the liberation of the oppressed need not be opposites." (6)

resolves to go forward that have been thwarted, nor our intentions to do right that have ended badly, nor our hopes to seek blessing that have gone unfulfilled, nor our efforts to save life that have ended in tragedy, our emotional investments that have left us bankrupt, our heroic fights against cancer and our intercessory prayers on behalf of the dying that have ended not with healing but with sorrow, our gallant efforts to accomplish some good that is not realized.⁷² None of these experiences in life is lost to God. They are remembered into the very heart of God and finally justified, redressed, fulfilled, saved. There is no experience of time in our lives that is lost to God—no time that is wasted, or unredeemable, or meaningless, nor without hope. All of our experiences, good and bad, successes and failures, are received into God's care and finally transformed.⁷³

(b) Some Criticisms

Flora Keshgegian argues that Moltmann's theology of hope as promise of God's future minimizes the importance of time present and, in the process, offers few resources for those who suffer the messiness of history. Keshgegian says Moltmann's theology of hope is written like some sort of "divine comedy"⁷⁴ where everything turns out well in the end. In his scheme of things, history progresses forward towards God's telos such that everything that happens to us between now and the fulfillment of God's future is understood as part of the grand scheme. This linear view of time does not adequately explain those occasions in life where our sufferings have

⁷² The image of Moses' life comes to mind. He was God's reluctant prophet who endured much for the sake of the journey to promise. And yet, as the writer of Deuteronomy remembers, Moses died having seen the land for which journeyed his whole life, but not finally entering it (Deuteronomy 34:1-5).

⁷³ Moltmann, *In the End—The Beginning*, 117. Moltmann suggests further that for some, God's final redressing of life's wrongs are completed not once and for all upon death, but also after death through God's ongoing history with us. Moltmann thinks particularly of those whose lives have been cut short and whom God wills to give the time to become what God destined them to become. It is of comfort to me, having lost a teenage son (and perhaps others who have lost children), to imagine that God has an ongoing history with him whereby he is allowed to experience all the joys of life for which he never had the chance. There were so many things Zach wanted to do in life that he never got the chance to do. To think God is gracious to give him that opportunity is a hope-giving consolation.

⁷⁴ Keshgegian, *Time for Hope*, 18.

no apparent meaning. Moltmann's progressive view of time privileges possibilities, not actualities. It values the destination, but not the journey. With its emphasis on an attitude of restlessness in the context of God's already but not yet future promise, Moltmann's theology of hope devalues the intrinsic worth of all our finite efforts.⁷⁵ It suggests a triumphal view of time where God is always in charge of history and that nothing can stop God's progress. A view like this abandons those who, in the dark holes of life, experience persistent ambiguity, who, instead of resolution, experience repeated suffering. For them, God's forward moving future promise leaves them stuck in the incomprehensible sufferings of the past and present.

Keshgegian suggests several alternate approaches. We can live as "expectant subversives,"⁷⁶ happy for a future we may never see. As such, our efforts to live faithfully, though not always or ever ending in resolution, are nevertheless valuable. We can also accept the fact that history is essentially ambiguous,⁷⁷ that there are rarely perfect, complete, easily accessible paths forward. There is rather, an open teleology with an invitation from a creative, improvising God, to join with God in applying our skills, wisdom and experiences in charting a faithful course of life. Where Moltmann insists that we are people of promise who live with the assurance that the victory has already been won, Keshgegian says that our lives are characterized by a greater tentativeness, that what matters most is not whether or not we know how things will end, or evolve, but that we choose to participate in the process of history. She emphasizes repeatedly that the journey matters as much as the destination. Throughout our lives, along the journey, God will continue to partner with us in continual dance of movement and return—a life-long process of faith that leads to recurring experiences of conversion and restoration and endless

⁷⁵ Ibid., 40, on discomfort with finiteness, 79.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 81.

⁷⁷ Keshgegian, *Time for Hope*, 83.

correction.⁷⁸ In the meantime, we celebrate the “partial manifestations”⁷⁹ of God’s truth in the community of faith. We do not insist that perfect answers be found. Instead, we claim ambiguity and ambivalence, and incompleteness and imperfection. Life places us in a multitude of untidy contexts. Rather than expending all our energy trying to escape them, we celebrate the goodness of shared life in the midst of them. Life, Keshgegian writes, is better understood, not as divine comedy where everything turns out well in the end, but as an open-ended story with variable developments and possible endings. Keshgegian’s post-modern view of God compared to Moltmann’s doctrine of God, suggests a “very different image of the divine than the monarchical God, enthroned in heaven directing the universe. It is also different from the loving God as ever-present comfort and source of order and security. This is a universe of potentiality, but not determinacy—of constant change but not of absolute givens.”⁸⁰ For those whose greatest struggle in loss is the seeming interminability of their feelings of grief, Keshgegian’s non-teleological view of time seems to offer a limited pastoral response to those who question the seeming interminability of their feelings of grief. Following my son’s death, for instance, my wife and I both experienced a dull, aching void. In order to learn how to grieve effectively, we reached out to several persons who had experienced similar loss. Repeatedly, we asked two questions: “Does it get easier?” and “How long does it hurt?” No one could definitively answer that question, but we drew consolation from an assurance that the intensity of pain would not last forever, that there would be some relief, some resolution of our grief. We were especially comforted by one woman’s counsel that while we would always in this life continue to remember his death, there would be a day when we could remember him with joy and not pain.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 84.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 88.

⁸⁰ Keshgegian, *Time for Hope*, 162.

Keshgegian is right, of course. Attempts to find answers to the question “why” of his suffering did not help. Some contended that in the raw reality of our loss, we could not see the larger picture of his dying. In time, they suggested, we would. But that never helped. I could not fathom any good reason why my son, or any child, would suffer with cancer and eventually die. In order to go on with my life, I learned to stop asking the question. What helped was learning to find a way to live with the pain. It seemed there were two basic choices: either to quit living, in which case I would abandon all obligations and relationships, or to choose to continue living. The choice to continue living despite the loss seemed the only good path. Yet, in order to choose life, I had to believe that in some sense the future would be better than the present and that God was assisting me in the journey forward.

Viktor Frankl addressed this need for hope as belief in the future. Remembering the stories of those who survived confinement in Nazi concentration camps, Frankl writes, “It is a peculiarity of man that he can only live by looking to the future This is his salvation in the most difficult moments of existence.”⁸¹ Frankl recalls that those who stood the best chance of surviving the daily pain of their existence managed to fix their lives on some future goal. Paradoxically, it was this orientation towards the future that allowed the prisoner to find some joy, or beauty, or comfort in the daily regimen. We need something to strive for, Frankl taught. Homeostatic attitudes fail us. We need instead to exercise the freedom to strive and struggle for a worthwhile goal.⁸² To be locked into life without meaning or sense of future is an “existential vacuum” that few can survive indefinitely.

Ellen Ott Marshall states a similar emphasis on hope as future. She quotes William F. Lynch in his book, *Images of Hope*, to say that the meaning and purpose of hope is that it frees

⁸¹ Frankl, 94.

⁸² Ibid., 127.

us from “the prison of the instant.”⁸³ Marshall agrees with Keshgegian that an overly triumphal view of time does not offer a realistic consolation. It tends to offer excessive claims that are not consistent with reality. And yet, neither does the community of faith help by offering an open-ended, indeterminate, view of life’s tragedies. What is needed, Marshall seems to suggest, is the nuanced view of Moltmann who, honestly accepting the hard realities of life, nevertheless offers an affirmation of possibility within history, something new, something unforeseen, something greater than human imagination. For Marshall hopeful living involves an “ongoing negotiation between the promising and sobering aspects of life and faith.”⁸⁴ Similarly, Moltmann’s idea of an adequate pastoral response requires offering both a way to stand in the present and a reason to keep standing: “It is through faith that man finds the path of true life, but it is only hope that keeps him on that path.”⁸⁵

Even so, Keshgegian’s present-oriented theology of hope offers valuable insights in offering a genuine pastoral response to those who experience loss. One, she offers an honest description of how loss is experienced as ambiguity and disorientation. In the beginning stages of grief, this is exactly how time is experienced. Talk of God and God’s future matters little when all that one can do is attend to the necessities of life. The beginning stages of loss are largely about survival. One cannot imagine how life will go on, and in this sense, there is, as Keshgegian suggests, no script, no pre-determined plot of how things will either evolve or end. As grief begins, there are no easy answers, perhaps no answers at all, and no easy consolations. I remember sitting in a counselor’s office in the weeks following Zach’s death asking, “How can I make the pain go away.” Truth was, there was no good way to make it go away. The anxiety of that frightening reality was only increased by a desperation to think that it had to go away.

⁸³ Marshall, 36.

⁸⁴ Ibid., xiii.

⁸⁵ Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, 6.

What might help, Keshgegian would say, would be to claim the darkness and not run from it. In the darkness one might begin to look around and find little glimpses of beauty or truth that, though not taking the pain away, might still validate the experience being in the suffering. One might also stay in the darkness to discover what needs to be learned from it. The darkness might teach us something. In the Church, for instance, we do well at attending to the meaning of the various stages of Holy Week. We consider the meaning of Jesus' triumphal entry, a last meal with his disciples, his arrest, and subsequent death. But inexplicably, we pass over Silent Saturday in our hurry to celebrate Easter. What could our willingness to remain in the hours of Silent Saturday teach us? Perhaps in the silence of that day between his death and resurrection we could learn more deeply what has been lost and how, given the same set of circumstances, we might live differently.

Keshgegian cites Walter Benjamin's description of Paul Klee's painting, *Angelus Novus*, to make the point that sometimes what needs healing is in our past, not in our pursuit of some future. In the picture, the angel looks backwards but is propelled forward by a violent wind. The implication is that the angel has no choice but to move forward, yet what interests him is in the past, all that has been left behind. Keshgegian writes:

Along with the angel, we need to look back. We need to attend to the past and hold it in memory, if we are to know what is left behind and how much is lost in the movement ahead. When we do pay attention to what is suffered or lost in history, we are not led astray by Christian triumphalism and its power-play resolutions.⁸⁶

Finally, perhaps Keshgegian's best contribution to a theology of hope for pastoral care is her insistence that we pay attention to the importance of the journey. What matters in times of loss, certainly in its beginning, is that we choose to be in the moment. I remember a discussion I had with a member following worship. He commented that another member seemed to be

⁸⁶ Keshgegian, 122.

having great difficulty getting over the death of his wife. “It has been almost a year now,” he said. “I would think that he should be getting better by now, able to come to worship, pray, sing the hymns, without breaking down.” I could not help but think that sometimes the community of faith places an additional burden on those who experience loss. We carry these tacit agreements that grief should be satisfactorily achieved in certain ways by a certain time. Maybe we should simply celebrate that in his grief he chose to be in worship at all.

3. Hope as Spiritual Discipline of Re-engagement

Though the fig tree does not blossom, and no fruit is on the vines; though the produce of the olive fails, and the fields yield no food . . . Yet I will rejoice in the Lord. —Habakkuk 3:17-19



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The picture is characterized by an understated beauty. It does not please the eye with its absence of bright colors and joyful panorama. It is mostly dark in the picture, and for this reason, I suppose, few people are drawn to it; even fewer are compelled to contemplate its possible meaning. Wendy Beckett’s elegant description of it helps me see what I sometimes fail to see at first glance:

⁸⁷ Ken Kiff, *Flower and Black Sky*, in Wendy Beckett, *Art and the Sacred: the Mystical Now* (New York City, NY: Universe, 1993), 74-75.

In *Flower and Black Sky* the flower stands alone in a lifeless landscape. To the left is a skeletal tree, pale green like an enlarged branch of seaweed, waving its dead branches despairingly in all directions, and in vain. To the right, low in the black sky, the sun is visible, and yet it gives no light. It is a sun of faith, a willed sun, overpowered by the darkness and still holding its place, waiting, keeping faith in powerlessness. The small flower is not dismayed. In an unmistakably anthropomorphic gesture, it raises its leaf-hands in prayer, it raises its flower-head in trust. The praying hands do not implore, but seem rather to jubilate. Incredibly, the flower almost orchestrates a hymn of jubilation. Like a conductor, the leaves rise to summon invisible players and singers.⁸⁸

In one sense, as Beckett suggests, *Flower and Black Sky* represents an example of personal faithfulness in a dark world. Despite the surrounding darkness which nearly extinguishes its little glimmer of light, the flower demonstrates a persistent resiliency. The darkness casts a fearful pall over the rock, the tree, even the sun. But the flower, either because it is especially strong with roots sunk deep, or because of its reliance on a power not its own, is undeterred. As Beckett suggests, it is jubilant, and in its jubilancy, it offers a song of unlikely joy for all creation to hear. The little flower is symbolic, perhaps, of any person who continues to believe in God and to trust the light, despite the pervasive darkness.

But in another way the picture might also represent the community of faith in a darkened world. The world's brokenness, with its dark powers, seemingly dominates the landscape. It influences almost everything that might resist it. The tree, one suspects, once had a head of supple leaves. But sometime in the past, as the light of day dimmed, all the leaves withered and fell. And the rock? It too once had power to reflect the light. The sun still shines behind the veil of darkness, but unless someone or something asks another to look up, its powers of light will likely go unnoticed. What is needed, and what is finally given in hope, is a little source of light in a deep, dark place. The flower's light does not seem like much, but it signals a beginning, a turning point. Perhaps its mere presence will cause the tree and the rock to remember what was

⁸⁸ Beckett, 74.

once possible. And then the flower's light will begin to spread. Perhaps it is not too far-fetched a vision to see the jubilant flower alive in the darkness as the community of the faithful—a company of those who believe in Christ who is the Light of the World (John 8:12), and who, because of their abiding relationship with Christ choose to stand resolutely in the midst of a great darkness to shine. Perhaps it is also not too far-fetched a vision to see in the tree and the rock, the faithful person who, though battered by loss, nevertheless chooses to see light and claim hope.

(a) Christo-praxis as a Personal Will to Re-engage

For Moltmann, the decision to stand resolutely and faithfully in the midst of the world's great darkness is not an act of spiritual magnanimity. Believing in God's eschatological promise, it is the Christian's vocation to remain in the world actively partnering with God to share the work of God's hope. It is a decision, a will, to do what one can today to embrace the in-break of God's future. Although God's promise will culminate in the future, it has already begun to transform the dynamic of our present circumstances. Those who believe in the promise join with God in participating in the Kingdom's promise-making work. Because of God's involvement in the world, we continue to hold a belief in the value of our engagement in that world. This, Moltmann says, is precisely the Church's mission: to act in faith in a world that is incomplete, broken, hurtful and marked by darkness, knowing that God continues to have faith in God's creation.

But for the purposes of this study, this is also the suffering Christian's calling, too. As Paul writes of his own experiences in Christian ministry as being alternately perplexed by the great questions of faith, persecuted by acts of evil, struck down by the hurting contingencies of life despite repeated efforts to preach possibilities of new life, he nevertheless chooses to keep

his eyes fixed on the larger spectrum of God's saving work. Neither perplexity nor suffering, neither failure nor even the threat of death itself, will determine nor diminish his anticipation of the possibilities of life. Paul acknowledges the heartache, but he does not end his assessment of life there. He draws from his belief in God's emerging future to sustain his continued participation in the work of ministry.

Moltmann speaks of "Christo-praxis" to summarize this theology of continued engagement. Based on God's incarnational investment in us through the death and resurrection of his Son, we reach out to this God of hope, despite our losses, to join again in doing those things, living our lives, in ways that promote the values that please God. God demonstrates a desire to be in relationship with us despite the things that separate us. We share God's reconciling hope by reaching past our brokenness, our disappointment, our fear, our anxiety to be in relationship with others. God's will to make life where there is every reason to abandon life, is the essence of God's irresistible hope. It is the essence of our hopefulness, too: that we seek the things of life despite every reason (the sting of our losses) to abandon life.

Ellen Ott Marshall speaks of Moltmann's Christo-praxis as the practice of a "responsible hope."⁸⁹ Hope has a job to do, she says, but it must be done responsibly. By speaking of a hope that is "responsible," Marshall means at least three concepts. One, she means that while "Basiliea vision" must spark a "revolutionary sensibility," it must also be grounded in reality of the present. Not every dream can be realized. Not every hope for the world or our lives has an equal possibility of being realized. And so both the community of faith and individual persons in the community (especially those who have experienced loss) engage in an ongoing negotiation between the ideals of faith and the realities of history and try to figure how to respond.

⁸⁹ Marshall, preface, xiii-xiv.

Second, yet in the process of ongoing negotiation between faith, history and response, Marshall emphasizes that the believer has a responsibility to remain actively engaged in formulating a response, to persevere, despite setbacks. There are some works of justice which will never happen in the world unless the believer becomes involved. Human effort is required for hope's work to be accomplished. God expects this. God's power in our lives is relational, not coercive, Marshall says. In thinking about God it is not so much God acting on us as it is God acting with us. Our relationship with God is mutual. And as such, Marshall speaks of a hope in the world that "does not relinquish agency to the unidirectional control of an omnipotent God."⁹⁰ Marshall draws from Suchocki in thinking of a "process eschatology" which is nothing less than a churning between God and world, each affecting the other.⁹¹

From this notion of "process eschatology" and mutual collaboration, Marshall offers her third, and perhaps most useful contribution to the development of a theology of hope for pastoral care: an "ethic of risk."⁹² This risk is inherent in God's saving work in history. God continues to act in history despite the uncertainty as to how humanity will respond. Humanity likewise acts in the world with an ethic of risk—choosing to engage the world for the sake of God's Kingdom and yet not knowing from the onset the outcome or efficacy of its efforts. Marshall bases her ethic of risk on the writer of Habakkuk. In the first two chapters, the writer looks at the world and in protest shakes his fists at God. The world is not right. The writer's world is not right. Things need to be changed. Then, beginning with chapter 3, the writer assumes the watch-post and waits for God's answer. Marshall says that the writer has no guarantee that his

⁹⁰ Marshall, xiv. It is uncertain if Marshall means to de-emphasize God's sovereignty, or if for the sake of emphasis, she highlights human agency. Later, she will talk about our hope in a God who finds a way to make the impossible happen. Regardless, Marshall favors the notion of a full collaboration and criticizes a view of "Christians with hands folded." Keshgegian, *Time for Hope*, 166, does "re-imagine God's sovereignty as God's energy, present and active, in history, rather than God's absolute and determinative dominion over the outcome."

⁹¹ Marshall, 54-55, quoting Marjorie Hewitt Suchocki, *God, Christ, Church: A Practical Guide to Process Theology* (New York City, NY: Crossroad, 1995), 188-89.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 81.

litany of protest will move God to action and yet the work of protest is made anyway. This is how the suffering one must make the journey to new hope: aware of both peril and promise, reality and ideal, yet not lapsing into paralyzing self-pity, the believer chooses to do what can be done today, even if “{the believer} relentlessly persists without belief that one can guarantee the efficacy of his or her actions.”⁹³

Both Søren Kierkegaard and Viktor Frankl emphasize the importance of human agency, too. Kierkegaard in the beginning portions of *Sickness unto Death*, speaks of despair as a state of self that one chooses (freedom) in relation to both one’s finitude (actuality) and infinitude (the possibility of relation with God). One form of despair emerges when one is ignorant of God and the possibility which God’s future promises. Another form of despair is to know God but to choose not to believe that God can help (Pieper’s sin of despair). For Kierkegaard, the key to despair or faith is the freedom each person has to choose to be in relationship to God or not and subsequently to choose one’s orientation of hopefulness to the world. Every person is bound by certain actualities, of course, those things that cannot be changed, those suffering experiences which cannot be forgotten. And yet, in the face of any reality, a person always has freedom to choose how the givens of life will be understood. In despair, a person can choose to see the impossibility of life, and therefore, resign one’s responsibility to make changes. Or, as Kierkegaard emphasizes, a person can exercise the freedom to choose to believe, to have faith in, the possibilities of God. Kierkegaard writes:

The believer has the ever infallible antidote to despair—possibility—because for God everything is possible at every moment. This is the good health of faith that resolves contradictions To lack possibility means either that everything has

⁹³ Marshall, drawing from Sharon Welch, *A Feminist Ethic of Risk*, rev. ed. (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 2000), 14, 37, 104.

become necessary (given and unchangeable) for a person or that everything has become trivial.⁹⁴

Reflecting on his experiences in a Nazi concentration camp, Viktor Frankl observed that incarceration stripped away every human freedom except the “freedom to choose one’s attitude in a given set of circumstances”⁹⁵ A person’s capacity to survive was most often the result of using one’s freedom to choose one’s attitude and not to let it be determined by the circumstances alone. Keshgegian finally concludes that we are “the authors of times and tales,” emphasizing with Frankl that living in hope is more than simply believing in what God has done, but is instead using one’s resources to make pathways to hope.

For Moltmann, personal agency in the suffering moments of life is a form of “spiritual watching”—a fourfold spiritual orientation to life that: 1) seeks the reality of God by moving from primary concern for self, or moving to the reality of God’s interest in the world away from numbness and apathy; 2) wakes up to those places where life needs to be re-created; 3) maintains a posture of tense expectation , with eyes wide open for signs of God’s future possibility; 4) and finally, looks soberly without pretense, understanding that with God all things are possible.⁹⁶ Here our will to re-engage in life, our insistence to reclaim the importance of life, becomes a process of sanctification:⁹⁷ healing and new growth replace the pain of loss, signs of the sanctity of life are recovered from the wreckage of loss, and a new attitude of anticipation for God’s creative possibilities emerges from our deep-seated cynicism.

⁹⁴ Søren Kierkegaard, *Sickness Unto Death: A Christian Psychological Exposition for Upbuilding and Awakening*, edited by Howard V. Hong and Edna Hong (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1980), 39-40. Parentheses mine.

⁹⁵ Frankl, 12.

⁹⁶ Moltmann, *In the End—The Beginning*, 84.

⁹⁷ Moltmann, *The Spirit of Life*, 174-177.

(b) Implications for Pastoral Care

(1) Acknowledge the Complexity

In the months following loss, the suffering one begins to engage the healing process as an intricate, multi-faceted work. The complexity of this healing work is described in a variety of ways as a necessity to “relearn our world,”⁹⁸ or the need to “relocate” one’s self in the loss,⁹⁹ or as a process of reconciliation, where the journey to loss recovery is understood less as one of “getting over” the loss,” and more as a process of reconciling one’s self with what has been lost. In the various stages of this process, the suffering one walks a delicate line between past and future learning to “integrate the new reality of moving forward in life” so that over time, the “ever-present pain of grief gives rise to renewed sense of meaning and purpose . . . and hope for continued life emerges as {the suffering one} is able to make commitments to the future”¹⁰⁰ John Navone suggests that this work of reconciliation may also involve a process of “positive disintegration,”¹⁰¹ through which the suffering one gathers the courage to move forward by learning to let go of the certainties of one’s past.

The complexity of this process is further complicated by the indeterminate context in which those who suffer must begin to relearn their lives. The anchors, both emotional and physical, of an assumptive world, have been shaken. The emotional cohesiveness of one’s prior assumptive world is altered. In loss the suffering one’s story has become fragmented. The pieces of that old story must now be integrated into a new story—a process that requires the will

⁹⁸ Thomas Attig, *How We Grieve: Relearning the World* (New York City, NY: Oxford University Press, 1996), 108-121.

⁹⁹ Alan Cole, *Good Mourning: Getting Through Your Grief* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008), 47-57.

¹⁰⁰ Alan Wolfelt, “The Journey Through Grief: The Mourner’s Six Reconciliation Needs,” <http://www.centerforloss.com/who-are-you/someone-i-love-has-died/>; the concept of the work of grief as “reconciliation” is discussed more fully in Alan Wolfelt, *The Wilderness of Grief: Finding Your Way* (Fort Collins, CO: Companion Press, 2007), 91ff.

¹⁰¹ John Navone, “The Cost of Ongoing Christian Conversion,” *Laval Theologique et Philosophique* 46, no. 2 (1990): 223-235. English translation at URI site: <http://id.erudit.org/iderudit/400535ar> (Erudit.org).

both to remember what has been lost while also nurturing a will to move forward into the future.¹⁰² This conflicting sense of both anticipation (moving on) and ambivalence (holding on), points to part of what makes the grieving process so deeply complex:

“Grief is fraught with inherent paradoxes and dualities: a longing for a sense of coherence, meaning and order {at precisely a time} when everything feels so incomprehensible, unjust and meaningless; the feeling that one’s grief is deeply private and unspeakable, while outsiders are watching and observing as the mourner grieves; grappling with how to live fully within this world, while simultaneously living a secret and parallel internal life with the deceased; the knowledge that time keeps passing, with a simultaneous feeling that time remains frozen.”¹⁰³

While many parishioners I counsel understand that one of the critical long-range goals of successful loss recovery requires making a new life for themselves, fewer know how to identify the smaller steps that will help them continue through the intermediate stages of that recovery process. In this regard, many suffering persons experience the period of time between the loss and the fullness of recovery as one marked by uncertainty, reticence, confusion, and spiritual dissonance.¹⁰⁴ The pastoral care-giver may help most effectively by encouraging the suffering one to stand in the moments of one’s deepest experiences of loss and to acknowledge the indeterminate nature of this period in the healing process. Sometimes as Brueggemann observes,

¹⁰² Nancy J. Moules, Kari Simonson, Mark Prins, Paula Angus, Janice M. Bell, “Making Room for Grief: Walking Backwards and Living Forward, *Nursing Inquiry* 11, no. 2 (2004): 103-104. Sonali Deraniyagala, in her memoir *Wave* (New York City, NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 2013), captures the emotional complexity of loss recovery as a process of looking back while moving forward. In the immediate aftermath of losing her family, Deraniyagala recalls returning to their vacation home for the first time, and lamenting the changes that had been made to it—furniture rearranged, clothes put away, personal items removed. “I didn’t want this barrenness. I yearned for the house as it was.” (49) Years later she signals a new perspective writing, “Seven years on, it is distilled, my loss. For I am not whirling anymore, I am no longer cradled by shock. . . . But I have learned that I can only recover myself when I keep them near.” (169-70)

¹⁰³ Janet Plotkin-Bornstein, “The Paradoxes of Grief,” letter to the editor, *New York Times*, March 6, 2011, Academic Search Complete, and EBSCOhost (accessed July 12, 2012).

¹⁰⁴ Howard Thurman, *The Inward Journey: Meditations on the Spiritual Quest* (New York City, NY: Harper & Brothers, Publishers, 1961), 68-69, draws from T.S. Eliot’s poem, *The Hollow Men*, in describing this station in the process of regaining hope as being in a “shadow place” that falls between “the idea and the reality, the motion and the act.” At this point, Thurman writes, “the gulf is deep and wide between the dream and the implementation.” Here those who assist suffering one’s in the Church may impede the healing process of grief recovery by offering easy answers to the inherently complicated work of healing.

we are squarely in a season of disorientation and no amount of energy spent trying to deny it helps.

Marshall writes that in Niebuhr's famous "Serenity Prayer" we are asked to assess whether the things of life should be accepted or changed. The reality, Marshall says, is that we rarely know which time it is in our lives. Especially in times of loss, we seldom know what the best course of action is. Into these occasions of life it may be best to acknowledge that uncertainty exists and that while there is no perfect answer, what may matter most is that we do what we can with the resources we have and trust that whether or not our decisions are efficacious in precisely the ways we intend them to be, the future remains open; the stories of our lives are not finished. Life, as Keshgegian reflects, is an "ongoing process of movement and return—conversion, restoration and always endless correction."¹⁰⁵ We do not act impulsively, selfishly or destructively. But neither do we lapse into passivity and fear.

(2) Claim Personal Freedom

Even in the worst of circumstances we have choices about how we will live in the moment. Howard Stone, drawing from Kierkegaard's three aspects of self, says that spiritual health, as much as mental health, depends on the confidence we have in personal agency—the belief that we are not mere victims in a suffering world, but capable of change.¹⁰⁶ All of us are bound to some degree by the actualities of life. A child or spouse has died. Something has been lost. A dream has been lost. We cannot change the fact of these losses. But neither are we bound to define our lives by them. We have freedom to choose what we will do with the givens of life.

¹⁰⁵ Keshgegian, 84. Keshgegian draws from Rosemary Reuther in *Sexism and God-Talk* (Boston: MA, Beacon Press, 1993).

¹⁰⁶ Howard Stone, *Depression and Hope: New Insights for Pastoral Counseling* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1998), 47-48.

Stone says that a lot of counseling focuses on actuality rather than freedom to fashion a new future (possibility). One response of Christian faith in tragedy may be to remind the suffering one that God promises hopeful possibilities, to say that death is not the end, but that the decision to accept or deny the reality of God's promises of hope is ours.

Ken Kiff's *Flower and Black Sky* comes to mind. From a personal perspective, the jubilant flower, "an unmistakably anthropomorphic gesture" of determination to reflect light and not darkness, life and not death, to keep faith despite the enveloping darkness, represents the suffering individual's moment of decision. As Moses taught the people of Israel, ours is a choice between "life and death, blessings and curses."¹⁰⁷ In solidarity with Christ, we acknowledge the pervasive darkness, but we choose to do something. We begin where we are with what we have, choosing to continue the journey while leaning into the promise of God's future. We understand that our actions may result in only partial manifestations of all that God intends. But we believe that God honors our resolve to move forward, and we remember that God in Jesus Christ has demonstrated a will to make a way to new life where there was no way (*ex creator nihilo*). We look up from the places of our losses and we see the Gospel proclaims that "God's light shines in {our} darkness, and the darkness {does} not overcome it." (John 1:5).

¹⁰⁷ Deuteronomy 30:19. David Jensen, in his book, *The Living Hope*, 131, gives an insightful commentary on this passage.

CHAPTER III. METHODOLOGY: A STORY TO TELL

*I want you to feel what I felt. I want you to know why story-truth is truer sometimes than happening-truth.*¹⁰⁸ —Tim O'Brien

*"The Word became flesh" is not just a beautiful theological formula. It declares where God's theological battle is joined and also where our human theological response is to take place.*¹⁰⁹
—C.S. Song

In chapter one, I described the common experience of loss. All our lives are inevitably tinged with occasions of loss. The structures and certainties of life change without our choosing and in these times we struggle to regain our footing. I suggested that the story of the Hebrew people, drawn into exile far from home in God's seeming absence, might serve as a descriptive narrative for what Kaufmann calls those experiences of life wherein we lose our "assumptive worlds."¹¹⁰ Their cry, "How could we sing the Lord's song in a foreign land?" gives expression to all our struggles in times of disorientation and describes how it might feel to lose the certainties of one's assumptive world.

Yet, I suggested that their cry of anguish was more than spiritual catharsis but also a defining question which intimated not only "Why has God forsaken us?" but also asked, "How are we to overcome deep sorrow to sing the song of life again?"¹¹¹ In chapter two, I suggested that Dr. Rieux in Camus' novel *The Plague*, asks a similar question. In the face of a child's suffering and death, the doctor argues with the town's priest to explain how a person could reconcile such human suffering with a helpful view of God. Though Camus does not intend to

¹⁰⁸Tim O'Brien, *The Things They Carried* (New York City, NY: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Publishing Company, 1990), 130.

¹⁰⁹C.S. Song, *Tell Us Our Names: Story Theology from an Asian Perspective* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 1984), 10.

¹¹⁰ Jeffrey Kauffman, ed., *Loss of the Assumptive World*, 2-3.

¹¹¹ Robert A. Neimeyer, *Meaning Reconstruction & the Experience of Loss*, 4; Neimeyer argues that this question goes to the heart of what he names, "meaning reconstruction." Neimeyer writes that "meaning reconstruction in response to a loss is the central process in grieving."

give a theological rationale (indeed he does not believe one exists), he nevertheless poses a key question: if Father Paneloux's traditional formulations of the efficacy of God in times of suffering fail to help, leaving those who seek God stranded hopelessly in dark places of disorientation, what understanding of God might help? Guided by the work of Jürgen Moltmann, augmented by the work of other theologians including Flora Keshgegian and Ellen Ott Marshall, I described three foundations for a theology of hope that would assist those who have experienced loss to gain a deeper sense of hope, including God's solidarity with us, God's promise of new life in the present and in the future, and a challenge to begin acting in ways reflective of God's promise. God's solidarity, I argued, is God's gift of comfort as we begin the journey. God is with us. God's promise of new life is the gift of possibility in those moments when all seems lost. The summons to a life of faith, what Moltmann calls Christo-praxis, is God's invitation to lean into God's future, to begin moving from despair and inaction to hope and new action. If despair is deadening paralysis, Christo-praxis represents a renewed interest to invest in life. Taking Moltmann's cue, I argued that the purpose of this pastoral theology of hope was not to explain the reality of suffering (Moltmann could not explain why Auschwitz happened any more than I can explain why my son died of brain cancer, nor why my parishioners experience great loss), but to provide a framework for navigating the journey from loss to new hope.

The concern with chapter three is to describe a way both to teach and practice the three foundations of a theology of hope. By speaking of the pedagogical nature of this project, I make three observations based on nearly thirty years of parish ministry. One, in addition to the pain of loss, the Church community sometimes compounds the pain by offering the suffering one understandings of God that impede the process from disorientation to re-orientation; two,

Moltmann's language of hope, particularly his view of the passability of God, describes a view of God in suffering that stands against much of what many in the Church have traditionally been taught to believe and that, therefore, such a theology of hope requires some period of learning before it can reasonably be practiced. By speaking of the practical nature of this project, I mean to say that the theology of hope described in chapter two is offered with the belief that the journey from seasons of loss may begin with new understanding, new thinking, new conceptualization about God's presence and life's possibilities, and that the journey has promise to direct the suffering one to new ways of living.

I propose that the use of story theology in a small group setting is an effective method both to teach and practice the theology of hope offered in chapter two for those who have experienced loss. This paradigm of hope-making is based largely on the work of Dori Baker, though as I will discuss, many others including Christian educators, theologians, medical practitioners, and therapists describe similar methods to help individuals process loss and achieve new perspective. Baker initially developed her method of story theology to facilitate "God-talk with young women." Yet, later writings have demonstrated its suitability as a form of theological inquiry for a broad range of persons.¹¹² Because the use of autobiographical narrative is central to story theology, I want first to make some comments about narrative theory. Following this brief discussion, I will detail a method of story theology, referencing other numerous adaptations of it. Then, in the remainder of the chapter, I will discuss the emphasis on personal and collaborative agency in story theology, describe some expectations for the development of hope that this project seeks—tempering them against the relatively grand claims

¹¹² Dori G. Baker, *The Barefoot Way: A Faith Guide for Youth, Young Adults, and the People Who Walk With Them* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2012), xxi-xxiii; also Baker, "The Barefoot Way," *Windows* 127, no. 2, Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary (Spring 2012): 12-13; also, Baker, *Doing Girlfriend Theology: God-Talk With Young Women*, 7, where story theology is discussed as a "method of religious education," suitable for "application beyond the realm of girls and women."

in Moltmann's theology of hope—name some limitations of this approach, and finally offer some instruments that were used in the project to measure degrees of participant hopefulness.

A. Narrative Quality of Experience

Stephen Crites writes that the “*formal quality of experience through time is inherently narrative.*”¹¹³ The statement suggests that this “formal quality of experience” may be understood as “three narrative tracks actively reflecting upon and affecting each other”: the sacred story, the mundane story and the temporality of experience itself. A careful definition of each word and phrase in Crites' thesis helps explain the scope of his claim.

By “experience” Crites sets forth two meanings. One, experience is the substantive reality of being alive. Andrew Lester, reflecting on Crites' writing speaks of experience as the gamut of human sensation, stimulus and interpersonal transaction.¹¹⁴ Experience is the grist upon which we reflect in making order and sense of our lives. Two, experience is our subjective awareness of being alive. Here experience becomes not only what is, but what, from our first-person vantage point we make of it and understand about it and ultimately, choose to believe about it.

By “narrative” Crites means literally representation of life experience in the form and structure of story. When we think about our lives, we use the elements of plot, meaning assignment, contextualization, points of reference, characterization, and movement from present to either past recollection or future contemplation. Narrative form refers to the organizing principles by which we impose structure on the flow of experience. These organizing principles,

¹¹³ Stephen D. Crites, “The Narrative Quality of Experience,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 39, no. 3 (September 1971): 291.

¹¹⁴ Andrew Lester, *Hope in Pastoral Care and Counseling*, 28.

according to Theodore Sarbin, constitute all the ways that we “think, perceive, imagine and make moral choices according to narrative structures.”¹¹⁵ It is to say that human personality is storied. And it is to emphasize that stories are something more than mere talk or illustrations the preacher adds to a sermon. The stories we tell, and the ones we choose to suppress, even the ways we choose to tell the stories we tell, are the means by which we construct self-identity.¹¹⁶

But Crites means something even more than the form by which we structure human experience. Crites believes that experience itself is an incipient story. Even though we tell stories to impose both structure and coherence on our life experiences, the grist of human experience from which we draw is itself unfolding in story form—raw and unformed, nascent, yet nevertheless in rudimentary narrative form. Crites believes that this observation gives further credence to narrative theory. If experience unfolds narratively (which, as I describe below he means to say with temporality), then it only makes sense that we would use story (experience’s native language and form) to talk about our particular experiences.

By referring to the “quality” of human experience, Crites speaks of three distinct, yet unified aspects of narrative form: mundane stories, sacred stories, and temporality of experience. The term “mundane stories,” Crites writes, does not refer to the relative importance of what is communicated. Rather, mundane stories represent the particular devices we must use to construct a narrative including “words, scenes, roles, sequence of events within plots”¹¹⁷ A mundane story might even include art forms such as dance, visual art and song. But quality of narrative form is more than mere literary device. It is also the means by which we use the story form to assign meaning to our life experiences. Here, Crites speaks about “sacred stories.”

¹¹⁵Ibid., 28, quoting Theodore Sarbin.

¹¹⁶ Caitlin Flanagan, “Jackie and the Girls,” *The Atlantic* (July/August 2012): 133-142. Flanagan reports the ways in which she believes Jacqueline Kennedy carefully scripted her husband’s life story to present an image, a narrative, of family devotion despite a preponderance of evidence to suggest otherwise.

¹¹⁷ Crites, 296.

Sacred stories may, for those in the Church, carry the authority of Scripture. Yet, sacred is not necessarily a religious connotation. It can broadly refer to the ways that we prescribe meaning to particular experiences. Sacred stories serve the role of meta-narratives that in turn help us understand all subsequent experience.

In speaking about “temporality” Crites describes that flow of experience, not strictly linear, but having distinct, yet inseparable occasions of time: past, present and future. Again, Crites believes that temporality characterizes both the way we speak about our particular experiences and the incipient nature of experience itself. The “past” is a “lasting chronicle,” though it is fragmentary and, therefore, fallible. The past is the pool of all our experiences. The past is memory. Yet more importantly the past is the vantage point from which we recollect. Recollection, Crites argues, is an intentional process by which we draw from our “lasting chronicle,” in order to shape for better or worse. Recollection is the critical process of appropriating memory in order to structure and make sense of our past experiences. While there is a determinacy about past (we cannot change what has happened to us; the primitive chronicle remains regardless of our efforts to change or suppress it), there is indeterminacy to the processes of recollection. Through time we can change our recollections. We can newly interpret them. We can decide, for instance, to minimize or heighten the relative importance of some memories, or we can choose to think of them in new ways.

Yet memory is only one modality of experience. There is also future. Future gathers up all of what Crites calls “scenarios of anticipation.” These anticipations can take passive form (we only dream about the future), or active form (we make plans to make our anticipations reality). Finally there is present experience. This is the only time that exists. Memory provides a lasting chronicle of experience from which the substance of recollection is drawn. But it is

done. Anticipations about the future suggest a possible path forward. Even so, only the present exists. Present is “full bodily reality.” Though these aspects of temporality are distinguishable, they are unified in what Crites calls a “tensed modality.” In the present, we both remember and anticipate. Only narrative form is able to gather up these different modalities of human experience into one story. Through story the multi-faceted temporality of our experience is integrated, synthesized, ordered and understood.

Of particular significance are the definitive ways this single narrative of subjective human experience functions to shape our outlook on life experience. As previously mentioned, the single, unified story of our lives provides coherence—organizes the various fragments of our lives into a meaningful whole. It also provides a method of interpretation whereby we make sense of our past experiences and use these recollections in the present to move forward or not.

But perhaps most importantly, the narrative of our lives is the foundation from which we construct aspects of self. The narrative we use to think about our lives defines who we are and who we might become. And in so doing, for better or worse, it establishes parameters, limits or expands possibilities, offers a progression, a plot, that we in a sense act out to its finish. In short, the narrative we construct of our lives sets the horizon of all time to come.

The narrative quality of life is not entirely ours to shape. Narrative experience is, in varying degrees, contextually bound. As constructive theorists point out, how we choose to think about our lives is shaped by societal expectations, family of origin, and particular circumstances. An American likely thinks about the possibilities of life differently than an impoverished Ethiopian. As the son of a preacher, I have particular understandings of the Church that a layperson may not share. As a father who has lost a son, I have certain

understandings about life's fragility that those who have not experienced such loss probably cannot share.

For the purposes of this project, I am particularly concerned to identify those places where the stories we construct about ourselves and the world we live in preclude the possibility of something newly life-giving. Specifically I am concerned to identify those aspects of our life stories that limit our experience of a compassionate presence of God, the possibilities of God's future for our lives, and the degree of personal agency we believe we possess to begin acting into the promise of God's future.

Drawing from Crites descriptions of narrative theory, I anticipate that the limits of hope, particularly for those who have experienced loss, will be found at the point where we formulate our recollections. Here we may begin to learn that there are lost stories waiting to be told, stories that need to be rewritten, dangerous memories that have been suppressed for fear of the perceived consequences of telling them, or stories that are so deeply embedded, assumed stories, that we are no longer aware how they function in our lives.

From within the Church, where this project is situated, I also suspect that we may discover that the sacred stories that we both tell and are told in order to understand the meaning of life experience (specifically in occasions of loss) may need revision, recasting and reframing. This is no cavalier statement to suggest that the Church's sacred Christian Story is lacking. It is rather to suggest that our operative interpretations of it (of God, of God and our suffering, or perhaps of what it might mean to be faithful in suffering) may no longer be helpful in assisting us to move from a suffering past to God's promise of a new future in the present. And if this is true, then a critical part of assisting the suffering one to make the journey from the experience of loss to new hope will require what Kaethe Weingarten calls "co-creation of conversational hope

spaces” where we covenant with one another to “create conversational space for hope to arise from the forms of conversation” that we share.¹¹⁸

B. Narrative Theory in Pastoral Care

This project makes the assumption that if all human experience is storied, then so too is religious experience. And if religious experience is storied, then it seems apparent to me that there is great validity in coming together in the Church to tell our stories. As I have suggested, in telling our stories in the faith community, using the language of Christian theology, we may have the opportunity not only to assign new meaning to experiences of loss but also begin the process of reframing those stories in more hopeful ways. Story theology invites us to do in a small group what we sing together in worship: “This is my story, this is my song.”

Dori Baker offers a four-step process to practice story theology. I am drawn to this process of theological inquiry in large part because it is, as Baker writes, an emancipatory theology which begins with life experience.¹¹⁹ Spiritual emancipation, liberation, the experience of freedom to imagine new possibilities is, as Moltmann writes, precisely the work of Christian hope. It seems, therefore, that the essence of Moltmann’s conception of Christian hope finds a compatible method of implementation in Baker’s process of story theology.

¹¹⁸ Kaethe Weingarten, “Reasonable Hope: Construct, Clinical Applications, and Support,” *Family Process* 49, no. 1 (2010): 11, 15. The phrase seems to gather up the sense of what Dori Baker proposes in her four-part story theology process.

¹¹⁹ Baker, *Doing Girlfriend Theology*, 11.

In her most recent writings, Baker describes her process of story theology “upside down Bible study”¹²⁰—a form of theological inquiry that begins not with Church dogma but with experience. The Christian Story becomes the eventual context for understanding the theological meaning of life experience, but it must begin with that “crucial first step”¹²¹ of human experience. Moltmann uses a similar methodology of theological inquiry beginning with an examination of human experience and leading to new practice. As noted in W. Bentley’s dissertation on “The Kingdom of God in Moltmann’s Eschatology,”¹²² Moltmann begins by questioning human experience (experiences from the Holocaust), examines Church history to see what the Church has traditionally written about the problem between Christian faith and human tragedy (theodicy), tests the sufficiency of these traditional doctrines, writings or theories in light of the present context through a rigorous process of biblical scrutiny, and finally names new possibilities for thinking and acting (Christo-praxis). Like Baker, Moltmann’s theology of hope offers freedom from the a priori constraints of systematic theology. This is seen especially in his then-provocative conclusion concerning the passability of God. In fact, Moltmann’s theological hermeneutic encourages an open-minded interpretation of the meaning of Christian faith and human tragedy. Certain “hermeneutical questions” lie at the heart of his theological methodology including ones that direct the participant towards new practices of faith including, “What gives life?” and “What offers transformation?”

¹²⁰ Baker, “The Barefoot Way,” *Windows* 127, no. 2, Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary (Spring 2012): 12. This process is named variously in Baker, *Doing Girlfriend Theology*, 188, as “Girlfriend Theology: the Method;” and in Baker, *The Barefoot Way*, 5-6, as “L.I.V.E. (Listen, Immerse, View and Explore); also adapted by Dr. David White in his class “Narrative Pedagogies,” Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary, as L.F.G.A. (Listen for God Always).

¹²¹ Baker, *Doing Girlfriend Theology*, 11.

¹²² W. Bentley, “The Kingdom of God in Moltmann’s Eschatology : a South African Perspective,” (PhD diss., University of Pretoria, 2003), viewed June 6, 2012, <http://upetd.up.ac.za/thesis/available/etd-10132003-170757/>

Step One: Listening—Sharing God’s Solidarity

Listening is not only giving the story-teller permission to speak. It is also more importantly a saving, healing work of “hearing the other to speech.”¹²³ In listening, we attend not only to the words but also to the story that is waiting to emerge. We “learn to sit in powerful silence” in ways that “evoke new speech.” Dietrich Bonhoeffer contrasts the saving work of attentive listening with the inadequate listening that normally characterizes our times of community— “a kind of listening with half an ear that presumes already to know what the other person has to say. It is impatient, inattentive listening”¹²⁴ Bonhoeffer writes that we frequently assume that the way to help another is to contribute something, forgetting that “listening can be a better service than speaking.”¹²⁵ Listening, then, is not only saving work for the story-teller but also the means by which we are able to hear God. Inattentiveness to another also becomes a form of inattentiveness to God. Admittedly, listening is only a part of the whole breadth of the Church’s ministry. There is also a time for the ministry of proclamation— occasions perhaps when we not only assert the truths of the Christian Story, but also confront another. But in the beginning we simply listen.

The ministry of listening makes three important assumptions. One, our stories are sacred grist for theological reflection. Kathleen Norris articulates this beautifully:

Our daily tasks, whether we perceive them as drudgery or essential, life-supporting work . . . have considerable spiritual import, and their significance for Christian theology, the way they come together in the fabric of faith, is not often appreciated It is in ordinary life that our stories unfold, tales of conceiving, bearing, giving birth, of trial and death and rising to new life out of the ashes of the old. Stories of annunciation, incarnation, resurrection, and the spirit, the giver of life, who has spoken through the prophets and enlivens our faith. As wondrous

¹²³Baker, *Doing Girlfriend Theology*, 30.

¹²⁴ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together: A Discussion of Christian Fellowship* (San Francisco: Harper & Row Publishers, 1954), 98.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 96.

as these mysteries are, Christianity is inescapably down-to-earth and Incarnational.¹²⁶

Two, self-authorship is imperative. If we are to truly hear to speech the story-teller must be given the space, permission, freedom, and time to author his or her own story. Neither the story which is told, nor the meaning of the story which is told can be imposed. The power of story-telling for spiritual formation loses its essential saving quality once we insist that certain stories be told or that certain stories must conform to assumed interpretations. This requires patience.

C.S. Song uses a passage from Lewis Carroll's *Through the Looking Glass* to illustrate the necessity of self-authorship. In her magical journey through the Looking-glass House, Alice meets the King who, having recently experienced great drama, decides that he needs to write down his memories:

Alice looked on with great interest as the King took an enormous memorandum-book out of his pocket, and began writing. A sudden thought struck her, and she took hold of the end of the pencil, which came some way over his shoulder, and began writing for him.

The poor king looked puzzled and unhappy, and struggled with the pencil for some time without saying anything; but Alice was too strong for him, and at last he panted out, "My dear! I really must get a thinner pencil. I can't manage this one a bit; *it writes all manner of things that I don't intend.*"

"What manner of things?" said the Queen, looking over the book (in which Alice had put "the White Knight is sliding down the poker. He balances badly.) *That's not a memorandum of your feelings!*"¹²⁷ (Italics mine)

Song suggests that Alice's impatience and the King's subsequent frustration is precisely what occasions of story theology must guard against. Song writes here about the process of inter-faith dialogue. But it applies to all occasions of story theology. "We need to keep our itchy hands in

¹²⁶ Kathleen Norris, *The Quotidian Mysteries* (New York: Paulist Press, 1998), 76-77.

¹²⁷ Lewis Carroll, *Through the Looking Glass* (Philadelphia: Henry Alterus Company, 1987), 29-30.

check,” Song writes, while others struggle to tell their own stories. “This is the basic requirement if our dialogical adventure is to proceed dia-logically and not mono-logically.”¹²⁸

Finally, story theology assumes the necessity of community. Unlike secular therapeutic settings where individual counseling is provided, story theology emphasizes the importance of telling our stories in a faith community. Bonhoeffer suggests that listening in community is both the story-teller’s need and the listening community’s vocation. Faith community is the context in which God chooses to speak to us. In fellowship with one another the wisdom of God’s Word is clarified, or spoken precisely when we may be too discouraged or uncertain to hear this Word of God ourselves. For the members of the listening community, our presence to the other is an act of solidarity—an act where we imitate God’s solidarity with us through Christ. “I am a brother to another only through what Jesus Christ did for me.”¹²⁹ Later, Bonhoeffer writes about the “ministry of bearing” and reflects that “it is the fellowship of the Cross to experience the burden of the other.”¹³⁰

Step Two—Identify Feelings

Here the story-teller and the listening community reflect together about how the hearing of the story has impacted them. What emotions did the story evoke? What memories were stirred? What images came to mind? In what ways did others in the group identify with the story?

Recently, I shared a story with a friend about how I had gradually lost touch with someone with whom I once had been very close. In the story I described all the ways that I had tried to remain in contact. I expressed a great deal of anger and irritation and frustration that my

¹²⁸ C.S. Song, *Tell Us Our Names* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 1984), 131. This is the fourth stage of what Song names “The Seven Stages of Dialogical Conversion,”—“Writing our Own Story in Strange Lands.”

¹²⁹ Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, 25.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 101.

repeated efforts to reach out had not been reciprocated. I speculated about all the possible reasons for the loss of relationship. I listed numerous strategies for maintaining relationship. Just when my righteous indignation was reaching fever pitch, my friend quietly interrupted me and said, “You’re hurt, aren’t you?” That simple statement touched an unspoken reservoir of emotion. For much of the past year I had focused all my energy on being mad. In my anger I had lost touch with the more primal feeling of being hurt. This new awareness, prompted by a simple statement of shared reflection, reframed the problem of a broken relationship. In this second step of Baker’s story theology, we share what we have heard, and in the sharing we are sometimes given the grace to hear something we had overlooked, forgotten, or not been able to articulate.

Step Three—Where is God in the Story?

In step three Baker’s process of story theology turns from subjective experience to dialogue with the Christian story. Baker emphasizes that the stories we tell “do not ‘go flying off solo somewhere,’ but are rooted and grounded in the stories of our faith.”¹³¹ Story helps us contextualize the places where God may speak to us. Our stories raise questions that the Christian Story answers. We enter into conversation with Scripture. We recall occasions in the Bible when others struggled as we struggle. We remember the Christian Story and recall that our predicament is not new. We remember how Abraham and Sarah struggled to remain faithful to a way of promise. We recall images of the Hebrews in the long journey from captivity to a land of promise. We remember the exhilaration of the day of exodus just as we remember the frustration of years in the wilderness. We remember the joy of finally arriving as we also remember the despair of being taken from it. We pray words of lament and thanksgiving. We remember seasons of coming home and of leave-taking. We place ourselves in the Gospel stories. We

¹³¹ Baker, *Doing Girlfriend Theology*, 7.

recall the teachings of Jesus. We borrow the insights Jesus gave to those who came asking serious questions of life. We look at the Christian story from changing vantage points. At times we are the father who suffers his child's absence. At other times we are the child who flounders away from home. At other times we still are the other child who feels cheated. But from every vantage point we bring our story in order to hear God's story. This, as narrative theorist Stephen Crites argues, is the critical work of meaning-making—the work of placing our personal story in the context of a larger, sacred story. If story is necessary in order to avoid mere abstraction, then remembering the Christian story is necessary to avoid the other temptation which Crites calls “the constriction of attention”¹³²—the problem of absolutizing our story and failing to see the larger picture, the problem of immersing ourselves only in the immediacy of our own thoughts and feelings. In this third step of Baker's story theology, we look to what she calls “experience distant,” experience beyond ourselves. In Christian community this distant (meaning, non-immediate) experience is the wisdom of the Christian Story.

Step Four—Going Forth

In the final step, we consider how the Christian Story may suggest possible new ways of living. With creative application, I suggest that this step correlates most closely with Moltmann's concept of Christo-praxis. The dialogue between life experience and theological insight has the possibility to lead to new action; Moltmann insists that it must. Where excessive focus on experience may, as Crites writes, lead to “constriction of attention,” an over-long fascination with theological insight may eventuate in abstraction. The value of story theology is in how it cracks open the fallow ground of our lives creating new ways of seeing old problems, new angles of observation, but eventually hints of how our lives can be newly patterned. The practice of Christian faith is incarnational, embodied, concretely grounded in the patterns of

¹³² Crites, 308-09.

daily living. Christian faith opens up the future to a world of God-shaped possibilities, but it is in the present that we begin to live these possibilities. Crites says this final step is the product of “conversion”—a reawakening of consciousness. Our “styles must change steps; we must dance to a new rhythm. Not only our pasts and futures, but the very cosmos in which we live, is strung in a new way.”¹³³ Crites’ notion of changing steps, of dancing to a new rhythm, calls to mind Jesus teaching in Luke’s Parable of the Good Samaritan. In response to a lawyer’s question about the precise scope of his religious responsibility, Jesus tells a story about a Samaritan who stops to help a person in need. While the details can be parsed, what ultimately seems to matter is Jesus’ application of the meaning of the story. To the lawyer he says: “Go and do likewise.” (Luke 10:37). Having received a moment of new insight, the lawyer is now instructed to practice what he has learned. For Baker and for Moltmann, “personal faith should not only awaken the heart,”¹³⁴ but also eventuate in a changed life.

C. Additional Methods of Story Theology for Hope-Making

The use of story theology for religious formation is noted in other sources, too. Patricia O’Connell-Killen identifies four steps in theological thinking that closely correspond to Baker’s paradigm of story theology. Theological reflection begins with “nonjudgmental narration of experience.” The content of narration is “our lived experiences . . . the ‘who,’ ‘what,’ ‘when,’ ‘where,’ and how of an event.”¹³⁵ The goal of this first step in theological thinking is to “slow down the meaning-making process” for both story-teller and listener. In listening non-judgmentally the listener is able to be present with the teller, and to begin noting connections

¹³³ Ibid., 307.

¹³⁴ Miroslav Volf, “Communities of Faith and Radical Discipleship—an Interview with Jürgen Moltmann.” *The Christian Century* 100, no. 8 (March 16, 1983): 246

¹³⁵ Patricia O’Connell-Killen, “Assisting Adults to Think Theologically,” in *Method in Ministry: Theological Reflection and Christian Ministry*, edited by James D. Whitehead and Evelyn Eaton Whitehead (Kansas City: Sheed and Ward, 1995), 106.

between one's own experience and the story-teller's.¹³⁶ His second step in theological thinking is to "identify the heart of the matter."¹³⁷ What questions does the story suggest? What issue, feeling, hope, dream, or frustration is presented in the story? What does the story-teller mean to tell us about his or her story? Third, we begin to "structure correlation."¹³⁸ Here the assumption is, as Baker notes, that our stories have elements that have potential to point us beyond the mere details of the story to something which is inherently theological. In his reflection on the use of story in C.S. Lewis' works, for instance, Gilbert Meilaender writes that the stories we tell are "sometimes the most adequate form for conveying the 'feel' of human existence {In fact} Lewis himself suggests on one occasion that 'if God does exist,' He is related to the universe more as an author is related to a play"¹³⁹ than as any abstraction about our relationship with God. In attending non-judgmentally to another's story, we find a window to something which is deeper than the story itself. We turn over the story carefully to get at the deeper meaning of it. Then, as O'Connell-Killen writes, we begin a conversation "between the heart of the matter in our experience and a piece of the Christian tradition."¹⁴⁰ We ask the questions for which Christian tradition may provide answers.

Fourth and finally, in a move consistent with both Baker (step 4) and Moltmann (Christopraxis), we "identify new learnings and calls to action."¹⁴¹ This final step, the realization of God's newly formed claims upon our lives, shapes the larger purpose of our times of theological

¹³⁶ James William McClendon, Jr., *Biography as Theology* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2002), 75ff. McClendon offers the possibility that story theology might also incorporate not only autobiographical contributions (personal stories) but also biographical ones (stories from outside the group) as a way to see how others have applied the "great archetypal images of faith to their own lives, and by extension, to our own." One might envision, for instance, studying not only Bonhoeffer's theology, but his life story, as a way to imagine/learn new strategies for hope.

¹³⁷ Ibid., 108.

¹³⁸ O'Connell-Killen, "Assisting Adults to Think Theologically," 108.

¹³⁹ Gilbert Meilaender, "Theology in Stories: C.S. Lewis and the Narrative Quality of Experience," *Word & World* 1 no. 3 (Summer 1981): 226.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 108.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 109.

reflection. Here we begin to understand that the goal of our theological reflection is to provide a pathway to new action, embodiment of truth, and insight. This final step is also the most demanding one. As O'Connell-Killen concludes, "It was nothing for Paul to get knocked off his horse on the road to Damascus. It took him a lifetime to live out the implications of that encounter with the risen Christ."¹⁴²

C.S. Song outlines a similar process of story theology characterized as "doing theology from the bottom up." Theological reflection begins by looking for God in one's present experiences of suffering and pain—an act of contextualization in which the totality of life becomes the raw material of theology (Baker, steps 1 and 2). Song names the Christo-centric quality of story theology, writing that "Jesus Christ, as the Word become flesh, is the theological center that guides our theological reflection."¹⁴³ Story theology is necessary in order to avoid the trappings of "upside down theology" which separates theological from secular and tends to focus on the abstract rather than experiential. Yet, engaging in this open-ended inquiry, Song emphasizes that theological reflection must finally lead to Christian engagement in the world. "Theology is to serve the future as if it were the present. The future that remains strictly future has no use for the present conditions of humanity."¹⁴⁴ Song uses Hebrews 11:1 to say that "Faith gives substance to our hopes." In all of this theological reflection, "we strive to make the future reality."¹⁴⁵ In the final analysis, Song is interested to provide a way of theological reflection

¹⁴² Ibid., 109. O'Connell-Killeen makes reference to Paul's conversion experience in Acts 9. Although the writer of Acts seems to suggest that Paul's conversion led immediately to a new ministry for the Church, Paul's account, in Galatians 1:13-2:1, suggests that the process of his conversion from Judaism to Christianity took many years.

¹⁴³ Song, 9. Song outlines "ten positions" for doing theology. Although intended to define a way for Asian Christians to connect the Christian story to their particular context, the ten positions describe processes, theological guidelines which are consistent with other story theologians.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 18.

¹⁴⁵ 18.

that leads from experiential insight to what Moltmann calls orthopraxy—a dynamic joining of Christian insight applied to matters of human need.¹⁴⁶

Thomas Groome describes a five-part process of “shared praxis” which touches on some of the same elements noted by Baker, Song, and Moltmann. Groome’s process of shared praxis is primarily intended as a way to critique and reflect upon present action in the Church, to provide possible insights for ways the Christian story may be calling the Church to engage in new forms of praxis. As such, Groome’s process is somewhat different from Baker and Song in that the subject of inquiry is already established. Yet, the processes leading to new insight are essentially the same: 1) Present action is named; 2) Participants critically reflect on the present action; 3) The critical reflections of present action are brought into fresh conversation with the Christian story and vision; 4) Participants note the ways that present action and the Christian story are in dialectical tension; and finally 5) Decisions are made for pathways to new lived faith.¹⁴⁷

The use of story as method of hope-making is also found in secular sources. Johanna Shapiro and Valerie Ross describe “narrative therapy,”¹⁴⁸ a form of psychotherapy which stresses a process by which we construct meaning through shared story. In narrative therapy, the patient describes the “problem-saturated story”¹⁴⁹ and then works with the therapist to rename the problem. In the renaming process the patient and therapist imagine hopeful exceptions to the

¹⁴⁶ Song, 18. Song’s argument is consistent with Peter C. Phan, “Method in Liberation Theologies,” *Theological Studies* 61 (2000): 60. Phan describes the indissoluble link between orthodoxy and orthopraxis; in his discussion on the work of liberation theologians, Phan points to a dynamic, dialectical relationship between the two, “so that theory and praxis are related to each in perpetual motion.” Phan also speaks of the “ceaseless oscillation” resulting in a theological perspective of life that is constantly under construction.

¹⁴⁷ Noel B. Woodbridge, “Review of Thomas Groome, *Sharing Faith: The Way of Shared Praxis*,” *Conspectus* 1 (September 2010): 114-132. These steps are outlined by Woodbridge, and as the title suggests, the article is a review of Groome’s book, *Sharing Faith: A Comprehensive Approach to Religious Education and Pastoral Ministry—the Way of Shared Praxis* (San Francisco: Harper Publishing, September 1991).

¹⁴⁸ Johanna Shapiro and Valerie Ross, “Applications of Narrative Theory and Therapy to the Practice of Family Medicine,” *Family Medicine* 34, no. 2 (February 2002): 96.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 97. Of special note is Shapiro’s table listing a set of questions to help encourage narrative exploration, Table 1, 98.

problem. The therapist is careful to allow room for the patient to author, or rewrite, his or her own story,¹⁵⁰ but actively works with the patient to name concrete ways in which the new insight can be practiced and encourages the patient to “generate support.”¹⁵¹ Narrative therapy acknowledges that one way to strengthen the practice of a new story is to create a receptive audience who serve as witnesses of accountability.

Kaye Herth describes the development and evaluation of a “Hope Intervention Program” implemented in outpatient oncology clinics to enhance hope.¹⁵² Herth proposes eight sessions that begin with community building, but then moves in sessions two and three to an “experimental process”¹⁵³ of searching for hope. Here participants share their own stories of fear, expectations, and hopelessness. In subsequent sessions participants enter into what Herth calls a “spiritual/transcendent process” where new perspectives on life may be gained. In assisting participants to gain new degrees of hopefulness, Herth encourages methods of “cognitive reframing,” along with the development of a plan to “incorporate energizing strategies.” In the end, Herth believes that hopefulness is increased as participants choose creative ways to engage the inherent limitations of their illness.

¹⁵⁰ Michael Mahoney and Donald Granvold, “Constructivism and Psychotherapy,” *World Psychiatry* 4, no 2, (June 2005): 76. The authors conclude that the role of the therapist must remain one of “respectful collaboration.” This is a common theme in story theology: the process of allowing another to author one’s own story. Baker, of course, notes that self-authorship is precisely the point for those whose stories have been silenced. C.S. Song also notes that in Asian culture a living theology can only develop when the Christian story is allowed to speak to one’s own context. He argues that the Church has monopolized the discussion (51), and speaks of the “weapon of orthodoxy” (15).

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 99.

¹⁵² Kaye Herth, “Development and Implementation of a Hope Intervention Program,” *Oncology Nursing Forum* 28, no. 6, (2001): 1009.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, 1012. A description of the eight sessions is detailed on page 1012, “Table 1, Hope Intervention Program.” Herth also offers an excellent instrument to measure hope, Herth Hope Index. Also, see Herth, “Abbreviated Instrument to Measure Hope: Development and Psychometric Evaluation,” *Journal of Advanced Nursing* 17 (1992): 151-159. Interestingly, Herth names the “cognitive-temporal dimension of hope” to suggest that unless a person can see a vision for the future, there is little chance of hopefulness. This is consistent with Victor Frankl, who noted that prisoners who lost hope soon died, and with Moltmann who speaks of hope as promise of God’s future in the present.

D. Human Agency: Moving From Despair to Possibility as Reframing Process

A critical assumption lies at the heart of narrative theory and its application to story theology: that we have both the capacity to imagine the future and the power to move towards the realization of this newly imagined future. Howard Stone and Andrew Lester draw from Søren Kierkegaard's three descriptions of self to describe the sequence involved in moving from despair (or emotional paralysis) to new hopefulness.¹⁵⁴ The self is experienced in terms of actuality, freedom, and possibility. Actuality refers to what is given about our lives—all the permanency of our past, the circumstances that cannot be changed. Freedom is the power we have in the present, with limits, to shape our actuality. Freedom is the power to ask what, given our limitations, we may choose to do. Freedom is the capacity to survey the options we have before us. Possibility refers to the ways we apply our freedom to choose new courses of action, or to recast old problems in new ways. Stone and Lester argue that “clergy in pastoral care-giving need to foster a kind of hope that not only recognizes actuality but also steps directly into the future by exercising freedom in the present—by taking action.”¹⁵⁵ They write that what typically happens in pastoral care-giving relationships is an excessive (perhaps even, exclusive) focus on a person's stories of actuality—what cannot be changed. Here the pastoral caregiver offers pastoral consolation by trying to soothe the sufferings of the past. Yet, in order to foster new hope, pastoral caregivers must instead help the suffering imagine possibilities for the future. To facilitate this forward movement, Stone and Lester describe a process that involves reconstructing future stories. In his book *Hope in Pastoral Care and Counseling*, Lester says that hopelessness is not only a loss of future stories, but a loss of future stories that work. The

¹⁵⁴ Howard Stone and Andrew Lester, “Hope and Possibility: Envisioning the Future in Pastoral Conversation,” *The Journal of Pastoral Care* 55, no. 3, (Fall 2001): 259-269.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 260.

work of hope-making, then, involves “reconstruction of future stories”¹⁵⁶—re-authoring future stories to allow for more hopeful imaginings.

The specific methods for facilitating reconstruction of future stories fall under the category of reframing. Donald Capps writes: “When a therapist tries to get a client to ‘think about things differently’ or ‘see a new point of view’ or ‘take other factors into consideration,’ these are attempts to *reframe* (italics mine) events in order to get the client to respond differently to them.”¹⁵⁷ Capps notes that while use of reframing is relatively new in contemporary therapy, reframing methods were used with considerable frequency as far back as the Bible. Jesus made frequent use of parables as a way to reframe reality. In the Old Testament, the incessant cries of Job are reframed by God’s thunderous reply in chapter 38, verse 4 “Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth?”¹⁵⁸ Now perhaps Job sees a glimpse of his life in the context of all God’s creation. The new frame does not remove the actuality of his present loss, but his suffering is seen against a much larger backdrop of God’s eternal time. Reframing becomes a tool to help a suffering one recast a vision of the future.

Specific tools of reframing include¹⁵⁹:

¹⁵⁶ Lester, 51. Lester also refers to “broken future stories,” as those times when the core narratives of self no longer serve to help us live hopefully in the face of loss. Such moments of existential anxiety may threaten our understandings of Christian faith and of how our faith functions in time of loss. The process of hope-making therefore becomes a process of theological reconstruction.

¹⁵⁷ Donald Capps, *Reframing: a New Method in Pastoral Care* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press), 11.

¹⁵⁸ Terrence Malick’s 2011 movie, “*The Tree of Life*,” is an imaginative exploration of this subject. In the movie, two core narratives are offered—the way of nature and the way of grace. The movie is one man’s struggle to know which way to see life.

¹⁵⁹ Howard Stone and Andrew Lester, “Hope and Possibility: Envisioning the Future in Pastoral Conversation,” *The Journal of Pastoral Care* 55, no. 3 (Fall 2001): 263- 268. Specific ways of reframing are also listed in Lester, *Hope In Pastoral Care and Counseling*, 144-148 and 108-114; Capps, *Agents of Hope: A Pastoral Psychology*, chapter 7, “Hope and the Reframing of Time,” 163-176. Capps also addresses deconstructing past stories, noting the process of biographic rehabilitation, 172. Additional reframing methods are outlined in Capps, *Reframing: A New Method in Pastoral Care*, 27-51, though only some listed are appropriate for the process of hope-making in a pastoral care setting.

1. **Writing make-believe stories, or letters.** Lester suggests posing the question: “If you wrote me a letter in a few years and it was filled with good news about your life, what would the letter say?”¹⁶⁰

2. **Tracking and expanding future stories.** Here, the caregiver invites the other to embellish the story of one’s life, to fill in the blanks. With imagination the shadows of a sketchy future are illuminated.

3. **Envisioning the future without the problem.** What would life be like if the problem did not exist? How would you feel? What would you do differently? What would change?

4. **Envisioning future goals.** Stone suggests asking the question, “How do you want your life to be different one month from now?” Stone says the question is a playful way to help people articulate their stories of “embedded eschatology.”¹⁶¹

5. **Imagining a miracle.** If life were to suddenly, miraculously change, how would you know? What would be different in your life?

6. **Guided imagery.** Here the caregiver invites others to form a mental picture of their preferred future. The assumption is that as we think, so we may begin to live.

7. **“As if” conversation.** Here the caregiver invites others to fantasize about the future. For some the future may be filled with apprehension. Engaging in “as if” conversation allows others to live in fearful future scenarios and to imagine how they might act in those scenarios, what they might say. Stone suggests that this offers a non-threatening way to face fear about the future.

Again, human agency is the key assumption at the heart of reframing. To engage in the process of reframing is to affirm that one has the capacity to act upon the future. Weingarten

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., 264.

¹⁶¹ Ibid., 266.

names this as a belief that “the future is not determined but is influencable.”¹⁶² Mahoney refers to the mindset of “continuous active agency,”¹⁶³ adding that unless the caregiver can persuade the other to partner in this process of ongoing agency, there is little chance for hopeful change. Cutcliffe argues that this act of persuasion is precisely the goal in care-giving: to collaborate with the suffering one to “counter the projection of hopelessness.”¹⁶⁴ Snyder argues that the process of hope-making is one that involves not only pathways (imagining, for instance, ways that life might be changed as in previously mentioned techniques of reframing), but also agency (a realized capacity to move in the direction of possible pathways).¹⁶⁵

Each of these descriptions of agency is applicable to the process of nurturing hope in the faith community. Yet, in the pastoral care-giving context this capacity is understood not as mere might of mind, or personal will, or steely determination, or creative capacity to imagine, but also as a faithful act of collaboration with God who stands with us in solidarity and promises us a God-shaped future. The move towards new hope continues to be a shared responsibility. As Ellen Ott Marshall emphasizes, we acknowledge the sharp realities of suffering, but we do not simply accept them passively. We persist and resist. And finally, we choose to act as God acts in relationship with us: with an “ethic of risk,”¹⁶⁶ fully investing ourselves in the processes of life not ever knowing with certainty the efficacy of our actions, but still choosing to believe and do what is possible.

Yet, even Marshall is pressed to admit that it is irresponsible for Christian ethics to offer “excessive claims in the face of human misery, to give assurances which are not borne out by

¹⁶² Weingarten, 9.

¹⁶³ Mahoney and Granvold, 74.

¹⁶⁴ J.R. Cutcliffe, “The Principles and Processes of Inspiring Hope in Bereavement Counseling: A Modified Grounded Theory Study—Part One,” *Journal of Psychiatric and Mental Health Nursing* 13 (2006): 599.

¹⁶⁵ C.R. Snyder, Jennifer S. Cheavens and Scott T. Michael, “Hope Theory: History and Elaborated Model,” in *Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Hope*, edited by Jaklin A. Elliott (Nova Science Publishers, Inc., March 2005), 104.

¹⁶⁶ Marshall, 81.

experience.”¹⁶⁷ And even Moltmann who speaks loudly of the “transcendent possibilities” of God’s future, and who encourages a passion for what is possible, and who cautions against stagnation and easy resignation, finally admits that a Christian theology of hope is something more than mere optimism. It is perhaps best described as a “reasonable hope.”¹⁶⁸ Reasonable hope is sensible and moderate. It is focused on what is possible. It knows the difference between dream and reality. It is interested in action and resists the temptation to get bogged down in excessive introspection. It is a process that lives into the future with small, attainable acts of faithfulness. It accepts that life is a journey. It celebrates what is here and now and does not wait for the future to arrive. It acknowledges that there is an inherent uncertainty to life but this uncertainty is an indication that there is also a hopeful degree of indeterminacy to life. It seeks goals and selects pathways, but it understands that it may be necessary to make readjustments. In much the same way, Flora Keshgegian describes a “reasonable hope” that affirms the essential messiness of life and accepts that hope can also stand alongside doubt.¹⁶⁹

I suspect that not everyone in the Church will be satisfied with a view of Christian hope like this. And here stands the opposition, the resistance, the critics, to this project. For some, a mere “reasonable hope” is no hope at all. It is theological reductionism. It is evidence of an anemic faith. It is not definitive enough. It will not give the crisp, neat answers to the questions that are posed. But for new hope to take root in a process of story theology, participants will need to acknowledge the mystery of the faith process, be patient with the sighs too deep for words that will likely characterize some of our stories, and accept inevitable loose ends and

¹⁶⁷ Marshall, 51.

¹⁶⁸ Weingarten, 7ff., “Part Two: Characteristics of a Reasonable Hope.”

¹⁶⁹ Keshgegian, *Time for Hope*, 17ff. Keshgegian redefines the traditional notion of Christian hope as “divine comedy” where everything ends well. Hope is a journey, not a destination. It is provisional. Christian hope insists on limits, and the practice of self-sufficiency and the acceptance of contingencies. It unfolds not in forward-moving linearity, but in stops and starts and, as with the Israelites in the wilderness, with much circling around.

continued struggle. To this end, it will be incumbent upon the facilitator to be at ease with the group's occasional dis-ease and to refrain from the impulse to come rushing in with simple answers.¹⁷⁰

I noted at the outset of this chapter that this project is both one of discovery and teaching. It is a teaching project, I said, because I believe that sometimes the problem with hope is that we have learned the wrong lessons about our faith. I am reminded of the young mother and cancer patient in my congregation who has asked me more than once if there is some connection between her great suffering and God's displeasure with something she has done or failed to do. And each time I hear her ask that question, my heart breaks. Our suffering is only compounded by religious understandings like these. Hers is a great need to relearn, or perhaps learn for the first time, that God is the compassionate one in solidarity with us. We cry and God cries with us.

And yet, for all the learning that surely happens when two or more gather together in God's name, the process of hope-making described in this project is first of all one of discovery and journey. As Ellen Marshall implies in her "ethic of risk," we cannot know precisely how the journey will end, which, as Kaethe Weingarten replies, is the first sign of an emerging hope: a hint that the story of our lives is not yet finished.

But again, for those who may come to this project with a notion that the pastor has planned an opportunity for group therapy—a chance for mere catharsis or to find other similar therapeutic remedies for what ails them—the process of hope-making and story theology may disappoint. I intend to create a context for the formation of a deeper faith, a stronger hope. This

¹⁷⁰ Peter Steinke, *Congregational Leadership in Anxious Times* (Herndon, VA: The Alban Institute, 2006), 61. Steinke talks about the neurobiology of hope which requires an engagement of the pre-frontal cortex (higher brain function or capacity for critical thinking) and a quieting of the amygdala (lower brain function which persists in mere survivalist thinking and prevents the critical thinking skills) necessary for hope and the processes of reframing. At one level, therefore, hope may be dependent on the degree to which participants (and leaders) are able to manage anxiety and engage in higher order thinking. Similarly, Kaethe Weingarten, "Reasonable Hope," *Family Process* 49, no. 1 (2010): 13, talks about the "neurobiology of trauma" and about how an inability to manage feelings of "unresolved trauma frequently underlies the seemingly frozen capacity" to move towards new hope.

is not necessarily easy work, not always pleasing. Like Jacob at the River Jabbok (Genesis 32:22 ff.), we may have to contend with our past before we can experience the possibilities of a new future. As Donald Capps and Andrew Lester suggest, the journey to hope requires the disciplined work of reconstruction, rehabilitation and sometimes deconstruction.

There will be others, of course, who will question all the questioning. The process of hope –making in this project begins with personal story, not Christian dogma. It begins with the uncertainty of our lives before it comes to the more certain affirmations of Scripture. There is a certain acquired skill, I believe, to being Christian while also accepting a degree of ambiguity. And even in eventually coming to Scripture where our stories may find clarification, there we may discover (indeed, I contend in chapter 5) that the clarification is dialectical and not simple. Coursing through Scripture is the puzzle of God who is alternately present and yet future, revealed and yet not fully known. As Paul writes, at every moment in our lives, “we see in a mirror dimly.” (1 Corinthians 13:12). Full disclosure is yet to come.

Those inclined to the more praxis-oriented outlook of liberation theology may be skeptical of what good ever comes from a bunch of Christians gathering in an upstairs room to tell stories. With the writer of James, they may insist that Christian faith is authenticated in practice not meditative seclusion: “Be doers of the word, and not merely hearers who deceive themselves.” (James 1:22) The process of story theology used in this project acknowledges the importance of action and agency and praxis and believes in the necessity of the Church coming to terms with what Moltmann calls its “Exodus mission”— not only to experience liberation ourselves but to go and help others experience it in God’s name. Admittedly, for some the careful, delicate, quiet, reflective process of story theology may be unbearably impractical.

E. Some Markers: How to Know If Anything is Happening

More than once in the writing of this project I wondered how it might be possible to quantify the qualitative process of story theology and its uses for hope-making. This project makes provisions for a final participant evaluation. Participant answers will offer some measure of the effectiveness of story theology and hope development. But just as doctors use various diagnostic tools to establish base-line readings, I wondered if it might also be possible to provide participants with other tools to measure a baseline of hope.

To my surprise I found a number of therapeutic measures of hope. C.R. Snyder offers the most accessible measure of hope. Based on his notion that hope is equal to a person's sum total of pathways and perceived agency, Snyder has developed a 12-part questionnaire named simply "The Hope Scale." Instructions on how to administer and score the results are explained in clear detail by Jerry Pattengale in his article cited below.¹⁷¹ Also, Kaye Herth offers the "Herth Hope Index" which comprises an evaluation of three key factors with four questions related to the measurement of each factor.¹⁷² The Herth Hope Index assumes the multi-dimensionality of hope as represented to varying degrees of strength in areas of: 1) cognitive-temporality (the perception that positive outcomes in life are possible; 2) affective-behaviorality (the feeling of confidence that one has about possible outcomes); and 3) affiliative-contextuality (the sense that one is meaningfully related to others).¹⁷³ Although the HHI holds promise for use in future groups, because of the relative complexity of the questions involved and the degree of skill

¹⁷¹ This essay appeared in *eSource Journal for the First-Year Experience*; and J. Pattengale, "The Hope Scale: A Measurement of Willpower and Waypower," in *Proving and Improving. Volume II: Tools and Techniques for Assessing the First College Year. The First-Year Experience*, Monograph Series No. 37, edited by Randy L. Swing, National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience and Students in Transition (2004), 157-160. The article cited in this paper was downloaded from http://www.semo.edu/ustudies/images/StuTrans_Pattengale_HopeScale_2009.pdf

¹⁷² Kaye Herth, "Abbreviated Instrument to Measure Hope," *Journal of Advanced Nursing* 17 (1992): 1252-53, scale on 1256.

¹⁷³ Ibid., 1256.

required for accurate scoring, this scale was cited only, but not administered in the small group. Regardless, the three key factors suggest ways to informally access hopefulness (hopeful outlook, interpersonal connectedness and feelings of relative empowerment).

In addition to formal therapeutic measures of hopefulness, two additional instruments of measurement were drawn from René Schläpfer's book *The Hope Experience*: 1) The "Experience of Hope Graph"¹⁷⁴ was used early in the process to help participants enter into the process of thinking narratively. The graph gave guiding questions to direct participants to think about the occasions of hope (or loss of hope) throughout their lives. 2) The second assessment instrument is "View of God."¹⁷⁵ This assessment instrument is based on an assumption that there is a critical connection between how we view God's relationship with us and the degree to which we are able to experience hope, especially in times of loss. Punitive notions of God would seem to inhibit hope. More compassionate views of God, such as articulated in Moltmann's theology of God's passability, would likely facilitate a greater degree of hopefulness especially in times of suffering. A greater self-awareness about one's embedded view of God would offer the possibility of healing reconstructions of one's understanding of God's presence in times of loss.¹⁷⁶

¹⁷⁴ René Schläpfer, *The Hope Experience*, 14.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 3

¹⁷⁶ For future studies, this project recommends using an additional instrument found in Craig Ellison, "Spiritual Well-being: Conceptualization and Measurement," *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 11, no. 4 (1983): 330-338. The scale might be useful for two reasons. One, because of the intuitive connection the Church makes between degree of hopefulness and spiritual well-being, and two, because the questionnaire posed questions related to one's sense of the future—a key aspect of the hopeful experience noted by Stone, Capps and Lester.

CHAPTER IV. A PRACTICE OF HOPE USING STORY THEOLOGY IN A SMALL GROUP SETTING: REFRAMING EXPERIENCES OF LOSS

*What do you say to someone who is suffering? . . . Don't say it's really not so bad. Because it is. Death is awful, demonic. If you think your task as comforter is to tell me that really, all things considered, it's not so bad, you do not sit with me in my grief. . . . What I need to hear from you is that you recognize how painful it is . . . that you are with me in my desperation. To comfort me, you have to come close.¹⁷⁷ —Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Lament for a Son**

So, maybe—just maybe—we look for God in the wrong places, not in the dark places where perhaps we lost sight of him, but in the light.¹⁷⁸
—Edmund Steimle, “Address Not Known”

I set out to do something in this project that on the surface of it seemed rather common to ministry: to invite some of the people I have come to know as pastor over the last ten years to meet with me to share some of the stories of their lives—stories that are marked by considerable loss and struggle and hardship and pain and darkness—and to see if a process of story theology might help us not only come to terms with the realities of our losses but also to move forward out of the darkness into the promise of God's future. That in the covenant of faith community, we could learn something new, or be reminded of some great truth we had forgotten, about how God is in relationship with us during our times of loss and discover some practices of faith that might help us move from the sting of our losses to new experiences of Christian hope. Faithful to the process of story theology, I knew that it would be important to give adequate room for participants to tell their stories and to struggle to reshape those stories in ways that would be meaningful to them. As such, our times together would need to be largely participant-driven. My role, as leader, would be to help create a safe and inviting place and time where such holy work could happen. I would share the journey with participants to the extent that I, like them,

¹⁷⁷ Wolterstorff, 34.

¹⁷⁸ Edmund Steimle, *From Birth to Death* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1973), 61.

had my own story of loss to tell, and because of that experience, would have some insight to offer that might resonate with their experience.

Yet, I came to the story theology process with the conviction that faith is more than subjective experience and that while story theology, as Dori Baker and others describe it, is inherently democratic; the experience of Christian hope has an important cognitive component to it. Christian hope is a quality of Christian life to be experienced. But it is an experience that is necessarily founded on a thoughtful, reasonable, careful understanding of God's relationship with us. To this end, it seemed to me that any effort to assist others to grow past loss to new hope would also need some pedagogical component. Our story theology process would happen in conversation with those who had devoted considerable thought to a theology of Christian hope. Jürgen Moltmann, Flora Keshgegian, Victor Frankl, and Ellen Ott Marshall would weigh in on our journey to faith discovery. We may not finally agree with their observations, their theological conclusions, but their work on the matter of Christian hope would help structure our discussions—give some measure of objective reality to our inter-subjective experiences. As mentioned earlier, I have a hunch that at least part of the reason some in the Church cannot move past depths of hopelessness to hope is because the theological foundation upon which we try to stage this critical journey no longer gives adequate support. In order to move forward into God's future, we might first need to learn new ways to conceptualize the meaning and movement of Christian hope. Drawing from the theory of cognitive-reframing theorists, we might need to think our way into new practices of faith. Theologies of hope together with specific practices of reframing might help us do that together.

A. Implementation Goals

In short, this is what I set out to do: Practice a process of story theology, using Dori Baker's paradigm of listening and reflecting, with a small group of parishioners who had experienced loss, for the purposes of:

1. Deepening personal experiences of Christian hope, by:
2. Providing a safe, inviting small group context in a parish setting where, over several weeks, participants would be given the opportunity to share their stories of loss, and in the process
3. Learn some new insights from a theology of hope based largely on the work of Jürgen Moltmann but in conversation with others theologians including Flora Keshgegian, Ellen Ott Marshall, numerous secondary readings on Moltmann, along with insights from logotherapist, Victor Frankl.
4. Practice methods of reframing described in works by Donald Capps, Howard Stone and Andrew Lester.
5. Experience the presence of God in solidarity with us.

B. Some Implementation Reservations

I began this process with some reservations:

1. Time or Intention?

In my experience as pastor, Christian hope has frequently been described as an inter-subjective disposition. Is this true? And if so, to what extent is it possible to establish objective concepts to describe the phenomena of hope? And related to this, having adequately described the phenomena of hope, is it possible to intervene in the process of hope-making (move from

despair to hope, for instance) to intentionally move it along? The concern here is that the formation of deeper hope may be, as I have often heard, a matter for the passage of time. When my son died, for instance, much of the counsel I received, from both lay-folk and mental health professionals, suggested that “over time” my feelings of loss would lessen. In fact, eight years since his death those deep, raw feelings of pervasive loss have dissipated. But I still wonder if there are ways that we might help those who have experienced loss navigate the journey to increased hope more effectively, if not efficiently. The answer to this question, of course, goes to the heart of the primary purpose of my project: if greater hope is simply a factor of time, why convene small groups to do story theology for the purpose of helping those who have experienced loss find new hope? My hunch is that while time does help heal the wounds that afflict us, sometimes we need additional help. And, as stated previously, sometimes time cannot perform its work of healing because there are emotional or theological obstacles that need a more systematic form of clearing. It may also be true that, to the extent that the process of hope-making is a new learning, hope, like all matters of learning, may come down to readiness. Some may be receptive to the creative processes of reframing and some may not. If Piaget is correct in his analysis of cognitively teachable moments, then perhaps some of what constitutes effective ministry to those who experience loss may be a matter of identifying optimal times for intervention.

2. Acceptance or Agency?

Does hope in the face of loss come down to the wisdom of Reinhold Niebuhr’s Serenity Prayer? Does Christian hope sometimes come to the moment when we learn to accept with faithful equanimity what cannot be changed, and to possess the requisite wisdom to know when such moments have come? I am reminded of a member who wonders if he should undergo

chemotherapy to reduce the effects of what his doctors say is a 90% likely incurable form of cancer. Is hope the will to keep on believing in the 10% chance of cure? Or is it the wisdom to accept the odds of his dying?

Kenneth Pargament and colleagues have identified three styles of religious coping. Using a “self-directing” style of coping, the individual assumes primary responsibility for resolving the problem. Here, the individual exercises the freedom to apply one’s resources to achieve resolution. As a “self-directed” coping individual, in the face of difficult diagnosis of highly incurable cancer, I would do everything in my power to achieve the 10% likelihood of remission. Using a “deferring” style of coping, I would do just the opposite. Instead of pro-actively seeking resolution, I would accept whatever the future might bring. I might say, for instance, “God has given me life and God knows when to take my life. I put my life and my future in God’s hands.” And finally, using a “collaborative” style of coping, I would do what I could to maximize my chances of health and healing, but would choose all options in active partnership with God. Here, the process of resolution would be one jointly-held responsibility.¹⁷⁹ Paul, for instance, speaks to this sort of collaboration when he writes, “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.” (Philippians 4:13)

At the beginning of their study, Pargament and colleagues privileged self-directed, collaborative forms of coping as evidence of a more mature faith. Yet, what they learned was that the exercise of faith often comes down to using different styles for different problems. Styles cannot generally be characterized as more or less mature. Sometimes, they learned, deferring styles of coping are appropriate in the face of “medical illness, accidents or death,

¹⁷⁹ Kenneth Pargament, Joseph Kennell, William Hathaway, Nancy Grevengoed, Jon Newman and Wendy Jones, “Religion and the Problem-Solving Process: Three Styles of Coping,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 27, no. 1 (1988): 90-104.

which lie beyond their control. . . .”¹⁸⁰ One assumption of story theology as a method for increasing hope in the face of loss is that higher degrees of personal agency are more indicative of the experience of hope. Hopelessness, as Stone and Lester write, is often the function of a person who feels little or no control about the outcome of the future, but that may be too simplistic a conclusion.

3. Expectations: Modest or Transcendent?

There is an essential dialectical quality to Christian hope and subsequently to its study, and, therefore, most likely to its practice. That Moltmann’s earlier *Theology of Hope* was followed a few years later by a second work *The Crucified God* suggests that Christian hope is not only a reflection on God’s Easter glory, but also Christ’s Good Friday ignominy. Moltmann’s second volume tempers some of the jubilant tones of possibility sounded in his earlier work, that the experience of hope is more a matter of expectation than realization, and that Christian hope must somehow contend with the hard, intractable realities of life.¹⁸¹ Yet it is Keshgegian’s work *Time for Hope*, which sets forth a more cynical tone saying that the experience of hope is a messy, provisional, and incomplete one—a hope, that if it is experienced at all, is a process whereby we accept the more modest joys of daily living and focus less on the grand sweep of God’s consummate Kingdom promises. The experience of hope is less “divine

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., 102.

¹⁸¹ Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, ix. Moltmann writes that this work is a response to 1) the personal experiences of the suffering of friends during the period 1968-1972, living “under Stalinism in Eastern Europe and under military dictatorships in Latin America and South Korea,” and 2) the persistent and haunting images of the Holocaust which brought him to the experience of a “very different dark night” and compelled him to find the theological meaning of this past. *The Crucified God* is also a response to criticism, much of it North American, that his *Theology of Hope* struck an overly triumphalist tone and tended to dismiss the prevalence of suffering in the world. David J. Bryant, in his critique of Moltmann’s hope theology in *Theology as Conversation*, edited by Bruce C. McCormick and Kimlyn J. Bender (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2009), 188, writes that “Moltmann’s later works showed more concern to avoid the impression that hope expresses an easy optimism that inadequately faces the world’s suffering.” William P. Frost, in “Decade of Hope Theology in North America,” *Theological Studies*, Volume 39, No. 1 (March 1978): 142-43, recognizes that Moltmann’s *Theology of Hope* had a deep sense of political ethic, and that Moltmann’s work was criticized in large part because it was largely misunderstood.

comedy,” where the problems of life soar upward and forward towards joyous resolution, and more a matter of small steps forward, little glimpses of partial joy, modest pleasures: sharing the journey with trusted others, for example, or taking in the consolations of a present moment, withholding the need to look too far ahead and learning to accept the limitations of life.

David Blumenthal suggests that hope and healing is a *seriatim* process, “a tacking into the wind, an alternation between empowerment and desire for revenge, between acceptance and protest, between love and rage.”¹⁸² The complexities of the journey are not to be overcome, but rather accepted, and that this is not, he writes, “dis-integrative . . . not a miring down in a cyclic process. Rather, it is a moving forward by alternating directions. It is sewing with a backstitch, repeatedly. It is integrative—more integrative than healing procedures that urge survivors to ‘forgive and go beyond,’ to ‘be healed once and for all.’”¹⁸³ In the end, we come to speak of those who make the journey from loss to new hope as “recovering survivors.”

In forming the design of this project and imagining how the small-group process might go, I was concerned to communicate the potential of our time together. Each time we gathered, we lit a candle to symbolize God’s directing presence with us and prayed that God would hear our stories and provide gifts of healing. A common belief in the creative possibilities of God’s Spirit characterized our time together. But knowing some of the complicated stories that would likely be shared, I was concerned to make reasonable claims for our time together. I wanted to exude a sense of expectation, but also avoid making false promises. And here, it seemed to me, was the essential dialectic quality of hope and its practice. On the one hand, the Bible claims that “with God all things are possible.” (Luke 1:37) And yet, on the other hand, Paul is taught that God’s grace, not the resolution for which he prays, “will be sufficient.” (2 Corinthians 12:9) What

¹⁸² David Blumenthal, “Theodicy: Dissonance in Theory and Praxis,” *Concilium* 1 (1998): 95-106; also found at <http://www.js.emory.edu/BLUMENTHAL/Theodicy.html>, 4.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*

might we reasonably expect to accomplish in our time together? Perhaps, as Blumenthal writes, if would be sufficient to begin the journey to healing; enough to hold up our stories to the light of God's promises and not presume when or how the healing might happen; enough to share a journey of possibility together.

C. Plan of Implementation: Formation of a Hope Study

1. Selection of Group Participants

A list of possible candidates was drawn up the summer prior to the October 5th opening session. Suitable candidates were selected and subsequently recruited on the basis of four criteria:

- Previous pastoral knowledge of some aspect of their life story that had resulted in deep loss such as divorce, death of a loved one, chronic illness, etc.
- Individuals that I believed would be open to active participation in a small group process. Candidates would need to be comfortable sharing their life stories with others.
- Members whom I knew had sufficient emotional distance from the initial experience of personal loss to engage in a process of learning and discovery.
- Individuals who would be willing to make firm commitments for the entire process.

Once the list had been formulated, I drew up a shorter list of candidates based on what I believed would constitute an optimal group dynamic including diversity of life stories, age, faith experience and candidates who had previously demonstrated an ability to make candid reflection and who were comfortable enough with me to feel the freedom to share those candid reflections.

As much as possible I tried to recruit a group of individuals who would give honest assessments of the process.

Candidates were initially contacted by phone. If they indicated interest, I sent them a comprehensive follow-up email that explained in greater detail what the project was about, why I was doing it, why I had selected them, and what commitment of time would be required. Two persons declined after careful thought because of time constraints. Eight expressed considerable interest, and gratitude that they had been selected. Although I had originally set out to form a gender-balanced group, only two men in my estimation fit the selection criteria named above. The group, to my surprise, ended up being an all-female group.

The participants ranged in age from middle thirties to early sixties. All of them were active members of the congregation, though one of the candidates who declined was a member of a neighboring congregation. One participant was retired. The others had full-time career jobs. Two of the participants had children still living at home. The remaining participants were parents of adult children. Five of the participants had been members of the congregation from the beginning of my tenure. Two had joined within the last three years. A week before the project's first meeting, one of the participants was diagnosed with a recurrence of illness and was not able to participate in the project. Because I had already announced the roster to the participants, I chose not to fill that vacancy. I also had some hope that the participant would be able to join us later in the process to share her story.

2. Book-End Retreat

Our time together was organized using a so-called "book-end retreat" framework beginning with a 2 ½ hour orientation meeting, followed in successive weeks, with six 1 ½ hour Wednesday night meetings, and concluding with a 2 ½ hour closing meeting of reflection,

closure, and participant evaluation. All of the meetings took place in the church's main campus. Rooms were selected for each meeting to guarantee confidentiality. The opening orientation meeting was held Wednesday, October 5, 2011. Small group meetings were held on successive Wednesday evenings beginning October 12 and concluding November 16. A closing reflection and evaluation meeting was held four weeks following the last small group meeting, Saturday, December 17. Each of the project's main entities, the opening retreat, the small group meetings, and the closing retreat were organized using written, time-sequenced goals and objective agendas. Those agendas were distributed to the participants at the beginning of each meeting. Each of the meetings included time for prayer and meditation, didactic and group reflection. The prayers and meditations, more than occasions to center, were also used to reinforce the concept of God's promise of new possibility. From the onset I planned to have the group meditate with me using the seven "signs of Jesus" in John's Gospel.¹⁸⁴ Each of the passages would be used to illustrate that promise of new life lies at the heart of God's Kingdom.

(a) Opening Retreat: Practicing an Emmaus Moment

The opening meeting began with a dinner prepared for the participants. The dinner was planned for three purposes: One, to provide some relaxation for those who were coming from work to the meeting; two, a way to begin building community; and three, as a way to help the participants experience the story of the disciples on the Emmaus Road.¹⁸⁵ Their experience, it seemed to me, was an example of the power of reframing. As Luke 24:31 reads, they shared dinner with Jesus "and then their eyes were opened." Their story was one of journeying from hopelessness to resurrection. As the meal concluded, I told the story from Luke 24:13-35 and

¹⁸⁴ John 2:1-11, 4:46-54, 5:1-18, 6:5-14, 6:16-21, 9:1-7 and 11:1-45.

¹⁸⁵ Appendix 6.

shared my interpretation of the meaning of the passage relating it to the process of new hope that I had planned for us to share together.

Following the meal, we went to another part of the church building, where our small group meeting would take place, and took some time to introduce ourselves. I lit a candle which had been placed on a small table in the center of our meeting space. I told the group that this would be a symbol to remind us of God's presence with us. After lighting the candle, I shared a meditation on Genesis 21—the story of Abraham, Hagar and Ishmael. I emphasized the portion of the story where God heard the mother and child's cry, and suggested to the group that God hears our cries, too. God's promise to hear us would serve as a guiding metaphor for our understanding of Christian hope. Each time we would share our stories, God would be present with us to hear us and to make the journey to new hope with us. As with Hagar and Ishmael, God would help us find new possibilities for our lives in those moments when our stories seemed to have come to an end.

Following a time of quiet reflection, I began talking about the goals of the project and why they had been selected. I said that one important part of our time together was to construct a theology of hope. I told them that throughout the project I would share insights from a selection of theologians. On this first night, I shared some prepared notes from Moltmann's works *Theology of Hope* and *The Crucified God*—notes which I believed summarized the key points in Moltmann's writings and which would be helpful to the group as they began the process. I particularly wanted the group to hear Moltmann's story of faith. I also wanted them to understand that Moltmann's theology of hope had emerged from his experience as a German citizen during the Holocaust. Moltmann's theology of hope had begun with a question: Where is God in Auschwitz? I closed the presentation of Moltmann's theology by asking them to

complete two hope measurement exercises—an autobiographical chart of life experiences of hope, “The Experience of Hope,”¹⁸⁶ and “The Hope Scale.”¹⁸⁷ The autobiographical chart would help them begin to think about their experiences of hope and hopelessness and might also help them in writing their stories. “The Hope Scale” would give me a sense of where the participants were in the experience of hope. We spent some time sharing our findings.

After a short break, I introduced the concept of reframing. Each of the participants received a handout that summarized what reframing is, how it is used, and a description of some techniques of reframing.¹⁸⁸ I told that one of the goals of our time together was to not only learn about Christian hope but to use techniques of reframing to practice new hope. Reframing would be a method of helping us discover new ways of looking at the stories of loss we would share. To take the conversation from theory to practice I had planned an exercise to use the technique “expect a miracle.” We would read Luke 13: 1-3, the story of the “bent over” woman, and then relate it to our own lives. I would then ask the participants, “What are the “crippled” places in your life for which you might ask for God’s healing?” And, “How would your life be different if that healing were miraculously given?” The purpose of reframing, I explained, was to help us see our “problem-saturated stories” from new perspectives.

Finally, I talked with the participants about the purpose and method of story theology. Each of them had a story to tell. I introduced the concept of story theology and reframing by telling the story of Jesus and the Samaritan woman in John 4. Jesus “heard her to speech” and she was transformed. The story was an example of how story-telling may become an occasion for us to encounter God in life-giving ways. Our stories may also be occasions to experience God’s solidarity with us. From our brief time with Moltmann’s teaching, I reminded them that

¹⁸⁶ Schlaepfer, 14. See Appendix 2. See Schlaepfer’s section (c) 1 & 2, following for a description and findings.

¹⁸⁷ Snyder, 585. See Appendix 3. See Snyder’s section (c) 3, following for a description and findings.

¹⁸⁸ See Appendix 4—Reframing.

God is affected by us. In speaking, we may come to know that God hears us and is moved to provide a way to new hope and healing. To guide them in telling their stories, I gave them a handout on how to write and tell a story.¹⁸⁹ I asked that they write down their stories and come prepared to give each of us a copy of the story. I told them that the stories did not have to be long. I then shared Dori Baker's method of story theology¹⁹⁰ and explained that this is the process we would follow in our times together. Before we ended our first meeting, I asked each participant to sign up for a week to share their story.

(b) Small Group Meetings

Small group meetings were held for six successive Wednesday evenings from 6:00-7:30, beginning October 12 and running through November 16, 2011. Because the group had seven members, I asked if two participants would be willing to share a night. I explained that I would not offer a teaching section on that night so that both participants could have adequate time to share their stories. Two participants agreed to give their stories at our November 9 meeting time.

Before beginning the first story time, I gave participants a handout that described the objectives for each meeting time. The handout also gave a breakdown of how our 1 ½ hours would be spent, including a complete listing of each of the six weeks' scripture meditations and repeat description of the story theology process.¹⁹¹ I prepared coffee and finger desserts for each group and allowed participants to mingle a little before I called the evening sessions together with prayer and scriptural meditation. The purpose of the coffee and desserts was to create a welcoming, hospitable atmosphere and to give participants a few moments to transition from

¹⁸⁹ See Appendix 5—Participant Story Guidelines.

¹⁹⁰ See Appendix 6, "L.F.G.A.: Listen for God Always," Dori Baker's story theology process adapted from *Girl Friend Theology*, for use in Dr. David White's Doctor of Ministry class, Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary (Austin, Texas), "Narrative Pedagogies," January 25, 2010.

¹⁹¹ See Appendix 7—Hope Study Meetings.

work and commute before beginning the work of story theology. By the third meeting the amount of time spent informally sharing about the past day and week lengthened. Even so, I continued to allot 45 minutes for story and reframing practices. I did not impose the reframing practices but allowed them to arise naturally from the stories which were shared. I set aside the last 30 minutes to share theological concepts about Christian hope

I made the following presentations at our small group meetings:

October 12 – Flora Keshgegian’s theology of hope (based on summary notes from her book *Time for Hope*). I told the group that Keshgegian’s views might help balance some of Moltmann’s view.

October 19 –Eschatology: Biblical Understandings of Eschatology and Eschatological Hope.¹⁹² Eschatology was a new concept for the participants. I explained the concepts of realized and future eschatology as they relate to our hope in God’s future. I closed our meeting by telling them the story from the movie adaptation of Cormac McCarthy’s “*No Country for Old Men*.”¹⁹³ I then played the final scene from the movie. Ed Bell’s dream, I explained, was a description of what I would call “eschatological hope.”¹⁹⁴

October 26—Distributed “View of God”¹⁹⁵ measurement to talk about how our capacity to hope may be related to our view of God. We concluded by watching a scene from the movie *Rachael Getting Married*,¹⁹⁶ where Kym recalls her great sorrow in life at a Narcotics Anonymous meeting. In it, Kym says, “*And I struggle with God so much, because I can't*

¹⁹² See Appendix 8—Definitions of Eschatology.

¹⁹³ *No Country for Old Men*, directed by Joel D. Coen & Ethan J. Coen, Miramax Films and Paramount Vantage, 2008 DVD Release, Scene 15, “Best I Can Do.”

¹⁹⁴ Thomas Long, *Preaching From Memory to Hope* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009), 120-22. Long suggests the idea for using the movie to illustrate “eschatological hope.”

¹⁹⁵ See Appendix 9—View of God.

¹⁹⁶ *Rachel Getting Married*, directed Robert Altman, Sony Pictures Classics, March 2009 DVD release.

forgive myself. And I don't really want to right now. I can live with it, but I can't forgive myself. And sometimes I don't want to believe in a God that could forgive me."

November 2—Presentation on "Views of Theodicy."¹⁹⁷ Although Moltmann stresses that the more helpful question is "how" God chooses to be in relationship with us in our experiences of suffering, the question of "why" was posed in our discussion. Although I did not base this project on an attempt to answer that question, the question of theodicy was thought to be a matter for discussion and perhaps theological rehabilitation. Even if we could not finally know "why," perhaps we could discuss "why not."

November 9—Because two participants shared their stories during this meeting, no teaching material was presented. However, I did deviate from the scriptural meditation schedule, offering a meditation by Joyce Rupp, "Holy Saturday—In the Tomb of Our Darkness."¹⁹⁸ I used the prayer to talk briefly about God's continued work in our lives even in those times when we cannot see God's work.

November 16—Scriptural meditation again deviated from announced schedule to give a meditation on the Resurrection narrative in Mark 16. Reading the shorter version which ends at verse 8, I pointed to a seemingly incomplete ending to an emerging story of life and suggested that this might be the way it is in all our lives: that the story is still to be continued; that as the angel instructs the women to "go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him," perhaps the living Christ also goes out ahead and invites us to collaborate with him to write the next, new chapter of our lives.¹⁹⁹ This, I said, would suggest

¹⁹⁷ See Appendix 10—Views of Theodicy. Materials adapted from <http://www3.dbu.edu/mitchell/theodicy.htm>; William H. Willimon, *Sighing for Eden: Sin, Evil, and the Christian Faith* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1985), 38-64.

¹⁹⁸ *Pilgrims of the Heart: Lenten Prayer*, edited by Steve Mueller from the works of Joyce Rupp (St. Louis, MO: All Saints Press, 2011), 30. Meditation may be found at: <http://www.allsaintscatholicpress.com/Pilgrims%20of%20the%20Heart%2002-341.pdf>

¹⁹⁹ This is certainly not an original interpretation of mine. Numerous commentaries and sermons present this theme.

what theologians call “realized eschatology”—the experience of living new life today. I closed our final small group meeting time with a video presentation by Rob Bell, *Today*.²⁰⁰ The video presentation emphasized that today holds the possibility of new life with Christ. Participants were also asked to complete a “Spiritual Well-being Scale.”²⁰¹ The tool was for emphasizing the connection between degree of hopefulness and one’s theological experience of God and future.

November 17—December 16, 2011: period of active learning and reflection upon new information and experience. The importance of “soak time” is noted as an essential aspect of an effective learning design.²⁰²

(c) Surveying the Landscape of Hope’s Recovery: Instruments of Measurement

As mentioned in the small group materials above, three instruments of hope measurement were given to participants: two during the opening retreat (October 5) and an additional one at the October 26, small group meeting. The instruments were included in this project for the primary purpose of giving me a series of snap-shots of where participants might be in the process of their journey from loss to new hope. Following, are some explanations about the instruments used and preliminary assessments drawn from the results.

(1) The Experience of Hope: an Autobiographical History

The first instrument presented a simple graph—a vertical line on the left with hope level values ranging from low to high, and on the bottom, an intersecting horizontal line with a life

²⁰⁰ *Today*, featuring Rob Bell, number 17 in a Nooma Films series created and produced by Flannel. Go to <http://nooma.com/> to find a complete listing of series titles. The subtitle caption for the video *Today* reads: “Can we become so consumed with the past that we can’t see the beauty of today?”

²⁰¹ Craig Ellison, “Spiritual Well-being,” *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 11, no. 4 (1983): 338. “Spiritual Well-being Scale.” Questions 2, 6, 10, 14, 20 were particularly germane to this project.

²⁰² The concept of process time for effective learning is noted by numerous sources. This project refers to two sources, Donald Currie, *Developing and Applying Study Skills* (London: Chartered Institute of Personnel Development, 2005), 59. Also numerous other online sources including Anne Darnell’s “Soaking It Up: Providing Processing Time in Learning Design,” cited July 15, 2012, from <http://www.torrancelearning.com/2012/03/12/soaking-it-up-providing-processing-time-in-learning-design/>

experience chronology ranging from early childhood to adult years. I asked them to remember as best they could different stages in their lives and to graph a line from past to present. The graph, of course, was a subjective tool to help participants begin to think of the flow of the past experiences in their lives. I wanted to invite them as Frederick Buechner writes, to engage in reflection:

Enter that still room within us all were the past lives on as part of the present,
where the dead are alive again, where we are most alive ourselves to the long
journeys of our lives with all their twisting and turnings and to where our journeys
have brought us.²⁰³

With their remembering with intention like this I hoped that the experience of autobiographical charting would: 1) help them begin to think narratively about the personal experience of hope; 2) remind them of times when they had successfully moved from loss to new hope and to think about how that had been possible; 3) to be honest about their degree of hopefulness in the present. At the top of the graph I gave instructions. After completing the graph, I asked them to think about what the chart might mean. “What key incidents in your life,” I asked, took hope from you? What incidents made you more hopeful?” Only two of the participants listed experiences that had given them hope. Most listed numerous instances that had taken hope from them. Of the seven participants who completed the survey, the following present experience of levels of hope were identified:

3—**Low level of hope**, either because of a current experience of loss or because a relatively recent loss (within the last 3-5 years) had not been satisfactorily processed.

2—**On the recovering end** of a relatively recent experience of loss from a low point of hope to an increased level.

²⁰³ Frederick Buechner, *A Room Called Remember* (San Francisco, CA: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1984), 8.

2—**Normalizing** from a recent experience of loss to the point of achieving a pre-loss level of hope.

1—**Highest** level of hope in their lives.

(2) View of God Assessment

The purpose of this assessment was both to teach and test possible correlation between a participant's view of God and the capacity to experience hope. The premise is that certain views regarding the nature of God's relationship with us may either promote or inhibit the experience of hope. The assessment listed ten pairs of contrasting relational traits ranging from "gentle—harsh" to "just—unfair" on a measurement continuum of "never to always." The question at the top of the chart read, "To what degree do I feel that God is like this toward me?" Seven participants completed the assessment. Results from each of those individual assessments were transferred to a master group sheet. The following results were recorded.

(Pairing #1)

Gentle

3—Sometimes

3—Often

1—Always

Harsh

4—Never

1—Rarely

2—Sometimes

Preliminary Read: Participants shared a sense that God is gentle and rarely ever harsh.

(Pairing #2)

Loving

1—Sometimes

3—Often

3—Always

Aloof

3—Never

4—Sometimes

Preliminary Read: The number of participants who responded that God is sometimes aloof was unexpected. The findings suggested that over half of the group could remember a time when God felt something less than close to them in a time of loss. The conclusion suggested the possibility that at least part of the problem with Christian hope and personal loss may be that the degree of great need for God's presence is not always matched by an equal degree of the experience of God's presence. In fact, of the two participants who indicated a low level of hope in the present indicated that God is aloof; one indicated that her present level of hope was the lowest ever. The finding pointed to the possible need for further discussion about the perception of God's presence in those times when we may feel God's absence.

(Pairing #3)

Sympathetic

- 1—Never
- 1—Rarely
- 2—Sometimes
- 3—Often

Unconcerned

- 4—Never
- 3—Sometimes

Preliminary Read: Again, the number of participants who responded that God is never, rarely or sometimes sympathetic was unexpected, along with participants who indicated that God is sometimes unconcerned. The results suggested that a significant number of participants were willing to express a degree (1 participant an absolute degree) of uncertainty about God's closeness to them in a time of personal loss.

(Pairing #4)

Close

- 4—Sometimes
- 1—Often
- 2—Always

Distant

- 1—Never
- 3—Rarely
- 2—Sometimes
- 1—Often

Preliminary Read: Consistent with pairing #2 and #3, participants seemed to indicate a nuanced view of God's presence in their lives. More discussion would be needed to understand whether these responses indicated disappointment with God (certainly the participant who indicated that God is "often" distant indicated disappointment), or whether their faith experience allowed them to accept the reality that God was not always necessarily close—that perhaps there were inevitable seasons of the absence and presence of God.

(Pairing #5)

Kind

- 1—Sometimes
- 2—Often
- 4—Always

Angry

- 2—Never
- 2—Rarely
- 3—Sometimes

Preliminary Read: God was generally viewed as mostly kind and disinclined to anger.

(Pairing #6)

Supportive

- 1—Rarely
- 3—Sometimes
- 1—Often
- 2—Always

Demanding

- 1—Never
- 1—Rarely
- 3—Sometimes
- 1—Often
- 1—Always

Preliminary Read: The number of participants who indicated that God is rarely or only sometimes supportive, and that God is often or always demanding represented an unexpected finding.

(Pairing #7)

Gracious

- 1—Sometimes
- 4—Often
- 2—Always

Provider

- 3—Sometimes
- 2—Often
- 3—Always

Preliminary Read: The source used in this project for Pairing #7 (Schlaepfer, *The Hope Experience*, 30) seems to have incorrectly noted the God-trait contrast in H. Norman Wright's book *Tomorrow Can Be Different*.²⁰⁴ Future uses of this pairing will want to invite participants to contrast their perceptions of God as either "gracious" or "disciplining." Regardless, it is noteworthy for this project's purposes that participants

²⁰⁴ H. Norman Wright, *Tomorrow Can Be Different* (Grand Rapids, MI: Fleming H. Revell, 1995), 53-59. See "Distorted Images of God."

shared a relatively equal impression of God as both gracious and providing with a slightly stronger sense of God as “gracious.”

(Pairing #8)

Ignores Me

- 3—Never
- 2—Rarely
- 2—Sometimes

Rejoices Over Me

- 2—Rarely
- 5—Sometimes

Preliminary Read: The number of participants who indicated that God only “sometimes” rejoices over them indicated the possible need for additional study on the relationship between the capacity to experience hope and a positive self-image.

(Pairing #9)

Consistent

- 2—Sometimes
- 2—Often
- 3—Always

Unpredictable

- 1—Never
- 4—Sometimes
- 2—Always

Preliminary Read: The findings seem to indicate that participants shared a belief in the ongoing creativity of God in our lives.

(Pairing #10)

Just

- 1—Sometimes
- 4—Often
- 1—Always

Unfair

- 2—Never
- 2—Rarely
- 2—Sometimes

Preliminary Read: This trait assessment seemed to go to the heart of the theodicy question: “To what extent are my sufferings unfair?” With the exception of one participant who answered that God is only “sometimes” just, the group shared a general consensus that whether or not we may understand why we had experienced loss, or, as one person wrote, “What did I do to deserve this?” God was nonetheless just and fair.

(3) The Hope Scale

The purpose of administering C.R. Snyder's Hope Scale was to get an additional general baseline reading of participant levels of hope. The scale represents 12 questions: four questions designed to measure a person's "way-power," questions 1, 4, 6 and 8 (perceived capacity to imagine possible ways to a newly imagined future), and four questions to measure a person's "will-power," questions 2, 9, 10 and 12 (perceived capacity to implement these possible ways). Questions 2, 5, 7 and 11 served as distracter questions. In rudimentary form, Snyder theorizes that the capacity to have hope equals way-power (creative possibilities) + will-power (personal agency either in terms of material resources or energy) to implement possible solutions to a problem. Low levels of way-power would indicate that a person has little capacity to imagine or conceptualize possible answers to problems. A person with little way-power would typically view the problems of life as intractable, unsolvable, beyond the scope of change. Conversely, low levels of will-power might indicate that while persons are able to imagine possible solutions to a problem, they possess few if any resources to enact those solutions. The capacity to hope is a function of both variables. Participants could score a possible 16 on both variables.

Each of the group's eight participants²⁰⁵ completed the scale. The results were as follows:

Way-power Scores: 12, 12, 14, 10, 11, 10, 13, 12

Will-power Scores: 13, 11, 11, 12, 15, 13, 11, 13

Overall Scores:²⁰⁶ 25, 23, 25, 22, 26, 23, 24, 25

Average Group Way-power: =12

²⁰⁵ One participant completed the Hope Scale but was not able to continue the process because of cancer recurrence.

²⁰⁶ The Way-power, Will-power and Overall Score results represent hope-study participants in the following order: Rachel, Anna, T. (who could not complete the process because of cancer recurrence), Leah, Hannah, Sarah, Ruth and Michal.

Average Group Will-power: =12.12

Preliminary Reads: Participants fell into the average range of capacity for hope with balanced levels of capacity to imagine possibilities for the future and resources to achieve those possibilities. The extremes tell the more significant story: the participant who had an overall score of 22 also gave answers consistent with negative views of God's relational presence (View of God instrument) and low present level of hope (Autobiographical instrument). The participant with the highest overall score, while ranking highest in the category of will-power, was among the lowest in level of way-power (suggesting, I suppose, that while she had a number of resources to achieve life goals, she could not clearly identify what, in response to her recent loss, those goals might be). The participant who expressed "shock" at her low score did in fact score near the bottom of cumulative scoring.

(d) Closing Meeting: Service of Closure and Final Evaluations

I give you praise, God of my journey—

For the power of love, the discovery of friends, the truth of beauty
 For the wonder of growth, the kindling of fidelity, the taste of transformation
 For the miracle of life, the seed of my soul, the gift of becoming
 For the taste of the little dyings which have strengthened me for this moment
 For the mystery of journey, the bends of the road, the pauses that refresh
 For the faith that lies deep enough to permeate discouragement and anxiety.

—Joyce Rupp, "Prayer of One Who is Moving On"²⁰⁷

The Closing Retreat was held on Saturday, December 17, 2011, 9:30-noon, in the church's fellowship hall. A continental breakfast was served. An hour was allotted for participants to complete a comprehensive evaluation form. One participant was absent. Participants were given a written agenda which outlined both objectives and a time sequence of activities.

The closing retreat objectives were listed as follows:

1. Concluding reflections on Christian hope

²⁰⁷ Joyce Rupp, *Praying Our Goodbyes: A Spiritual Companion Through Life's Losses and Sorrows*, 1st rev. (Notre Dame, IN: Ave Maria Press, May 2009), 125. The complete prayer is used in a liturgy later in the project.

2. One more exercise of story theology: a personal story
3. Service of Closure
4. Completion of participant evaluation forms

(1) Closing Retreat Reflections

I began the session by presenting four pages of prepared comments on the theme of Christian hope. The comments were for the purpose of reinforcing some of the key concepts which had been presented and practiced during our time together. Comments focused on three main topics:

First Topic—Definitions of Hope

Descriptions of hope were summarized from the various theologians that had been shared with the group, including Jürgen Moltmann, Flora Keshgegian, Viktor Frankl, and Ellen Ott Marshall were shared with participants. Although William Lynch's ideas had not been presented during small group, I also shared his three aspects of hope: imagination, inter-personal collaboration, and the strong connection between hoping and wishing.²⁰⁸ In this section I also posed three questions that I hoped had been answered in our time together—questions that were implied in my project title: “A Theology of Hope for Pastoral Care: Reframing Life's Losses in the Context of God's Future.”

“*Why a theology of hope for pastoral care?*” For hope to make any difference, I said, it must give guidance to our struggles with life.

“*What does reframing have to do with hope?*” Here I said, “It seems to me that the work of hope is to imagine (Lynch), to see the world through God's eyes (Moltmann), in order to claim beauty where we might otherwise see only pain or loss (Keshgegian), in order to choose

²⁰⁸ William Lynch, *Images of Hope*, 1st ed. (South Bend, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1990), 48.

life where we might otherwise choose death and to know what that choice is worth making (Frankl), and to envision our lives with greater possibility (Marshall).

“What does ‘God’s future’ have to do with it?” Here I said, “We have glimpsed God’s future in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. This glimpse of God’s future, actively present in our world today, is the ground of all hoping. As Moltmann says, God’s future far exceeds the scope of any human possibility, any human capacity to imagine. God’s future offers something that we could never hope humanly to accomplish.”

Second Topic—Progressions of Hope

Precipitating Moment: a Crisis of Faith. Here, I referred back to Jeffrey Kauffmann’s concept of “loss of assumptive world.” These occasions in life may lead to several outcomes including reaffirmation of an earlier belief, recognition that our belief system is inadequate, abandoning spirituality or finally, modifying our belief system to accommodate the new experience, such as C.S. Lewis, Harold Kushner and John Claypool had done in the aftermath of their respective experiences of loss. I also reminded the group about Søren Kierkegaard’s two forms of hopelessness (presumption and despair) and said that in all moments of loss we have a choice how we will respond—either in despair and presumption (and subsequently bitterness) or hope. I read the passage from Deuteronomy 30:19, where at the edge of promise, Moses reminded the people of this fundamental choice: “I call heaven and earth to witness against you today that I set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Choose life so that you and your descendants may live.” Today, I said, we have a choice to make. Hope, like despair, is choice.²⁰⁹

²⁰⁹ As I gave these words, I recalled a speech that Viktor Frankl had given to his comrades during the dark days of imprisonment. (*Man’s Search for Meaning*, 101-04.)

Rehabilitation of Hope. Here I described some possible ways that our will to find new hope may be frustrated. I named several instances where our frustration may be the result of a less than adequate framework of theological understanding. I reminded them of the connection between hope and our view of God. For those of us who live with regret—perhaps, like Kym, in the movie *Rachel Getting Married*—we might need to imagine a God whose compassion and will to forgive us is greater than what we have assumed. We may be guilty of what Kierkegaard called the sin of presumption, or what C.S. Lewis finally discovered were debilitating expectations of God. Perhaps God is willing to offer more than we have dared to hope. Perhaps also, I said, we need to foster a greater spirit of collaboration with God. Maybe we have fallen into the trap of immobilizing spiritual passivity. Perhaps God is waiting to assist us on the journey to new hope, but like the prodigal son in Luke’s Gospel, we need to make that critical turn towards God.

Third Topic—Practices of Hope. Finally, I told the group, our will to collaborate with God to form new experiences of hope would need to be embodied. It would not be enough for us simply to think about new hope. We would have to do something. Here I talked about the need to cultivate a spirit of restlessness to motivate us to act in new ways, and to choose to act in new ways today.²¹⁰ Or perhaps we would need to step out and practice what Ellen Marshall calls “an ethic of risk.” Maybe we would have to move in new directions without waiting for complete certainty. Maybe it would be enough for us to move into God’s future without knowing for sure where the journey would take us. Perhaps we would need to trust in God’s future for our lives.

Regarding ground of hope, God in Christ gives us a vision. We in faith, choose to believe in that vision. Our faith in that vision shapes the actions of our lives. In times of

²¹⁰ Flora Keshgegian, 188-214. Keshgegian names these new ways of acting, “Practices of Habitation,” including “honoring time,” “moving in place,” “imaging creatively,” “participating in inter-relation,” and “living in wild wonder.”

temptation (presumption and despair), perhaps we could remember God's empowering presence of both grace and solidarity on our journey. I closed my remarks by reading a quote from Jürgen Moltmann's meditation on the work of the Holy Spirit: "The experience of God deepens the experiences of life. It does not reduce them, for it awakens the unconditional 'Yes to life.' God the spirit is at last the one who awakens this 'Yes to life' when we have forgotten even how to say the word."²¹¹

(2) Sharing a Personal Story

Here, I shared my own personal story of loss. It was a piece I called "Walk in the Rain."²¹² It was a memory about a pre-dawn walk in a driving rain which my daughter and I had made from the hospital in New York City, where my son was being treated for late-stage brain cancer, to a convenience store about three blocks away. I told the group that at the time, the moment seemed inconsequential—going to the store to get some snacks—but that in retrospect it was a moment that gave my daughter and me an indelible memory of the meaning of a watershed day in my family's life. I told the group that in my struggles to make sense of my son's death later that day, in all the years since, I had often found an unexpected peace in remembering that moment.

After I told my story, I invited the group to spend a little time going through the processes of story theology with me. They shared their feelings about what I had told them. We talked about the presence of God in that moment. However, when we got to the final process of story theology, the step of moving from reflection to action, the group asked me to share how I had moved from my loss to new hope. I told them that it had been a very basic choice, a choice that others had had to make, either to give up and resign myself to the pain of his death or to

²¹¹ Moltmann, *The Spirit of Life* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1992), 98.

²¹² Complete transcript of the story is included in this project as Appendix 11. The story provides not only a personal narrative context for the project but also illustrates the kind of story participants were asked to share.

choose to go forward. The decision to move forward was a gradual one I told them. No trumpets sounded. There was no moment that I could clearly point to when the decision was made. It was rather a slow, incremental series of steps forward. I also told them that a choice to invest in life was a will to believe in a trustworthy God—that there were plenty of times when I did not feel hopeful, could not see the meaning of life, but that I chose to continue acting into a belief in God’s future.

(3) Closure: a “Service of Going Forth”

We had begun our time together with a meal. Here, around table together I had hoped to forge relationships of trust. In the weeks to come we would share some sensitive stories from our past. I wanted the participants to know that I would hold their stories in sacred trust, that I was deeply thankful for their willingness to share with me, and that I would make the journey with them as a “fellow-struggler.”²¹³ At that meal I had reminded them that our willingness to share our stories had the possibility, in God’s presence, to be the means by which we, like the travelers on the Emmaus road (Luke 24), would encounter the risen Christ. In making the journey perhaps our eyes would be opened. But now, perhaps, having had our eyes opened some, it was time to go and live the rest of our lives. I told them that I would continue to be their pastor and would be there for them in all the times needed in days to come but that now it was time for our story theology process to end. To mark the moment of closure, I invited them to join me in reading a responsive prayer from Joyce Rupp entitled “*Prayer of One Who is Moving On.*”²¹⁴ The prayer touched on four key aspects of prayer—praise, thanksgiving, sorrow and petition. I hoped that the prayer would be more than a fitting way to end our story process and that it might

²¹³ John Claypool, *Tracks of a Fellow Struggler* (Waco, TX: Word Incorporated, 1974), 17.

²¹⁴ Rupp, 125.

also give expression to those experiences in our lives where we might be struggling to move into God' future.

(4) Participant Evaluations Distributed

I gave participants a 5-page evaluation form.²¹⁵ The form asked participants to give a series of written responses. The form began with a word of thanks, followed by a brief reiteration of the three main objectives of the project and then gave a paragraph of instruction regarding the evaluation form questions. The form stressed that I coveted their “honest” answers and that while I had hope that our time together had achieved its stated goals (introduce a theology of hope, provide an affirming and safe place to share stories of loss, and practice ways to re-imagine our broken stories) this had been a learning experience for me, too. Their comments would help me improve future implementations of the story process of hope-making.

As mentioned earlier, six of the group's seven participants were present. After distributing the forms I waited in my office. Four of the participants completed the forms and brought them to me. Two took the form home where they were completed and then returned to my office within the following week. The participant who did not attend the final session was given an evaluation form, but, following two attempts to secure its completion, did not return the form. The results of those completed forms are described in chapter five.

D. Description of Multi-Disciplinary Hope-Making Model

The hope-making model envisioned in this project, and implemented in a fall 2011 small group study, draws from four separate disciplines: 1) narrative theory as adapted by Dori Baker in her four-part sequence of story theology 2) theological reflection based on three foundations

²¹⁵ Appendix 12, “Participant Evaluation—Hope Study.”

for pastoral care identified in Jürgen Moltmann's theology of hope (solidarity, resurrection possibility and adaptation of Christo-praxis as indicative of both necessity and personal will to act in new hopeful ways based on a changed narrative of the meaning of one's loss) 3) pastoral care with its use of a theory of cognitive restructuring applied by Donald Capps, Howard Stone, and Andrew Lester as specific reframing techniques. And 4) in the process of evaluating the model's use, a fourth discipline, transtheoretical insight, was added as a way to name the critical element of personal readiness in the process of hope-making. The theory names five primary stages in personal change including pre-contemplation (not ready to change and unable to articulate need for change), contemplation (awareness of problem and thinking about change), preparation (ready to change), action (making change), and maintenance (staying on track).²¹⁶

1. Story Theology: Emergence of Hope as Narrative Process

Dori Baker's four-part story theology process served as the organizational mainframe of our time together. All the other disciplines named above co-opted her process. The process was implemented for the purpose of:

- Giving participants a way to structure the telling of their personal stories of loss.
- Providing a means not only to acknowledge and give voice to the affective elements of their loss (rage, depression, sadness) but also to make the critical turn toward theological engagement. Baker's third step, "experience distant," provided, in my

²¹⁶ James O. Prochaska, Carlo C. DiClemente, and John C. Norcross, *Changing for Good* (New York City, NY: Avon Books, Inc., 1994), 38-46. Although the Transtheoretical model is used widely, Prochaska and DiClemente are credited with first developing the theory in *The Transtheoretical Approach: Towards a Systematic Eclectic Framework* (Homewood, IL: Dow Jones Irwin, 1984). The theory is summarized by Mehmet Oz, "Goal Power," *Time* 180, no.12 (September 17, 2012): 46-49; also "Stages of Change Model/Transtheoretical Model (TTM)," at http://currentnursing.com/nursing_theory/transtheoretical_model.html; and applied to the process of bereavement recovery in Kimberly A. Calderwood, "Adapting the Transtheoretical Model of Change to the Bereavement Process," *Social Work* 56, no. 2 (April 2011): 107-118.

estimation, an appropriate platform from which to introduce and appropriate the language of hope that Moltmann, and others offered, and to name ways that these narratives might provide theological reframes of their stories.

- Giving them an opportunity to struggle with possible ways that their new understandings of personal loss, and God's involvement with them, might lead to new ways of living.

2. Didactic: Moltmann's Narrative of Hope

Although I introduced participants to other theological hope constructs (Keshgegian, Marshall and Frankl), Moltmann was the primary basis for our theological discussion. Other narratives of hope were contrasted with his. Moltmann provided the "theological hooks" on which we began to hang (and sort) the meaning of our stories of loss. The three provisions of hope described in chapter two were introduced as a way to navigate the theological process of our journeys from despair to hope.

- **Auto-biographical Connections.** We began with Moltmann's personal story. Here I would establish Moltmann's moral authority to teach us about how we should hope. It was important from the outset to make a connection between the depth of his struggle and ours. Our questions about the meaning of life and of God's place in it arose, as did Moltmann's from the context of personal anguish. Each of us had been brought to a sort of theological urgency for having experienced great personal loss.
- **God's Emotional Kindred-ness.** Moltmann's development of God's passability seemed to offer particular therapeutic benefit to our emotional experiences of loss practiced in Baker's second stage of story theology (experience near). Moltmann offered a possible

way to consider the theological import of our feelings. The candid expression of our feelings of rage, frustration, depression, and sadness, might eventuate in something greater than mere emotional catharsis. Perhaps in the naming of our deep emotions we might begin to enter into consoling, healing relationship with God who not only understands (cognitive) but also experiences (affective) our depth of emotion. As Moltmann argues, God in God's passability chooses to be accessible to us in our pain. Our feelings, in concert with a new awareness of God's capacity for emotional kindredness, might offer a significant moment of learning and change.

- **Possibilities of Already and Yet-to-Come.** This project envisioned that the essence of Moltmann's theology of hope would be most applicable at step three of Baker's story theology process. As participants turned in step three to consider the possible meaning of their loss experiences, and as they began to frame their losses in the context of the Hebrews' exile question, "How could we sing the Lord's song in a foreign land?" Moltmann's provisions of both solidarity (hinted at in step 2) and resurrection possibility might begin to offer healing benefits. From an "already" perspective, participants could begin to see that their experiences of loss were not God-forsaken. As Moltmann teaches, God is in solidarity with us. And from a "not-yet" perspective, participants could begin to see that the story of God's future offered rich possibilities for seeing the first outlines of new life in the darkness of their losses. Here Moltmann might teach them that their lives could be seen not as dead-ends, but as new beginnings. God's Resurrection could provide a new narrative for imagining the possibilities of their lives. God was with them in the darkness of their Gethsemane, Good Friday, even Silent Saturday moments. But

with God there was promise of more. If we looked we could see a first glimpse of God's promise. If we persevered, we would see even more clearly in days to come.

- **Summons to New Engagement.** At step four of Baker's story theology process (consideration of new action), Moltmann's theology offered not only the theological impetus for new forms of re-engagement (God comes to us from God's future), but also the efficacy of the Holy Spirit which empowers personal agency. With God alive in both our present and future there is theological motivation to move beyond the emotional paralysis of loss.

3. Reframing: Hope as Therapeutic Practice of New Narrative

The process of reframing offers a concrete way to practice Moltmann's resurrection narrative. Yet, in the first two steps of Baker's story theology process, reframing is used to name the loss of an assumptive world. In telling our story and in describing the emotional themes of our loss, we acknowledge a qualitative difference between the experience of "before" and "after." In the aftermath of our losses, certainties of life have been shaken. In the first two steps of Baker's process we come to terms with the spiritual landscape of what Brueggemann calls a season of disorientation. The reframe necessitates a description of so-called "new normal." But beginning with step three of Baker's process, reframing offers a concrete, practical way to apply the therapeutic benefit of Moltmann's resurrection possibility narrative. From the vantage point of loss we begin to imagine new scenarios of life and hope. In step four of Baker's process, reframing becomes a concrete way to formulate new actions based on new insight. The last two uses of reframing may be called "gain" reframes. In the process of "loss" reframe (steps one and two), we adjust to the changes incurred by our loss. In the "gain" process of reframe we re-

orient ourselves to new possibilities. The use of reframing assumes a fundamental principle of cognitive-restructuring: that new behavior has its genesis in new thinking.

4. Readiness: Hope and the Transtheoretical Model

This fourth aspect of the hope-making process was added after the small group meetings to evaluate the results of the study. In thinking about the successes and failures of the hope process envisioned in this project, it became evident that the critical third step of Baker's story theology (experience far), during which participants were challenged to apply two key provisions of Moltmann's hope theology (solidarity and resurrection possibility), depended significantly on their readiness to move beyond what the transtheoretical model calls the "contemplative stage." In fact, I discovered that some of the participants had considerable difficulty moving past the emotion of loss. At least three of the project's six story-telling sessions bogged down at step two of Baker's process. In reflecting on this dynamic, it occurred to me that the successful completion of the hope-making process described in this project depends on a requisite degree of readiness to move from contemplative stages of processing to what the transtheoretical model names stage three (preparation) and four (process). It seemed to me that some of the participants interacted with the hope-making model as a sort of group therapy time—an occasion to share their feelings with others. For this model of hope-making to succeed the project requires "change-ready" participants. It also occurred to me that Moltmann's theology of hope offers a relatively emotionally-advanced narrative of loss-recovery. Moltmann's use is probably largely applicable to participants who: 1) have done previous emotional processing; 2) have an self-awareness of the need to grow past their loss and are presently-motivated to act on this new awareness; and 3) demonstrate both an inclination and interest in engaging in more intellectual-

introspective theology. It is also to suggest that this model likely offers limited benefit to those who are in the initial, raw, largely pre-contemplative stages of grief recovery.

5. Hope Process Chart of Intended Progression

I constructed the following Hope Process Chart, fall 2012, to illustrate the integration of the four disciplines named in the hope-making process (narrative theory, Christian theology of hope, pastoral care uses of reframing, and transtheoretical model of change), and to suggest ways that participants might progress through the process of hope-making. The chart intentionally omits stage one of the transtheoretical model of change (pre-contemplation), because the hope-making process described in this project assumes that participants can benefit from the process only once they have achieved stage two of the transtheoretical model of change, “contemplation.” Each of four steps illustrated in the chart begin with the four steps of Dori Baker’s story-theology and then, reading left to right, demonstrate how the other three disciplines in the hope-making model intersect with and inform the story-theology process.

The hope-making model used in this project assumed a chronological-progressive flow of development. Beginning with step one, each step would necessarily build on the previous accomplishments. In this regard this project envisioned a sort of developmental-stage progression: assuming at the onset that the participant could not successfully move to the next step until he or she had adequately completed each successive step, and additionally assuming, therefore, the movement from loss to new hope required completion of all four steps outlined in the chart. The chart argues that the step three of the hope-making process is the critical point at which participants begin to move from processes of “loss reframing” (reframes that have largely to do with negative assessments of what has changed as the result of one’s experience of loss

including an assumptive view of life and a subsequent acknowledgment that the past will not be regained), to “gain reframing” (reframes that engage the process of recasting the meaning of one’s experiences of loss in the more positive, life-giving context of God’s resurrection possibility).

MODEL OF HOPE-MAKING PROCESS

Chart 1

Story Theology (Baker)	Theology of Hope (Moltmann)	Reframing (Capps)	Trans-theoretical Model--Readiness
Step #1—Telling our stories	Prisoner of war and reflection on Auschwitz	Loss of “assumptive world” view <i>Loss Reframing</i>	TTM(2) —Early contemplation; awareness of faith crisis
Step #2— Experience Near. Feelings named.	God In Present Moment 1. God’s passability 2. God hears us. 3. Moltmann’s despair	Coming to terms with a “new normal” <i>Loss Reframing</i>	TTM(2) —Continued contemplation; naming the effects of loss
Step #3— Experience Far. What does my experience mean? Where is God in this experience? How does Christian faith provide a context for understanding? Psalm 137—How can I sing the Lord’s song in this foreign land?	Theology of Hope: God in Present & Future 1. Solidarity: God of the Cross 2. Resurrection: God of Easter possibilities 3. God’s Kingdom <i>Telos</i> (Already & Not Yet)	Resurrection becomes primary frame of reference: loss seen through new lens of present and future possibilities: 1. Resurrection present 2. Resurrection future <i>Gain Reframing</i>	TTM(3) —Preparing to see life differently: 1. Need for hope identified 2. Process towards hope begun
Step #4—Going Forth. What am I being called to do?	Theology of Hope: 1. Christo-praxis: personal initiative to re- engage 2. Enabling agency of Spirit	New thinking results in new, resurrection forms of living. <i>Gain Reframing</i>	TTM(4) —Process towards change imagined as reasonable possibility and actionable goal

E. Moltmann's Theology and Their Stories

1. Points of Narrative Resonance

As envisioned in the model described above, points of resonance with Moltmann's narrative of hope happened primarily in step three of Baker's story theology process as participants turned from an examination of the emotional effects of their losses to possible meanings. Yet it is also noteworthy that connections to Moltmann's narrative of hope were largely made, not by the story-teller, but first of all by me and secondly, by participants who heard the story. Possible reasons for a less than strong connection with Moltmann's narrative will be discussed below.

(a) Hope as Possibility of Something Yet to Come

Hannah

As I look back over the last 26 years of my life, I am astounded at how much God has been a part of it without me even knowing about it. I started teaching {high school}. I was not happy about that. It was not part of my plan But while I was feeling sorry for myself, I developed a relationship with a fellow teacher that would turn out to change the course of my life forever My relationship with him began to grow and become more serious. Before long, he was proposing to me and we were married

When he died, there were many children at my daughter's school who wrote her cards and in those cards, they expressed their memories of him. In many cases, the memories included the books he had bought them at the book fair because they didn't have enough money to make the purchase. And he didn't turn them away empty handed. I was so touched by the fact that each of her friends actually had memories of him that they could share. It wasn't just an 'I'm sorry your dad died kind of thing. They knew him and loved him for their own reasons. They all called him 'Dad.' That was God working in my life and hers because that has tremendous impact on {my daughter} especially now that he is gone. I could not have provided her that sense of self and confidence in who she is by myself. {He} is doing it from the grave.

- Remembering God's Future.** Hannah resonated with God's future by identifying those times, previously missed, when God had been faithfully present to her, working in her life to creatively fashion moments of providential care. She said that in the years of her early adulthood she thought she knew exactly what she would do. But along the way her plans changed. The educational goals she began with became less important and as time passed she began to do work in places she had never anticipated. Hannah mourned the loss of her husband and mourned for how that would impact not only her but her teenage daughter. But in describing how her changed life plans had brought her to meet her future husband, several participants noted that without her knowing, God had worked in her life to bring about something greater than she could have even imagined. Participants shared her feelings of loss. But each of us commented that precisely when Hannah felt she was floundering, God was working through the decisions she was making to bring her to a wonderful, caring husband and the beginning of a family she had not anticipated. We also noted those times when it seemed that God was also working in her life to prepare her for what was yet to come. Her husband died. He was the love and joy of her life. But the manner in which he lived his life had provided connections, friendships, which in his death had provided considerable comfort for Hannah and her family. In looking back to take note of these God-shaped provisions, Hannah began to cultivate a new confidence for the ways that God was likely at work in her life now to provide and to prepare. Perhaps this is the way God collaborates with us to help us along the way to new hope: in using experiences in our present lives to prepare us for what may become an unexpected sign of grace and strength and encouragement precisely in the

future. Hannah and her daughter discovered a source of strength in sharing the memory with many others that husband and dad had left a legacy of compassion. That memory became a source of comfort, connection, and inspiration for the journey ahead. Here, it seemed to me, was evidence of how Moltmann's notion of God's solidarity with us (albeit through reflection on the past) provided a way to experience new hope for the future: the backward glance of faith that remembers to celebrate God's future.

Sarah

In 1984 I married the man who has been my rock, my love, my life. . . {*Later, after years of testing, she is diagnosed with multiple sclerosis and describes in detail the permanent ways this illness has change her life*}. "And yet," I still have a great life. I have been blessed with a wonderful husband. He has been right beside me every step of the way . . . I don't like to think about facing this without him. He does so much for me . . . In 2000 my mother moved in with us . . . {*At her home in south Texas*} she had started attending a Disciples church. I knew it was important to her and that she would want to attend here also. So, I found a church in the Yellow Pages and started coming with her. She passed away in 2006, but I have continued to attend. I was surprised by how much this church came to mean to me. I thought I would just be attending since I had to take Mom. It never occurred to me that I would benefit from or enjoy it in any way.

- **Hope as Remembering Forward and the Great "And Yet."** Sarah had a similar experience to Hannah. She remembered the providential way that God had brought her to a caring husband who has cared for her in ways that she could not imagine at the time of their marriage. A few years after they were married, Sarah developed multiple sclerosis. She was surprised to discover the gift of her husband's patience and compassion in taking care of her. Later, when her mother came to live with them in the last few years of her life, she recalled how she was reluctantly brought to be a part of the church. Sarah said she came to church with her mother out of obligation.

But since her mother's passing, Sarah has marveled at how important her church has become. She finished her story by saying, "It sometimes frightens me to think what I would do if something happened to my husband." When I suggested that she might have peace about the future by taking stock of all the ways that God had already provided for her (caring husband, supportive church family), Sarah seemed to have a genuine "aha" moment. But of even more importance was Sarah's insistence, evidenced in the way she wrote and told her story, that while she had lost much in life, including especially her physical ability, she nevertheless had much for which to be thankful. The simple phrase, "and yet" told a story of how hope for her was looking forward by remembering a providential past. This, it seemed to me, was an indication of Moltmann's suggestion that despite the horrible moments of crucifixion in our lives, we nevertheless look with hope to God's resurrection promise. Sarah's story, more powerfully than any other, struck a resonate note with me suggesting that we may take confidence in our future by looking back to remember that God is Merciful Provider. In listening to her story, King David's words came to mind. When the Ark of the Covenant is finally returned to the Temple, David assembles the congregation and says to them, "Seek the Lord and his strength, seek his presence continually. Remember the wonderful works he has done." (1 Chronicles 16:11-12) I recalled those years during my son's illness and finally, the afternoon he died. I could not begin to see it at the time. But now, some eight years since his passing, I can look back and remember not just the pain of it all, but the good people, the gifted doctors, the generosity, the prayers, the experiences of God that were providentially sustaining.

- **Dissenting Opinion: Hope as Future Orientation.** Anna, (another of the participants) resonated with Moltmann's notion of God's future, but unlike the others in the group, she insisted that hope is the capacity to look forward with God and not spend inordinate time looking back. Hope, Anna said, was a challenge to focus on the future. This is the Christian faith's great benefit: that regardless of what has happened to us, God goes out ahead of us and calls us to come and follow.

Ruth

To pick one moment in my life is difficult. The endless moments with {my daughter's} health issues is just that, endless. Since birth she has had kidney problems. Doctors ran many tests and put her in the hospital so many times, it's impossible for me to remember how many times and told us, 'Just put her on this medicine for a year. She'll be fine.' This was at the age of 3 {Since then} she has had at least 15-20 major surgeries and countless smaller surgeries The medications she was on from 3-7 years old permanently altered her comprehension and concentration. I can remember the doctor telling us, 'If an adult was on this dosage of this medication they would be floating with the seagulls.' This has affected all of our lives permanently as well.

"May 16, 1996, I lost my sister when she was only 49. This moment has put a HUGE hole in my heart that cannot be filled. I lost my mom 7 months later.

(b) Hope as Struggle between Reality and Promise

Ruth was drawn to this same sense of God's future possibilities for her, though for her, the struggle between hard reality and the experience of promise was especially deep and pronounced. Ruth told two stories, but each of them described a similar theme of profound and unimaginable loss. For the majority of their adult lives, she and her husband had lived with the deep pain of the effects of a long series of medical missteps regarding their daughter's care. Their daughter had been born with acute medical need. Subsequent medical intervention had exacerbated her condition. Now, mostly as a result of those medical errors, their daughter bore cognitive and physical scars. When Ruth's sister died, also likely due to medical error, Ruth said

that she was ready to concede that life would never be good. Her past had been marred by repeated losses. She had come to the conclusion that this is the way life is—that the best any of us can do is be strong and hold on. When we reminded her of what Moltmann taught about the possibility of God’s future for her, despite her losses, my sense was that Ruth reacted with the same hesitancy that the parent does in Mark’s Gospel. Jesus promises to heal a sick child, but the father cries out, “Lord, I believe, but help my unbelief.” (Mark 9:24). Although it would be presumptuous to say that Ruth fully accepted Moltmann’s notion of God’s future for her, perhaps a moment of reckoning, and perhaps spiritual healing, began to take shape. For a life of sustained hardship, Ruth and her husband had come to accept a relatively bleak outlook on life. I was particularly struck by the starkness with which she chose to describe the permanency of her loss: “a HUGE (her upper-case letters) hole in my heart that cannot be filled.” Her cry recalled a similar cry of deep mourning in Psalm 137—words that characterized the opening chapter of this project: “How could we sing the Lord’s song in a foreign land?” Both represented soulful laments which give expressions to deep pain. Something had been taken away and, in its wake, it was difficult to imagine that life could ever be made right. Yet, Ruth’s cry of pain, like the one of the Israelites in Psalm 137, marked, possibly, the beginning place of a journey from loss to new hope. To begin the process forward, the group challenged Ruth to make contact with her sister’s treating physician at the time of death. Part of her inability to move forward from that experience, some of us thought, was an incomplete, perhaps inaccurate, understanding of exactly what had happened to cause her death.

(c) Solidarity: Shared Experience

Sarah

“I was very moved by some of our group and their courage.” (Final Evaluation Form)

Rachel

“Because of Dan’s own struggles and his willingness to share I can grasp the concept of Christian hope and apply it to my life.” (Final Evaluation Form)

Hannah

“It helped so much to know that other people had persevered through tough times.”

While I taught the group that Moltmann speaks of God’s solidarity with us—a solidarity that assures that God both hears our cries of need and promises to be in fellowship with us as we journey through our struggles—several participants pointed to an unexpected connection to Moltmann. Their experiences of devastation connected most deeply, not with Moltmann’s theology of hope, but with the story of his personal experiences of loss (losing a friend in war, prisoner of war, the darkness of the Holocaust). During one of our small group times, I told the group that Moltmann had experienced great loss in his life and had managed to grow past those losses to new hope. I said that Moltmann described this time in his life as nothing less than despair. I suggested that Moltmann had come to a juncture in life where, like many in the group, he had to make a fundamental decision to keep investing in life. Many seemed more receptive to his teachings when they learned about his struggle in finding hope.

Others pointed to their prior knowledge of my personal narrative of loss and wrote that their connection with my story helped them understand the value of Moltmann’s teaching. My personal aspect of the hope narrative functioned in two ways.

One, it validated their dark experiences of hopelessness. Hearing others tell stories of loss helped put their experiences in perspective. In hearing others share stories, they realized that their stories, though difficult, were not unique, and that they struggled as others struggled and there was comfort in knowing that. One comment seemed to express what many said:

“Knowing that we were with other people who had ‘moments’ of their own and in telling our stories we were receiving help from others for walking through our grief toward more peaceful, hopeful times.”

And two, it reminded them that others had faced what they face and managed to persevere. One participant wrote that our many stories pointed to the richness of God’s providence. She spoke of many stories and many signs of God. “We all had stories with different struggles,” she wrote, “and God has a place in all of them. I think we all trust in what God is doing.”

In the final analysis, personal story, including Moltmann’s struggle following the Holocaust, along with my own personal story of losing a son, conveyed the message most powerfully that hope is attainable even in the darkest occasions of life. Here was an unexpected connection to Moltmann’s concept of solidarity: that we experience solidarity with God in community with each other.

(d) New Definition of Strength in Times of Loss

Hannah

Since he has died, I have come to understand the depth of the connection we had . . . I was twice the person with him that I am today without him . . . I worry sometimes that I will not be able to fill the huge hole that his death has ripped into the fabric of my life and heart. Who will ever be able to fill his shoes? I worry that {my daughter} will always feel as though something is missing in her life, but thanks to her dad, she is a very strong little girl. I think she is better than I am at coping with his loss.

Hannah identified with Moltmann’s concept of God’s strength not as capacity to stand above the fray of human need, to be stoically unmoved, but precisely God’s willingness to fully enter the spectrum of human struggle. As she told her story, Hannah attributed qualities of great strength to her late husband, referring to his ability to act with resoluteness, to face his own

illness with a calmness and courage, to help her deal with some complicated dynamics in her family of origin. Yet in reflecting on her own capacity to face the challenges of going forward in life without her husband, she doubted her own strength. When I suggested to her that strength can be understood not only as resoluteness but as passion, Hannah began to assess her qualities of strength as deep capacity to care and to feel deeply. In her story she suggested that her late husband had a great gift to think analytically and to express himself with sharp wit, an ability to know exactly what to do in the moment. We talked together in our group about how strength may also be a capacity not only to speak and to think analytically, but also to be fully present with others in the moment of great pain and indecision. In listening to Hannah tell her story, I remembered a passage from Nicholas Wolterstorff's *Lament for a Son*:

On the way back I thought about tears. Our culture says that {we} must be strong and that the strength of a person in sorrow is to be seen in a tearless face But why celebrate stoic tearlessness? And why is it so important to act strong? I have been graced with the strength to endure.²¹⁷

(e) Hope as Decision to Live

Rachel

It all started in July 2009. I awoke one morning and was anxious about everything with absolutely no reason to be. When the anxiety and insomnia continued the next several weeks . . . the doctor prescribed a mild anxiety reliever and sleeping pill. The anxiety helped somewhat, but I started to become withdrawn. I actually felt it happening but was powerless to stop it I could not shut my mind off but didn't have a thought in my head . . . Friends would comment they wanted the old Rachel to return On November 3, I received the news that I had breast cancer After the doctor described the courses of treatment, I asked what would happen if I chose not to do anything. The doctor said I would die. In my present state, I didn't think dying sounded like such a bad thing—at least I'd get some sleep {A few weeks later} I consented to have Thanksgiving with my best friend and her family. I couldn't think of anything to be thankful for and didn't want to be around people who were having a good time. I had a terrible day and that night I decided to finally get some sleep and end the turmoil by taking all the anti-depressants and sleeping pills. I ended up in the

²¹⁷ Wolterstorff, 26.

psych ward . . . At some point in all this emotional upheaval, I had to make a decision on what course of action I was going to take with regard to the cancer surgery and treatment. I had been asking God for help with this and at 3:00 one morning, I heard a voice clearly tell me what I should do.

The group was struck by the fact that God's voice had spoken to her in perhaps the darkest moment of her life. The biblical metaphor in Isaiah 9 of "light shining in the darkness," came to mind. And yet, perhaps the clearest image of God in Rachel's life was the one of Elijah, languishing in a mountain-side cave, overcome with fear, anger, and pity, finally hearing the still, small voice of God telling him to have courage and to go on living. That voice in the early morning hours was Rachel's Elijah moment. Rachel seems to connect with Moltmann's concept of hope as summons to act into Jesus' resurrection. At times, one's inclination to live may be very small, and yet, despite all the reasons not to live, an experience of God in the darkness gives her courage to keep moving forward.

2. Points of Narrative Divergence

(a) Privileging of Hope as Cognitive Process

One of the participants wrote in her final evaluation that "Moltmann is too impractical for me to apply his concepts to my life." Throughout the process of story theology many of them preferred to linger in step two and struggled to make connections to the more academic/theological notions of Moltmann's hope. Another criticized me for being "too academic" suggesting that the greater value of the study was that I had provided a pastoral context for sharing. Though the study succeeded in teaching new information about a Christian understanding of hope, the concepts presented were too esoteric for personal use for some.

(b) Modest Hope

Michal

{My son} still struggles, but is winning the battle right now. Maybe that is where I find hope for myself.

A majority of the participants resonated, almost intuitively, with Keshgegian and Marshall in their conceptualization of the experience of hope as a provisional experience. Where Moltmann spoke of hope in the grander terms of God's Kingdom *telos*—a progressive, linear advancement to the steadily increasing realization of God's resurrection possibilities—Keshgegian and Marshall spoke of hope in terms of life's little victories, small steps forward, daily pleasures, partial moments of Kingdom realization. Leah, for example, who struggled in her story to find reasons for hope, was encouraged by the possibility that while the larger problems of her life could not be immediately resolved, she could develop a hope not on some great achievement of victory, but in smaller moments of victory, little in-breaks of God's presence along the way. Michal also identified with this notion of hope. Many aspects were still broken in her life. Her son was still in recovery. She still experienced considerable anxiety and said that some days it is hard even to muster the energy to get out of bed. And yet, she concluded that maybe the evidence of hope in her life was to be found not in the final fixing of what is broken, but in the capacity to persevere: in each day finding the strength to continue getting up, in celebrating that while her son will always be in recovery, he is nevertheless engaging in the process of recovery. Here was hope for Michal: not in God's Kingdom come but in provisions of daily bread, in little reasons for joy along the journey.

(c) Scriptural Narratives: Other Resonant Metaphors

Anna

In our final session you shared the tomb Bible story. I heard for the first time the emphasis on ‘unbind him.’” (Final Evaluation Form)

Michal

All of the passages were meaningful. The one that stood out most for me was Lazarus—once dead made alive. From the ashes. You can gather hope. (Final Evaluation Form)

Throughout the story theology process, I introduced scripture references to reinforce the notion of resurrection possibility. Through scripture, I wanted to teach and reaffirm that God in Jesus has incredible life-giving power and is willing to share that power in our lives. Often times, I said, the obstacle is not about God’s willingness, but about our capacity to trust in God’s provisions of life. I told the group that I was going to share the “seven signs” of Jesus in John’s Gospel. In the final evaluation I asked the participants to name “one Bible story or passage that was especially meaningful” to them. Three of them named the story of Lazarus (John 11) and the connection I made to hope as being God’s will to “unbind” us. Anna wrote, “I heard for the first time the emphasis on “unbind him.”” Hannah pointed to a meditation I had shared about Silent Saturday. In the time between crucifixion and resurrection, I told the group, there is silence and the feeling, the thought that maybe nothing will happen. There are silences in our lives, too, I said. Perhaps the silent moments, when it feels like God is absent, are preludes to resurrection. Rachel spoke more generally about the theme of power in John’s “seven signs.” The Gospel narrative reminded her that despite her weakest moments God has life-giving power. While Moltmann points to the Exodus metaphor (Exodus 15) to put emphasis on hope as liberation not only from sin but also from the fears that keep us from living an abundant life, many of the participants indicated in their final evaluations forms that the metaphors of

“unbinding” (John 11) and waiting for God in the silence of darkness (Holy Saturday) were more resonant metaphors for how hope emerges from experiences of loss.

(d) Presence Today

When asked to comment on the value of the theological perspectives that were offered (Moltmann, Keshgegian, Marshall, Frankl), a majority of the participants hinted at the relative impracticality of Moltmann’s theology and the importance of Keshgegian’s perspective on hope as experience of God in the present. Their preference may have been influenced by my characterization of Moltmann as being more future-oriented (Moltmann also speaks of Christo-praxis) and Keshgegian as more present-oriented. Yet their comments seemed to suggest that Keshgegian provided a corrective to what they had already heard about hope as the future reward for a life well-lived. Keshgegian’s argument that hope can also be a less-than-grand experience of God in the everyday moments of life, that it can be provisional and not complete, that it can be modest with many ebbs and flows, resonated deeply with their own experiences of the reality of life. Participants not only appreciated the perspective but also found considerable value in her “Practices of Habitation.”²¹⁸ Regarding Keshgegian’s perspective, one participant wrote, “This is new to me, but I find it to be a more strengthening (hopeful) way to think.” Another wrote, “It helps me to reframe my experiences to shape my present state of mind instead of waiting for the time to come.” Several participants noted similar appreciation for Ellen Ott Marshall’s more present-oriented eschatology. “Marshall’s perspective gives me the most understanding and hope,” one participant wrote. It is a plan of action—stepping stones to the future and a better life.²¹⁹

²¹⁸ Keshgegian, 188ff.

²¹⁹ Marshall, 96ff. Hope, Marshall writes, is a willingness to apply all of one’s resources, to conceptualize a plan, and to address the suffering.

F. New Perspectives For The Practice Of Hope In A Pastoral Care Setting

This project began with the assumption that through the processes of story theology, I would introduce the participants to the three provisions of Moltmann's theology of hope. The project's intention was that Moltmann's language of hope, along with concepts from other theologians, would help shape the way participant's articulated the meaning of their experiences of loss. As described in the hope-making model above, steps three and four of Baker's story theology process would be critical junctures of theological reframing and new understanding. But, of course, the participants brought their own insights that, in keeping with the design of narrative theology theory, served as an additional aspect of new understanding. The insights gained from this interaction are described below.

1. Causal Relationships: the Personal Theodicy Question

This is not really a new perspective, of course. The question of "why" in the face of suffering dates to the beginning of the scriptural narrative. Yet, as Moltmann thinks about loss and the recovery of hope, "how" God is present with us and "where" God is present with us are more important than "why" we have experienced loss. In fact, Moltmann does not offer a satisfactory answer to "why" the Holocaust happened and "why" some died and some did not. Moltmann's consolation is to say 1) that God is with us in the "gallows" moments of our lives (solidarity) and 2) that from the losses we anticipate new possibilities of God's future. But repeatedly in the course of our story theology process of hope recovery, participants began their stories by asking "why" God had allowed their losses to happen. Of significance to this study is the degree to which several participants internalized their experiences of loss as evidence of some personal inadequacy. This was troubling on two accounts. One, it attributed a punitive

quality to God's character. And two, it suggested that there are possible ways to live life that might protect one from the hard realities of life. Rachel, for example, framed her descent into deep depression and subsequent attempts at suicide by asking, "I don't know what I've done to deserve this?" At the very least, her question suggests, that an important part of hope recovery involves a theological rehabilitation of God's character. The participants seemed to teach that hope is as much about experiencing (affective) God's love as understanding (cognitive) any theological concept. In what ways could a project on hope recovery deepen the experience of God's love for us?

But more than rehabilitating a theological understanding of God's character, it seemed that participants needed help separating loss from feelings of personal inadequacy. In this sense the theodicy question was less "Why does God allow bad things to happen to good people?" but rather, "Why did God allow this to happen to me?" The question gave expression not only to self-doubt, but also a deep disappointment that having lived their lives sacrificially and faithfully, they still experienced heartache. At least part of the difficulty of hope for these participants was in wondering about the value of keeping faith. If the rain falls on the just and the unjust, why persevere in faithful obedience? In the end, despite Moltmann's claim that theodicy is unimportant to a theology of hope, it remained at the heart of nearly all those who reflected on their stories of loss.

A scene from the movie *Good Will Hunting* frequently came to mind. Will Hunting has suffered the pain of an abusive childhood. Most of his young adulthood has been spent coming to terms with what he believes is a personal sense of inadequacy. Will Hunting believes he has done something to deserve the pain. But in a dramatic final scene, Will's counselor finally confronts him with the truth of his life: "It is not your fault." Recovery of hope in the aftermath

of loss may be as elemental as helping a person experience the truth of those words. If Moltmann's theology of hope seems inadequate, it fails here to provide an adequate answer to the driving personal question: "Why me?"

2. Rage and Hatred in Faith Discussion

Leah

We got married November 6, 2004 and in February 2005 we got a phone call. A PHONE CALL (upper-case hers) that would put our lives on a course to a destination only God knew. {My husband's ex-wife} was dead—the mother of his two kids, the mother that hated {my husband} so much that she threatened to hurt the kids if they even spoke of their dad. The mother that tormented {my husband} with threats that just would not end. There was a conversation between {my husband and his ex-wife's husband}. Just the name alone makes me shudder. I hate the name {of my husband's ex-wife's husband}. The hate inside me had started to build and I was not familiar with these feelings at all. {My husband} was going to finally get his kids, but we didn't realize at what cost. We ended up in a custody law-suit with the step-dad but after two years in the courts, close to \$35,000 later, we had {my husband's two children}.

Leah goes on to explain the very difficult time the family has had in blending. She writes about her relationships with the children from his former marriage:

To this day I still struggle with loving them. Especially {her}. We butt heads and I am angry at her most days. {His children} hate us because of {his former wife's} death. {She} says she does not want to come to church because there is just no point. God has done nothing for her . . . The feelings I have for this person makes me really question myself.

Leah concludes about the general darkness and pervasive anger in her life by saying:

I would hope that God is in the middle of this situation, that he has a plan. I just can't see it.

At first analysis, Leah seemed to have the longest journey to recovery of hope. She used the word "hate" numerous times to describe both the intensity of her feeling towards both her

husband's ex-wife and for members of the blended family. Speaking of her husband's ex-wife, she wrote: "I hate his name. The hate inside of me had started to build and I was not familiar with these feelings." Later in her narrative, she described her relationship to one of the blended family members saying, "The feelings I have for this person makes me really question myself. I hate the way I feel about {this person}." She goes on to explain that "the way I feel about {this person} makes me question myself as a mother, wife, friend and good person. I know that it is not normal to feel the way I do" Yet, Leah more than any other member of the group reminded me of the lesson of scriptural wisdom found in Psalm 137. Chapter one of this project begins by naming that lament as an archetypical narrative of loss. In loss, I write, we give our own expression to the question, "How could we sing the Lord's song in a foreign land?" With Leah's story, full of raw emotion, I remembered that closing sequence of Psalm 137. What apparently begins as a mournful plea to find God in a foreign land ends with some of the most provocative, shocking language in all scripture:

O daughter Babylon, you devastator! Happy shall they be who pay you back what you have done to us! Happy shall they be who take your little ones and dash them against the rock! (Psalm 137: 8-9)

Leah reminded me that even my so-called archetypical story of loss ended not with gratitude or expectation, but with rage. Neither the Hebrews' story, nor Leah's I believe, ends there, but it begins there. The process to hope recovery must provide a context for expression of raw, uncensored, uninhibited emotion. Anger and rage, even expressions of hatred, may be signs not of an un-Christian sensibility, but of a Christian who is struggling to come to terms honestly with the intensity of a painful experience. As David Blumenthal reflects, there is also a place for anger and rage in the divine-human relationship.²²⁰

²²⁰ David R. Blumenthal, "Liturgies of Anger: the Lost Art of Imprecation," *Crosscurrents* (Summer 2002): 179.

Sometimes new hope must begin not with an assessment of the future but with a rehabilitation of the past. Where Sarah looks back and draws strength from remembering the ways of God's presence in her life, Leah looks back and remembers only pain and anger, even hatred. The words of a prayer come to mind: "Lord, help us to overcome our fear of the future for having known so much pain in our pasts." For Leah, the experience of hope may need to begin precisely where it was lost: in the past. And to her comment about the seeming absence of God in her family's situation, I recalled a central narrative in Moltmann's theology of hope: that God, who brought creation from nothing, has power to create new life in the nothing places of our lives (*creatio ex-nihilo*).²²¹

3. Hope as Mere Survival

I was overwhelmed by the sheer darkness of all their stories. In fact, some of them were so dark, so utterly God-forsaken, that I was not certain that hope was possible. From Michal who told of struggling and agonizing to get through each day for a multitude of reasons that seemed justified, to Rachel who described her moments on the precipice, to Leah who told with aching detail her struggle to overcome anger, to Ruth who reminded me that when it comes to a parent's concern for her child there is really something just as bad, maybe worse, as the death of a child, I tried to remember that one of the pre-project assumptions about Christian hope is that it is possible to find something redeeming in every occasion of life. Yet, maybe Christian hope is more modest than that. Maybe the benefit of hope is not in finding the meaning, or the value of our experiences of loss, but in realizing the capacity, by whatever means possible, to keep going forward.

²²¹ Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, 197. Also, Moltmann's discussion found in *In the End—The Beginning*, 63ff., where Moltmann reflects on justification as God's will to make right the lives of both victims and perpetrators.

4. The Weight of Expectation

Michal

January 2001, my father died. My son was brought in from the rehab he was staying in to attend the funeral. I buried my father on Saturday, {my son} relapsed on heroin Sunday, my boyfriend committed suicide in my living room on Thursday, {my son} was kicked out of rehab and forced on a bus back {home} (didn't know where he would go) on Saturday, I went home to find my house flooded. I lapsed into a deep depression where I stayed in bed for over a week—all I wanted to do was sleep I am not the same person I was before all this started. I was always confident and optimistic—I miss that person so much. I feel defeated most of the time and painfully tired. {My son} still struggles, but is winning the battle right now . . . maybe that is where I find hope for myself.

Michal's story reminded me that Christian faith disappoints not only in preventing the losses of life, but that it also sometimes heightens those losses by creating an expectation that the pain can be finally alleviated. Speaking about a particularly difficult week that began in January 2001, Michal commented: "This is only a snapshot of the many times that hopelessness took hold with {my son's} frequent overdoes, incarcerations, and injuries" Michal goes on to say, "I feel defeated most of the time and painfully tired. {My son} still struggles, but is winning the battle right now. Maybe this is where I find hope for myself." I think I hear in her words an even deeper question—that whatever Christian hope is supposed to be (and Michal does not claim to know), it has not helped her get past the symptoms of her pain. The words "defeated," "painfully tired," and "deep depression" marked not only her narrative, but also tone of presentation. Michal was still living in the darkness of a time nearly twelve years ago and there was little sign of relief. Her story pointed to the paucity of Christian faith, as she had learned it growing up in the Church, to provide resources to cope with painful loss. And here, I suppose, is the challenge of finding hope in a pastoral care setting: that it might need to begin with a Christian theological apologetic and a frank discussion about the chasm between the promises of the Christian faith and experience.

Michal's story teaches me that any study of hope must include adequate reflection, perhaps extensive pedagogy, on what we can rightly expect from God. Michal brought the burdens of her expectations to the project: to regain some of her former optimism, to find relief from chronic depression and fatigue, to recapture a view of life that is not consumed in memories of deep loss and to find some remedy for a pervasive sense of fear and dread that continues to mark her life. What answer does Christian hope provide for such concrete human needs? Other than the assurance of God's solidarity with her, what other provisions can Michal expect from the practice of hope?

John Claypool devotes an entire chapter to the problem of hope and expectations, arguing that the provisions of hope come in three forms including miracles, our will to collaborate with God, and finally, the gift of endurance.²²² It is a modest claim, but here perhaps we might unbind the double wound of loss: giving up the burden of unrealistic expectations of God and hope in order to know God's presence in occasions of unrelenting darkness. In his book *Why Do Christians Break Down?* William Miller writes that Christians break down, fall beneath the weight of their crosses to bear, not only because their crosses are too heavy, but also because they persist in carrying a load of false notions about hope.²²³ Wolterstorff, for instance, writes that the pain of losing his son was made bearable in part because he was able to accept that the consolation of hope is not necessarily the gift of some great gladness of resurrection possibility, at least not in the beginning, but the strength to simply walk through, or be in the experience of suffering. "I go through my paces," he writes. "What the world gives, I still accept. But what it promises, I no longer reach for."²²⁴ For Wolterstorff this meaning of hope as endurance is gathered up by the poet Maria Dermout who asks, "Can sadness be relieved, or can one only pass

²²² Claypool, 53.

²²³ William A. Miller, *Why Do Christians Break Down?* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing, 1973), 104-105.

²²⁴ Wolterstorff, 48.

it by, very slowly?” In response to the poet, and writing from his own experience, Wolterstorff is emphatic that hope is more often the gift of strength and patience that enables the suffering one to pass *through* what the Psalmist calls “the darkest valley,” (Psalm 23: 4) and not a promise of some easy path *around* the deep experience of loss.

In providing pastoral care to persons such as Michal—“always brought to church growing up,” she writes, and coming ever since—Keshgegian and Marshall call to mind the hurtful excesses of a triumphal hope. Sometimes we do not experience the sort hope that the Bible seems to promise. Here, we may begin to think of Christian hope as Keshgegian envisions: not as destination but as journey, so that the experience of hope, when it comes, is founded on our willingness to take comfort in the little, modest signs of hope, in our continued strength, despite all odds, to continue the journey.

5. Affective Experiences of Hope

Anna

In October my daughter had to drop out of school. She was having anxiety attacks and suffering with depression. The ex-boyfriend was still abusing her. I truly feared for her life I was constantly in fear and constantly doubting whether I was doing the right thing I was existing on 2-3 hours of sleep every night, unable to eat, and I began having paralyzing anxiety attacks.

Michal

I lapsed into a deep depression where I stayed in bed for over a week—all I wanted to do was sleep I feel defeated most of the time and painfully tired.

Rachel

At work I couldn't concentrate or focus. I could not shut my mind off but didn't have a thought in my head{After I got my cancer diagnosis} I didn't think dying sounded like such a bad thing—at least I'd get some sleep.

Leah

The hate inside of me had started to build I know that is so wrong to feel that way but I just don't know how else to feel or see anything different

The participants shared a common litany of emotion: “I was angry. I was sad. I was frustrated. I felt alone. I could not sleep. I had repeated anxiety attacks. I could not make my mind turn off.” Only months after our time together, sitting in a room, leafing through their stories, did the import of their words dawn on me. I had assumed they were dawdling in inter-subjective experiences of hope: speaking with self-pity about their losses, indulging in emotional deprivations of having been made to endure things so horrible. And maybe some of them were. But in another way I began to imagine with them about a kind of experience of hope that was understood not with theological words and concepts but as concrete moments of simple physiological comfort. Experience of hope must at least be described, as Anna did, as the gift of inner peace in the face of repeated panic attacks. Or, as Rachel described, hope must also be the gift to sleep, to turn one’s mind off, to stop all the racing thoughts, and simply feel relaxation. Or, as Leah described, hope is a desire to experience an absence of anger’s tension. Moltmann offers a cognitive understanding of Christian hope. But perhaps there is also validity in speaking of hope as a quality of feeling. Hope in this regard would be less about thinking one’s way to new hope (cognitive restructuring through reframing), and more feeling one’s way to the possibility of new action. As nearly all the participants indicated, hopelessness was framed not as absence of right belief about God and God’s future, but as a preponderance of feelings that contradicted the experience of hope. This may suggest new stand-alone efficacy for step two of Baker’s story theology: expressions of emotion not as a perfunctory segue to the more important work of theological reflection, but feeling for the sake of making affective connections to God and to the meaning of hope. This may also add credence to the claim that the experience of hope comes in modest forms.

6. Chronic Sorrow: Wounded Capacities for Hope?²²⁵

Ruth

It's impossible for me to remember how many times the doctor told us, 'Just put her on this medicine for a year. She'll be fine.' This was at the age of 3.

Ruth's story, spanning a period beginning with the birth of her daughter (now an adult child), to the time, nearly fifteen years ago when she lost her sister, teaches me that hopelessness is not always the result of a single, precipitating loss, nor does hopelessness always have a clear beginning and ending. Sometimes the loss of hope is the result of an accumulation of losses which leave a permanent mark on one's life.

As I listen to Ruth tell her story, I wonder if her life of sustained loss hinders her capacity to believe in God's future. Though I insist on the power of God's promise of hope for the chronic sorrow that seems to characterize Ruth's life, I wonder if perhaps Ruth's experiences of loss have wounded, diminished and complicated her capacity to experience the depth of hope described in this project—a hope that is able to move beyond the painful memory of loss to new understandings of God's presence in her life, and with this deepening sense of God's solidarity, a greater capacity to accept new possibilities. And yet, I share Moltmann's conviction: that God is *ex creator nihilo*, and in this regard, no circumstance in life, and no life, however deeply marked by the pain of chronic sorrow, lies beyond the reach of God's healing power. Kaethe Weingarten suggests that Ruth's experience of chronic sorrow points to hope of a different kind. For Ruth, and others who have had similar experiences of life, perhaps it is more reasonable to think of hope not as a progressive movement from hopelessness to hope, but rather as a life-long

²²⁵ Kaethe Weingarten, "Sorrow: A Therapist's Reflection on the Inevitable and the Unknowable," *Family Process*, Vol. 51, No. 4 (December 2012): 442. The concept, "chronic sorrow" originated with Simon Olshansky in 1962. Chronic sorrow is defined as "unending grief," and as "a normal response to living with ongoing losses." Olshansky first applied the term to parents of disabled children. Over the years, and especially beginning in the 1990's, the term has been applied to a wide spectrum of long-term-loss circumstances.

process of assimilating loss into the story of one's life.²²⁶ In this sense, the experience of hope is validated not by the absence of sorrow (or as a capacity to tell a more hopeful story of one's past), but rather by an intentional, deliberate, acknowledgement that some traces of sorrow will continue to co-exist with new-found experiences of hope.

In chapter five, I continue a discussion of the hope-model by drawing from the small group sessions to discuss the value of this model for the study of hope in a pastoral care setting. The following discussion notes both contributions and deficiencies in Moltmann's theology of hope as a guiding narrative in the study of the practice of hope in a pastoral care setting for those who have experienced loss while also suggesting revisions for use of the model in future hope studies. The chapter concludes with a description of the dialectical nature of hope as observed in this study's small group process, finally suggesting that while hope does offer an answer to the Hebrews' cry, "How could we sing the Lord's song in a foreign land?" the song we eventually learn to sing (a new song of hope) is sung with both a mixture of joy and modesty.

²²⁶ Weingarten, 442-43.

CHAPTER V. FINAL REFLECTIONS: SINGING A NEW SONG

O Lord Jesus our God . . .
 Bless {our} hopes
 The first tiny stirrings of desire
 The little resolve to go forward
 The small vision of what might be.
 Deal gently with {our} fears
 The hesitation of uncertainty
 The darkness of the unknown
 The lack of confidence in {our} own capacity
 And turn it all to trust in you.²²⁷
 —Gabrielle Hadington

A. The Participants

I begin this final chapter remembering the people who made the journey of hope with me. More than once during our time together one of them would ask, “Is this what you wanted? Is this what you need?” Each time I said that all I needed was for them to share honestly some of the stories of their lives. I had no pre-conceived notions of where the process might lead. The process itself was the purpose of our meeting. Sometime later, I told them, I would think about all the stories we told, read their reflections, study and collate all the results of the various instruments of hope measurement they had completed for me and try to piece together what I believed our time together had taught each of us. But for the moment, I told them that it would be enough to be willing to come to share a story from their lives.

I assumed numerous roles in the group. I was teacher, facilitator, pastor, and participant-observer. And in all these various roles there was a difference between us. Yet, the commonality of our experience is what made the group process work as well as it did. Each of them knew something of my story of having experienced considerable loss and of my struggle to

²²⁷ Gabrielle Hadington, *The Oxford Book of Prayer*, edited by George Appleton (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 89.

regain hope. In fact, I told them that they would teach me in this process of hope-making. I had some ideas from having had devoted considerable time to reading various theologies of hope. But I was still trying to piece together the outlines of a process of hope. To this end, I wanted them to know that I was personally invested in what we might learn together. I was more than a participant-observer. I was a fellow struggler, a wounded healer. I had come to join them and walk with them. I had a hunch that their stories of loss would resonate with my story of loss. I came with the expectation that something in their stories—something of what they had been through and come through and possibly overcome—would help me, too.

Finally, if they had any apprehension that our weeks together might be nothing more than coming together to tell stories, I reminded them that ours would be a holy work. The Holy Spirit, the power of God which, as Moltmann writes, “Creates space and opens new vistas” would be with us to lead us to surer places of hope. The Spirit’s creative agency in our midst, together with our willingness to speak and listen and reflect held promise for new beginnings—fresh experiences of consolation, or heightened awareness of God in our lives, or a renewed hope that despite the hard realities of our pasts, the design of some new future might begin to take shape.

B. Assessing the Model’s Use for Pastoral Care Application

Before suggesting some additional insights that were gained throughout this hope study, I want to make some observations about the use of Moltmann’s narrative of hope as a pedagogical piece in the study’s model of hope.

1. Narrative Contributions

Although Moltmann's theology was offered as the primary conversation partner in our process, other theologians, along with scriptural metaphors, appeared to offer more resonant narratives. Keshgegian's notion of journey to hope as one of small steps forward resonated the most deeply with all participants, and in this regard it would probably be wrong to say that Moltmann's narrative provided a singularly adequate or primary theological framework for fuller understanding of the hope journey. Even so, Moltmann's theology offered participants four useful, albeit rudimentary concepts, for understanding the experience of hope. In thinking about our small group conversations, it seems to me that Moltmann, while not always succeeding in providing precise language, nevertheless described significant aspects of the journey from loss to hope.

(a) Suffering is a part of the experience of Christian faith.

Not only do we suffer, but also God suffers with us. Suffering is not indicative of a poor degree of faith, but is an essential part of Jesus' life and God's involvement in the Son's life. Although participants did seem to understand the particulars of Moltmann's argument of God's passability, but not completely his notion of Trinitarian participation in Jesus' suffering, I believe that Moltmann's emphasis on suffering validated their own experiences.

(b) There is a gap between the promises of God's Kingdom and the realities of life.

Moltmann's emphasis on the future aspect of God's resurrection affirmed an essential belief that despite the particulars of the tragedies they had experienced, neither their life-stories, much less God's, had been completed. Most of them understood that this future aspect of God's kingdom, though for some only minimally evident, was a hopeful possibility.

(c) God can be found in the darkness.

It may be difficult to find God in the darkness. But because of the character of God who, as Moltmann taught, wills to be in companionship with us, there is a possibility of finding God in the darkness. For some this relieved the tension of trying to find God where and how they could not, and where and how they had been told God must be found. Darkness, like suffering, is a part of the Christian experience. I sensed that in many ways this lesson touched them more strongly than any talk about resurrection possibility. Many of them indicated that even though the study had not helped them resolve the problems they faced, they felt a new-found relief in being able to speak honestly about feelings they had tried hard to deny.

(d) Community is a gift of God.

When we who suffer are with others who struggle, we feel stronger. In fact, community, mere presence, is equally as important as any word. Moltmann spoke of the Church as the Exodus community—as a place where we come together to experience God’s liberating presence. And though I do not recall that any of them used the phrase to describe their experience of being in the hope study, they alluded to its meaning by expressing gratefulness for being able to share their stories of loss with a listening community and to hear how others were struggling.

(e) The Spirit helps us do what we cannot. It is God’s Spirit which finally makes hope possible.

Anna

I prayed for God to protect my daughter and help my mother. I begged Him to tell me what to do. (Story)

I don’t believe that hope springs from a will to live because when we reach rock bottom our thinking is not clear enough to make that choice. (Final evaluation)

Rachel

I had to make a decision on what course of action I was going to take with regard to the cancer surgery and treatment. I had been asking God for help with this and at 3:00 one morning, I heard a voice clearly tell me what to do.

I recall those who strongly disagreed that hope was, as Frankl writes, a choice that each of us makes. Anna was emphatic that in the depths of our losses, we do not have the capacity to make right choices. Ruth emphasized that if there is new hope, God makes it possible. Although this study concludes that hope is mostly a collaborative effort—that is relies on God’s power in our weakness and our responses of faithfulness—Moltmann’s narrative of hope succeeds where the narratives of Keshgegian and Marshall and Frankl fall short. The body of Moltmann’s work, especially *The Spirit of Life*, begins to develop a necessary pneumatology. Keshgegian is bold to suggest that “we realize we are the authors of time’s tale.”²²⁸ Yet, in *The Spirit of Life*, Moltmann insists that it is God’s Spirit that provides “a new energy for living,” and God’s Spirit which “creates space” in our lives, setting in motion a way through the narrow places of our lives. Later, Moltmann adds that the Spirit is the form that God’s empathy takes in relationship with us, or the Spirit which is God’s incessant desire to be with us, alongside us, even when we wander off course. It is the Spirit, Moltmann writes, “that gives us power to say yes to life despite outward intimidations and all inward fear.”²²⁹ Marshall, though strongly insistent on the responsibility for personal, cooperative agency with God, nevertheless agrees with Moltmann, arguing that though ours is the decision to practice an “ethic of risk,” it is “God who empowers us and makes a way where this is no way.”²³⁰ In the final analysis, this study contends that Moltmann’s theology of enabling Spirit is essential to a full understanding of hope recovery.

²²⁸ Keshgegian, 221.

²²⁹ Moltmann, *The Spirit of Life*, 105.

²³⁰ Marshall, 81-82.

2. Narrative Deficiencies

But despite these four ways that Moltmann contributed to the process of hope-making, participant comments indicated that his usefulness as theological partner was modest. Drawing from those comments, I name four primary narrative deficiencies.

(a) Moltmann provided an inadequate theodicy.

Again, as noted above, Moltmann does not intend to offer a theodicy. Beginning with his experience of Holocaust, Moltmann is not concerned why Holocaust happened, but what God intends to do in the aftermath of Holocaust. Regardless, questions of personal theodicy were recurrent in the study.

(b) Moltmann's pedagogy requires an advanced degree of readiness.

Using the transtheoretical model, this study concludes that participants who engage Moltmann's narrative of hope must be at, or be capable of, reaching stage three of personal readiness (post-contemplative). Another way to assess Moltmann's narrative of hope is to suggest that it may be less helpful as a way of offering primary pastoral care and more helpful as a tool to help emotionally ready Christians reflect on the meaning of Christian faith and human tragedy. Moltmann's pedagogy is not a beginner's tool either for group facilitator or participant. In fact, I was surprised that some participants had difficulty articulating their stories of loss. They could feel the pain of their losses, but had difficulty describing (perhaps talking about) them. All of them had difficulty moving past a naming of feelings to the later processes of meaning-making, much less action. Perhaps this is an indication that I (project facilitator) had misjudged their degree of readiness. And also, it is to say that this project is not useful for application with individuals who have not had previous therapy.

(c) Moltmann's pedagogy assumes an orderly progression of thought.

While Moltmann's narrative of hope succeeds in setting the parameters of theological discussion, we begin where we are (rooted in personal history) and proceed to investigate the possibilities of God's future (Kingdom *telos*), the progression between first thoughts and any form of realization is much less orderly than Moltmann's theology provides. In fact, the time needed to process experiences of darkness is much greater than Moltmann seems to allow and the goal of resurrection possibility, though elegant in concept, is less easily attainable than Moltmann suggests. Keshgegian and Marshall's conceptions of the ways in which the journey to hope is made appealed more deeply with the project's participants. The journey forward happens haltingly with plenty of starts and stops. The journey is a *seriatim* process of meaning-making. It is a messy process, moving forward neither fluidly nor sequentially, but unevenly and circuitously, at times, cyclically and repetitively. It is a journey that looks to resurrection promises, but more often than not, it is a journey of modest and imperfect steps. It challenges us to look to God's future, and puts before us great possibilities (with God all things are possible); and yet, it is, as Keshgegian says, a journey worth making simply for the sake of making the journey. In the final analysis, Moltmann's narrative of hope may be that it allows us the freedom to stand in the darkness and to find God there.

(d) Moltmann's narrative of hope offers a cognitive approach to hope-making.

Such an approach, of course, will offer appeal to those in the faith community who choose to engage the Christian faith in a largely intellectual way. Yet, most studies conclude that only a small percentage of an average congregation will embrace such an approach to faith. As noted earlier, participants taught me not to overlook the validity of an affective experience of hope. While notions of divine passability, solidarity, have value in a full understanding of the

nature of God's relationship with the suffering one, so too do God's gifts of peace, rest, relaxation, and a good night's sleep. At its core, Moltmann's theology is, to use therapeutic terms, the capacity to cognitively reframe one's suffering experiences through the frame of Christ's resurrection. Not all will engage in an experience of hope based on processes of cognitive restructuring.

3. Implementation of Model: Suggested Revisions for Future Studies

The model relied on the inter-relationship of four primary disciplines: narrative theology, Moltmann pedagogy, pastoral care adaptation of reframing theory, and transtheoretical model of readiness. Each of these disciplines required that participants attain a rudimentary working understanding of the basic concepts in order to engage the process of the practice of hope. The time allotted for the implementation of both the didactic and praxis components was not sufficient. My guess is that multiple sessions would be required to sufficiently teach the respective concepts: 1) story theology, 2) Moltmann's narrative of hope, 3) theory of reframing, 4) and transtheoretical concept of readiness for change. Only after planning the time to gain a working understanding of these concepts might participants be able to engage in the practice of hope. As facilitator, the degree of difficulty involved in simultaneously teaching advanced concepts of theology, pastoral care, narrative theory, and readiness, while also guiding participants in the practice of hope, was nearly impossible.

Future hope-making projects would likely have more success by incorporating the following suggestions:

- (a) Separate the didactic and praxis components of this study

(b) Make provisions for sufficient time in the small group (minimum one session per concept) to teach the concepts used in the model including story theology, essential content of Moltmann's narrative of resurrection possibility (or primary conversation partner) and reframing as theory.

(c) Devote an entire session to help explain the model of hope to be implemented taking care to explain the inter-relationship of the concepts.

(1) Story telling as a way to present the issues of life that need the healing process of hope and as a possible way to experience new hope.

(2) Presentation of theological pedagogy as a way to describe the issues embedded in our struggles to acknowledge and move to hope. For future hope studies I would strongly consider using Keshgegian as the primary theologian with Moltmann used when appropriate. Participants seemed to intuitively resonate with Keshgegian's descriptions of the hope process.

(3) Reframing explained as a process of new orientation illustrated in the biblical narrative instead of a concept from therapeutic disciplines. The use of parabolic illustrations of reframing, for example, used in Jesus' teachings might offer a more resonate illustration of how reframing works in Christian faith.

(4) Transtheoretical model of change presented as a way to assess one's readiness to practice the concepts of hope-making.

(d) Allow a period of soak time for participants to assimilate the concepts.

(e) Engage participants in an additional period of time to gain greater proficiency in the practice of hope envisioned in this model.

(f) Before the first session explain, with examples, how to tell a story for theological exploration. Dori Baker argues that we all have a story to tell. And while we do, in their final

evaluations, several participants indicated that they had not understood what sort of stories I had wanted them to share. One participant seemed to sum up the confusion by writing: “It took me a while to understand the parameters of our stories, and I’m not sure we succeeded with what was expected. It might have been clearer with an example.” Related to the process of storytelling, I offer two additional practical considerations for those who may use this model for future hope studies:

(1) Be intentional about completing all four steps of Dori Baker’s story theology process. For the purposes of this study, the fourth step was the critical step towards the act of reframing. Participants were more comfortable with steps one and two, and at my insistence, three. More than once our group session ended before we could spend adequate time reframing. Sometimes, of course, the reframing was implicit in step three. For future studies I would advise the facilitator to be intentional about completing step four. Step four is the hardest one, yet it represents the critical step from analysis to practice.

(2) In teaching how to tell a story for hope discovery, be clear with group participants about the difference between story theology and group therapy. Some of the participants used story time to practice catharsis much as one might do in any other support group. Each time I would try to redirect the conversation away from therapeutic fixes to theological inquiry. It might also be helpful for participants to clarify that theological inquiry is not necessarily about completing something, or finding the single best answer. It is more about being in conversation, dialoguing and beginning to formulate better answers to the questions of life.

(g) Regarding the use of hope measurements described in this study, plan small group time to share, explain, and explore the results. Participant answers provided important pieces of

the narrative process. Their use also introduced a surprising level of stress into the group process that called for more small group discussion.

(h) Finally, plan pastoral follow-up. The stories shared in this project expressed profound emotion and deep struggle. Each of them represented unfinished stories. Each of them hinted at private pains that would not easily heal. The stories they wrote were preludes to opportunities for continued conversation.

C. Observations from the Journey

1. The Wisdom of Many

Moltmann's *Theology of Hope* was not an attempt to craft a systematic theology of hope. It was a work, by his own admission, that intended to think about God's future from a new light, an eschatological light—and from this perspective to ask new questions, or perhaps different questions, and to see where those questions might lead. Moltmann believed that the doctrine of Christian eschatology had possibilities for new ways of thinking about the present. He had no sense that his writings represented final answers. They were contributions to the ongoing study of God in the world and our relationship with God. Reflecting on writing his first work, Moltmann seems to hint at precisely that in the short introduction to *Theology of Hope*: “The various critical discussions {about hope seen in an eschatological light} should not be understood as rejections and condemnations. They are necessary conversations on a common subject which is so rich that it demands continual new approaches. Hence, I hope they may make clear that even critical questions can be a sign of theological partnership.”²³¹ In fact, one of the foundational tenets of his hermeneutic of theological inquiry was that one should begin with

²³¹ Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, xxi. Preface by the author.

experience (Auschwitz) and questions about life, and then move to theological dogma. The systematic theologies of Church history, he insisted, sometimes failed to provide satisfactory answers to common questions of human experience. Theological inquiry was an investigation of the possibilities, a creative engagement with God and life, from a multitude of vantage points. Theological inquiry was at its best when it was characterized by spirited freedom. The point is that Moltmann invited, even saw the necessity of, collaborative theological inquiry. Moltmann believed that his work offered important contributions to a fuller understanding of Christian hope, but I strongly doubt that he would resist the faith community's interest adding other theological criticisms.

Here at the end of this project on hope I believe Moltmann points us in a right direction. At times we need to soar to the lofty places of God's transcendent possibilities. We need to be encouraged that with God all things are possible. Yet, we also need the tempering modesty of Keshgegian's present-tense view of hope. We need the full-throated talk of endless possibility, but we also need "practices of habitation" for daily living. As Moltmann wrote, the swell of conflicting voices is evidence of theological partnership. It is a realization that the complexity of the hope journey requires the wisdom of many. One of this project's participants put it this way: "If even learned men and women who have made a living studying these things can come to such drastically different conclusions then I can know that maybe there is not just one right way to grow. Maybe at different times I can rely on different paths."

2. Some Dialectical Observations about Hope

In the final analysis, it seems that Christian hope as practice is less precise than the suffering one may want. Precisely when we may demand answers of God in the throes of

personal loss, hope may require that we claim modest certainties when possible, but keep faith when the darkness of uncertainty persists. The study of Christian hope likely requires a chorus of many voices, many theologians, and various perspectives, precisely because a deeper understanding of Christian hope is so richly dialectical. Following are five primary dialectics that were characteristic of this project's study of hope.

Anticipation and Realization. It is an anticipation of God's promise of a new creation (*nova creatio*)—something more than what we can humanly hope for or imagine: something more, I would contend, than Paul Tillich's boundaries of a "reasonable hope" which exists in that which already has some presence, some seed-like presence. Yet, it is also the experience of a *kairos* moment described in the Gospels—moments when Jesus announced that the Kingdom of God "is among you." (Luke 17:21), or moments when, as he announced to his home town, "Today the scripture has been fulfilled in your midst." (Luke 4:21).

God-in-Process and God of Kingdom *Telos*. I affirm the value of God's dynamic participation in our lives. I am especially drawn to Moltmann's description of God's passability. God is affected by our suffering and there is hope, and consolation, for our sufferings in this. God is no "unmoved mover." God, as Moltmann describes, using a passage from Elie Wiesel's novel *Night*, is the One of heaven who is with us in the gallows moments of our lives. From this perspective we may rightly claim the ambiguities and contradictions of life. We may suggest, as Keshgegian does, "that the victory is not already won—that life is still in play,"²³² that there is potentiality but not determinacy at the root of our lives, and that in essential ways, "we are the authors of times and tales."²³³ And yet, Christian hope is also grounded in the ultimacy of God's kingdom. There is in the Christian faith also an appropriate teleological quality of time that does

²³² Keshgegian, 117, 162.

²³³ Ibid., 221.

not diminish our freedom to live in co-creation with God, but ensures that despite life's inherent incompleteness, there is finally a promise that God's Kingdom will be consummated. Life may unfold in messy, or circular, or ironic ways. But in the end, God is faithful to God's promise. In the circling of the years we look to this sense of God's future and take hope, in part, that even though this life is celebrated for all its finite pleasures, by grace we are made heirs of an eternal Kingdom.

Trust and Rage. Moltmann argues that the experience of hope in God's future is based on the memory of God's faithfulness in the past. "We remember the future,"²³⁴ as Jensen writes. In the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ we are given an "earnest pledge"²³⁵ of the abundance of God's future. This decisive act of God is a "foretaste of all that God intends. Our faith is based on the future of God. It is based on a trustworthy God. And yet, there are some experiences in life that are so raw, so devastating, that the darkness of them obscures our quiet trust in God's future. In such times, the journey to hope may be understood as suffering Job who shakes his fists at God,²³⁶ or as the raging, angry words of lament found in Psalm 137.²³⁷ Marshall calls this tension between trusting faith on the one hand (privileged in the churches of my experience) and the groaning laments in Job and the book of Psalms, "the problem of hope."²³⁸ She points to the poetic words of acceptance in the concluding chapter of Habakkuk: "Though the fig tree does not blossom, and not fruit is on the vines, though the produce of the olive fails, and the fields yield no food; though the flock is cut off from the fold, and there is no herd in the stalls, yet will I rejoice in the Lord." (Habakkuk 3:17-18) There is

²³⁴ Jensen, 41.

²³⁵ Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, 197.

²³⁶ All through the book of Job, beginning with Job's lament of life itself in chapter 3.

²³⁷ Before God's people learn to sing a new song (Ps. 144:9), they speak an unrestrained litany of despairing invective, "Happy shall they be who take your little ones and dash them against the rock!" (Ps. 137: 9).

²³⁸ Marshall, 3-4.

danger, Marshall says, in separating the equanimity of chapter 3 from the passionate words of lament in chapters 1 and 2 and to draw from this disconnect a counsel to passivity. The writer of Habakkuk experiences new hope precisely because he has freedom to voice lament.²³⁹

Choice and Grace. Frankl (also Marshall and Keshgegian) speak of the fundamental choice to hope. The concentration camp stripped away the last of human freedoms except, “the freedom to choose one’s attitude in a given set of circumstances.”²⁴⁰ The difference between life and death, despair and hope was the decision one made about how to use this freedom. Frankl writes: “The sort of prisoner a person became was the result of a decision, and not the result of circumstance itself.”²⁴¹ Frankl’s emphasis on personal agency recalls Moses’ admonition to the Hebrews to choose between blessing or curse, or Joshua’s similar admonition “to choose this day whom you will serve” (Joshua 24:15) or Paul’s teaching to the Philippians to “work out your own salvation with fear and trembling . . .” (Philippians 2:12) And yet, the journey to hope is also a work of God’s grace. Even Bonhoeffer, who demonstrated that grace is not cheap, that Christian faith requires ethical responsibility, writes that “the death and life of the Christian is not determined by his own resources; rather he finds both only in the Word that comes to him from the outside.”²⁴² Marshall seems to describe best the necessary tension of the practice of hope when she comments: “In her book *Hope in Holler* A. Elaine Brown Crawford reveals a hope that is rooted *both* in God’s empowerment of human beings and in God’s ability to make a way out of no way.”²⁴³

²³⁹ Nancy Duff, “Recovering Lamentation as a Practice in the Church,” in *Lament: Reclaiming Practices in Pulpit, Pew and Public Square*, edited by Sally A. Brown and Patrick D. Miller (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), 3-14. Duff argues that “What was once quite natural for the Hebrew worshipper, however, now seems foreign to most of us.” Also, reference again to Blumenthal, “Liturgies of Anger.”

²⁴⁰ Frankl, 12.

²⁴¹ Frankl, 86-87.

²⁴² Bonhoeffer, 20. Bonhoeffer speaks of what the Reformers called an “alien righteousness.”

²⁴³ A. Elaine Brown Crawford, *Hope in Holler: A Womanist Theology* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 2002), cited from Marshall, 82.

Light and Darkness. Perhaps Moltmann's greatest contribution to the study of hope was his insistence that the ground of our hope is the resurrection of the crucified one. Moltmann was interested, of course, to move the discussion along to one of resurrection possibilities, even more, to a reflection on what, as Exodus Church, we are called to do in a broken world. Yet, it was precisely at the point of his rich description of the depth of God's suffering that Moltmann spoke most strongly to the experience of loss. The biblical narrative describes hope in Isaiah as a light which shines on those who have been in darkness. But in Jesus' crucifixion and in Jesus' own suffering in the darkness of Gethsemane, the beginnings of hope may be found in the dark places of life, too—not always standing in the light of resurrection possibility, but sometimes standing for long periods in the darkness of suffering loss. These dark moments are not moments of God's absence. They are, as Moltmann describes, occasions for the deepest experiences of God's solidarity. Edmund Steimle gathers up this profound mystery in his sermon "Address Not Known," writing that while our inclination is to look for God in the "light" places of life, in times of great joy, in occasions where life is abundant, in moments of personal prosperity, when the reality is, God is not found there, but in the dark places of our lives where we lost sight of him. Steimle quotes Samuel Miller in concluding: "We never see God directly. God is always mediated by the very things that seem to deny Him."²⁴⁴

3. Connections

Experience Near. As I finalized implementation plans for this project (August 2011), the congregation was at the beginning stages of a rather emotional discussion over a wide range of potentially divisive issues. A much loved staff member ended a long-term tenure, and either because of, or coincidentally, several social-theological issues which directly impacted key

²⁴⁴ Steimle, 62.

leadership she had worked closely with, began to surface. Through the summer of 2011, the church began a year-long conversation about homosexuals in congregational leadership and how precisely (or if) to allow known registered sex offenders in the church. Through the coming months, several families left the congregation, resulting in a significant decline in the church's contemporary worship service attendance, a noticeable effect on the church leadership's *esprit de corps*, and subsequently the emergence of general fund financial issues. In the context of all these issues it was difficult to see a clear path to a hopeful future.

It struck me more than once as I prepared for the season of Advent that the need for hope was as much a corporate one as an individual one. I had spent eight weeks assisting a group of individuals through a story theology process of hope-making. It seemed that perhaps this process might also be deeply applicable to the church itself. It is beyond the scope of this study to define exactly how a pastor might use this model of hope to help a congregation. But the need is clear. It pleases me that many of my sermons during that long path from the summer of 2011 through the fall and Advent, into Lent and Easter were informed by the work of this project and particularly the insights that a host of theologians had given me. In the darkest times of that year, I reminded myself, as an occasionally discouraged pastor, that God was still present in our midst to help write a new story of hope. An insight from Jaco Hamman's book came to mind which suggests a beginning place for a process of congregational hope-making:

Steeple cry. Congregations grieve. Your Gospel community has experienced or is experiencing significant losses brought about by various kinds of change. Like you, your congregation is paying the spiritual, emotional and relational cost of loss and change Gospel communities are called to do the work of mourning.²⁴⁵

²⁴⁵ Jaco J. Hamman. *When Steeples Cry: Leading Congregations Through Loss and Change* (Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 2005), 46. Hamman names six kinds of corporate loss (see page 50ff.) and suggests that the pathways to hope from loss may happen within the context of congregational conversation, worship (communion), and ministries of outreach (compassion).

Experience Far. This project reminds me of the global community in which I live. As I write these final pages, Syria is in civil war and has threatened to deploy biochemical agents to defend a dying regime. Iran and Israel are at the brink of nuclear war. The world economy is at breaking point between solvency and bankruptcy, with many in Europe and the United States wondering if their best days of material prosperity are behind them. The ecosystem shows increasing signs of stress. Off the coast of Greenland, a large sheet of glacier ice has broken loose prompting scientists to issue a new warning about global warming. Closer to home, a former administrator of a revered higher learning institution has been charged with forty-six counts of child sexual molestation over a twenty-year period. The community he once served is divided over how to go forward in the wake of such emotional devastation. In Aurora, Colorado there is grief of a different kind. An assailant went on a killing rampage in a local theater. When the rampage ended, twelve were dead and countless others were wounded.

But it also remembers the lament of all creation described in Paul's letter to the Romans: "We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies." (Romans 8: 22-23).²⁴⁶ This project, with its insistence on reframing life's losses in the context of God's future, points to the larger context of the world's need for new hope.

²⁴⁶ Jensen, 135. Jensen emphasizes that the promise of God's new creation has not only personal, but social and cosmic implications. Also, Theodore Hiebert, "Reclaiming the World: Biblical Resources for the Ecological Crisis," *Interpretation* 65, no. 4 (October 2011): 346, points to more recent New Testament biblical scholarship which questions the "otherworldly reading of Revelation claiming instead that John's visions actually look forward to a renewal of this world rather than its abandonment and replacement." Here, as Jensen argues, the promise of God's new creation, the foundation of Christian hope, is a cosmic event. We, first and foremost as members of God's creation, hope not only for our own salvation, our own future, but for the new creation that God is working with us to realize. Hiebert outlines biblical principles that inform our hopeful work with all creation.

D. Learning to Sing a New Song

I began this project remembering the biblical story of the Hebrew people in exile. If the seasons of life can be conceptualized the way Brueggemann describes them as alternating seasons of orientation, disorientation and re-orientation, the words of lament in Psalm 137—“How could we sing the Lord’s song in a foreign land?”—suggest that Israel was in the midst of a long season of disorientation. We remember their story because it is our story. We remember that story because it reminds us that disorientation is a significant part of our lives.

Yet, what leads to disorientation does not end there. Moltmann speaks of a “catastrophe theology” to say that in a world with God endings, even cosmic ones, become occasions for God to create something new. The central narratives of Scripture are definite about this. From the new covenant with Noah, to the Exodus from Egypt, to the resurrection of Jesus Christ who was crucified, new beginnings, new opportunities rise from the contexts of seemingly intractable losses. So too for Israel, Moltmann reflects. The fall of Israel, which leads to exile, becomes in time an occasion to remember the rise of Judaism. “How could one still desire to be an Israelite after the fall of Jerusalem?”²⁴⁷ The answer then, and in every new occasion of loss, lies in our continued belief that despite all odds God creates new possibilities.

One wonders if the Israelites pictured in Psalm 137 may have had the wrong idea about the possibilities of God’s future. The book of Nehemiah remembers that Israel conceptualized hope as restoration and not recreation (Nehemiah 2:5)—that what mattered most was not future, but rebuilding, returning, restoring.

Nothing is lost to God, of course. Maybe this is what lies at the heart of our most anguished moments of loss: the fear that this is not true. That nothing is truly ours to keep. That

²⁴⁷ Moltmann, *In the End—The Beginning*, 41-42.

all for which we have invested our lives is finally lost. That the things we have built all eventually fall down before us, even the walls of our most holy places. That the people whom we have loved and shared as part of our souls, leave, or die, or change or as in the case with Anna no longer remember our names. Or maybe as with Leah, some of our most cherished expectations about the way life should be, are taken from us. Love is not repaid with love. Hard work is not rewarded. The long fight against illness does not lead to healing. All the investments of time and talent do not result in a net return.

The truth is that no triumphal perspective on life can change this reality. Life is transient. Our accomplishments are provisional. There is an essential incompleteness to life. Seasons of great orientation do lead to repeating seasons of disorientation. And yet, with God the great hope is that even the broken pieces of our lives are taken up, and remembered and woven into the tapestry of God's new lasting creation. The great hope is that nothing is lost to God—not the times when we have planted the seeds of God's kingdom justice; and not even the times when we have abjectly failed. God's kingdom justice is consummated in God's future. All the words of the prophet Isaiah that Jesus preached to the people of Nazareth—that the poor receive good news, that those in bondage are unbound, that the blind finally see, that the oppressed are liberated, and that all the world's "Naamans from Syria" (Luke 4:27) are cleansed. We see glimpses of this Kingdom justice now, but in God's future these things will be made complete.

And as for the broken pieces of our lives? The fears that have crippled us? The doubts that have imprisoned us? The regrets that have persisted? The actions that have long alienated us from one another? The trespasses that are unforgiven? Even these broken future stories in our lives are gathered up and justified, made right, by the saving grace of God.

I remember the day Zach died. Besides the pain of losing an only son, I remember the deep emptiness of having fought eight long years that he might be healed only to come to a moment as crushing and final as that moment was. Despite doctors who had cautioned us against expecting too much, we had unleashed every possible resource to overcome his dreaded disease. We had sought first, second and third opinions. We had tried experimental treatments and alternative ones. We had arranged for intricate surgeries to repair the damage done by countless surgeries. We had worked tirelessly with educators to make sure that his traumatic brain injury did not complicate his learning. But in the end our best efforts were not sufficient. There is a profound emptiness in a moment like that.

In the years since his passing I have often wondered if all the time we invested in fighting his illness was essentially lost time, or wasted time. If we had known he would eventually die, would we have invested so much time in his education? Would we have spent the money, nurtured the dreams, spent time imagining his healing? And from the perspective of Christian hope, the answer is that every moment in our lives invested in his comfort, and hope, and healing, was meaningful and is not lost to God. In reflecting upon a life cut short, as Zach's life of eighteen years was, and of how possibly God's promise of justification can be realized, Moltmann says he believes that God will complete the life which he has begun in a human being:

Mustn't we think the thought of an ongoing history of God's with the lives that have been broken off and destroyed this way {*So that we might be able to*} affirm life in this world in spite of its destructions, and love life in spite of its cruelties, and protect it I believe that God's history with our lives will continue after our deaths until completion is reached in which a soul will find its wrongs redressed and will find rest and happiness.²⁴⁸

And if we may imagine God's ongoing history this way, then perhaps we might have a deeper way to experience the promise that with God nothing is lost: all that we have invested in life

²⁴⁸ Moltmann, *In the End—The Beginning*, 117.

here, even the best of our love in a loved one who is no longer here, these things of life become, by God's grace, a part of God's ongoing history of the one lost and of our lives, too.

"Life is about the living of it," Keshgegian writes. "Life is process and movement. How we live is ultimately more important than what our living produces."²⁴⁹ Keshgegian emphasizes that "what is important is the playing, not the outcome."²⁵⁰ And maybe this is the surest sign of a hopeful life: that we exemplify courage and bravery and fortitude and a will to persevere against the hard realities of life. And if this is true, then in some sense, we are Ernest Hemingway's fabled character Santiago. The old man's legacy is that he dares to fight the great powers of the sea and does not quit. "A man may be destroyed, but not defeated," Santiago reflects. And maybe this is some of what Paul means when he says that "we are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair." (2 Corinthians 4:8) At least part of hope, Christian hope, is facing the perplexities of life and choosing not to despair.

In the end, I choose to believe that Christian hope is a God-enabled capacity to live with the same conviction that all the saints demonstrated.²⁵¹ Theirs was a faith to keep believing in the promise of God's future even when they could not see it. Dietrich Bonhoeffer speaks of this conviction as a willingness to accept the Psalter's invitation to "Sing unto the Lord a new song." This new song, this song of hope, is a song with which to celebrate the triumphs of life:

It is the victory song of the children of Israel after passing through the Red Sea, the Magnificat of Mary after the annunciation, the song of Paul and Silas in the night of prison, the song of the singers on the sea of glass after their rescue, the "song of Moses the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb" (Revelation 15:3)
²⁵²

²⁴⁹ Keshgegian, 179.

²⁵⁰ Ibid., 166.

²⁵¹ Hebrews 11, the roll call of saints.

²⁵² Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, 57.

But, as Bonhoeffer knew from experience, the song of hope is also a song with which to travel the harder pathways of life:

Our new song is an earthly song, a song of pilgrims and wayfarers upon whom the Word of God has dawned on their way. Our earthly song is bound to God's revealing Word in Jesus Christ. It is the simple song of the children of this earth who have been called to be God's children; not ecstatic, not enraptured, but sober, grateful, reverent²⁵³

²⁵³ Ibid., 58.

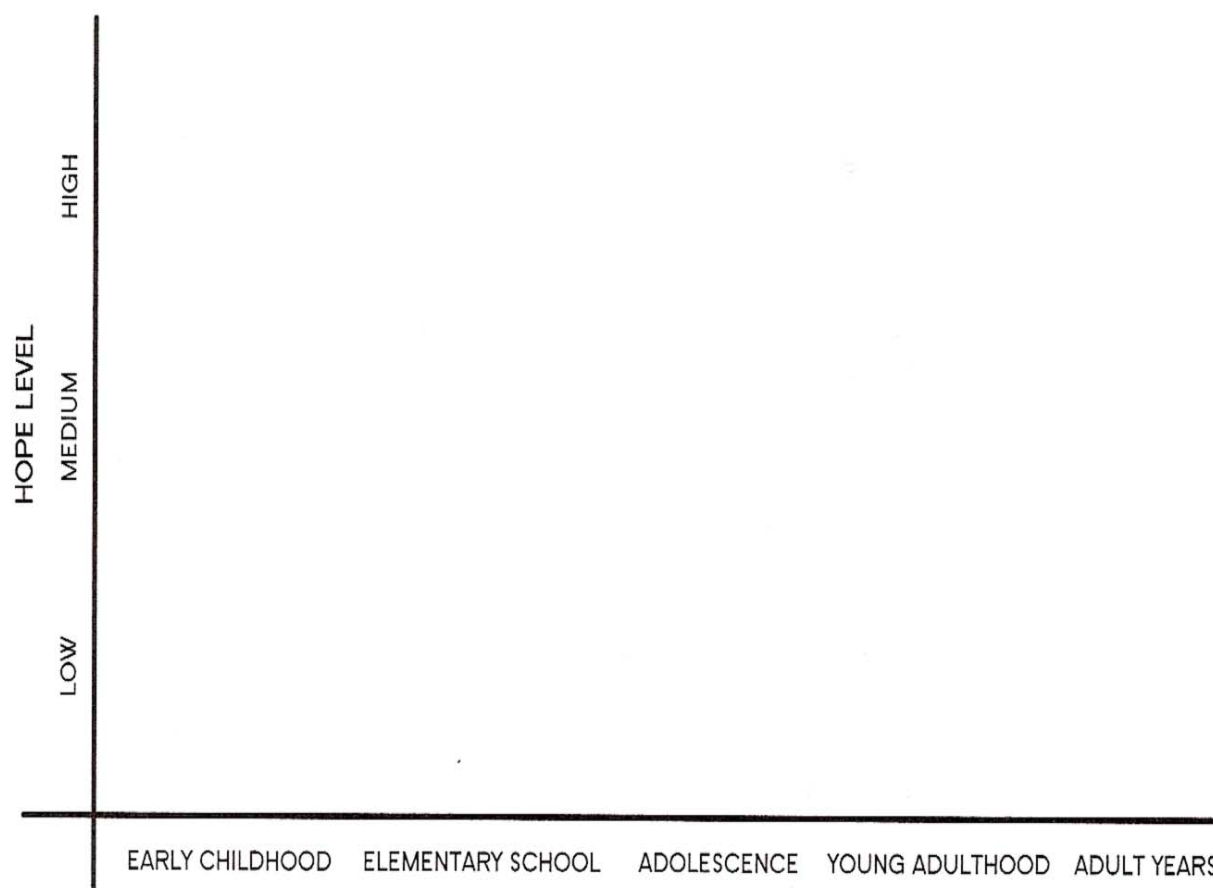
APPENDICES

Appendix 1—Opening Meeting Agenda

6:00—6:25	<p>Dinner</p> <p>Prayer of Hope</p> <p>Meal is served</p> <p>(Meal is served as a way to help participants experience the story of the disciples on the Emmaus road—an example of the power of reframing, Luke 24:31, “And then their eyes were opened”)</p> <p>Tell story of disciples on Emmaus Road</p>
6:25—6:40	<p>Introductions</p>
6:40—6:45	<p>Meditation on “Hagar’s Story” (Genesis 21)</p>
6:45—7:30	<p>A Theology of Hope: God in our Future (Introduction to Moltmann’s ideas about Christian hope)</p>
7:30—7:35	<p>Break</p>
7:35—8:10	<p>Strategies for New Hope (Introduce reframing as pathways to Biblical promise of hope)</p> <p>Individual Spiritual Exercise: “Imagine a Miracle” (Lester, 148) Exercise Set-up: Tell story in Luke 13:10-13 (After telling story, introduce concept of “imagine a miracle” and invite participants to spend some quiet time imagining some personal circumstance for which they might pray for a miracle)</p>
8:10 – 8:30	<p>Telling a Personal Story of Faith</p> <p>During this portion of the retreat I plan to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tell Gospel story in John 4, Samaritan woman. Listening and telling her story as the means by which transformation began to happen • Talk about what we will do in small group • Distribute handout on how to write/tell personal stories

Appendix 2—The Experience of Hope

Take a few minutes to chart your hope level on a graph. From childhood to today, chart your life's high and low Hope points.



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After you are done with your chart, think about what your chart might mean. What key incidents in your life took hope from you? What incidents made you more hopeful?

²⁵⁴ Schlaepfer, 14.

Appendix 3—The Hope Scale

The Hope Scale

Directions: Read each item carefully. Using the scale shown below, please select the number that best describes you and put that number in the blank provided.

1 = Definitely False

3 = Mostly True

2 = Mostly False

4 = Definitely True

- _____ 1. I can think of many ways to get out of a jam.
 - _____ 2. I energetically pursue my goals.
 - _____ 3. I feel tired most of the time.
 - _____ 4. There are lots of ways around any problem.
 - _____ 5. I am easily downed in an argument.
 - _____ 6. I can think of many ways to get the things in life that are most important to me.
 - _____ 7. I worry about my health.
 - _____ 8. Even when others get discouraged, I know I can find a way to solve the problem.
 - _____ 9. My past experiences have prepared me well for my future.
 - _____ 10. I've been pretty successful in life.
 - _____ 11. I usually find myself worrying about something.
 - _____ 12. I meet the goals that I set for myself.
-

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²⁵⁵ C. R. Snyder, et al., "The Will and the Ways: Development and Validation of an Individual-Differences Measure of Hope," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 60 (1991): 585. Also Snyder, "Conceptualizing, Measuring, and Nurturing Hope," *Journal of Counseling & Development* 73 (January/February 1995): 357.

Appendix 4—Reframing

Basic Assumptions: the meaning any event has for us depends upon the frame in which we perceive it. Therefore, when we change the frame, we change the meaning. And therefore, when the meaning changes, our responses and behaviors change.²⁵⁶

Definition: The word “frame” refers to the core narratives that we use to put events into perspective and make sense out of life. This may involve, reshaping one’s perceptions, changing the story-line that plays in our heads, changing belief systems (about God, self, future or suffering), taking on a new perspective or mindset. In short, reframing is the process of helping a person, a family, and group, transform the way in which they conceptualize a life situation. Reframing establishes directionality; provides a sense of movement through time.²⁵⁷

Link to Christian Hopefulness: a way to forgive the past, find peace in the present and anticipate the new thing that God promises.

How Reframing May be Used:

1. **Revising the past.**²⁵⁸ Reframing how we think about the past in our lives. Referred to as “biographic rehabilitation. For example: Story of Joseph and his brothers. See, Genesis 45:4-10 Think also of Paul’s writing in Philippians 3:7 ff.

Sources of hopelessness: regret, shame, guilt, failed expectations, loss of assumptive world.

2. **Rethinking the present.**²⁵⁹ Flora Keshgegian, especially, talks about reframing the present in order to be in the moment, to see the beauty of the moment. So also, Victor Frankl, who speaks of small pleasures in the context of suffering. See Paul’s writing in 2 Corinthians 4:7ff.

Sources of hopelessness: overwhelmed, fear, anxiety, over-wrought sense of need to accomplish, perfectionism

3. **Envisioning a new future.**²⁶⁰ This involves reshaping unproductive, unhopeful future projections. Isaiah 40.

Sources of hopelessness: absence of grace, defeatism, experiences of repeated failure, unclear, lack of spiritual imagination

4. **Imagining a future story.**²⁶¹ Sometimes we have no future stories. Some have suggested the hopelessness is the result of a future broken story. We have no way of seeing into the future with hope. Think of how Abraham and Sarah felt as they continued to be childless into old age. God gave hope by making them a promise. Genesis 17. Also, the Israelites in Psalm 137.

²⁵⁶ Donald Capps, *Reframing: A New Method in Pastoral Care* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1990), 10.

²⁵⁷ Lester, *Hope in Pastoral Care and Counseling*, 139-140.

²⁵⁸ Ibid., 170ff.

²⁵⁹ Keshgegian, 128ff.

²⁶⁰ Lester, 138ff.

²⁶¹ Ibid., 124ff.

Sources of hopelessness: desperation, depression, despair

Methods of Reframing ²⁶²

1. **Story-telling:** telling stories that envision the future beyond where your own imagination can take you. Such as—

“If your life was made into a wonderful movie with a happy ending, tell me what that last part of the movie would look like.”

“If you wrote me a letter in a few years and it was filled with good news about your life, what would the letter say?”

“If I read a story in the newspaper about some wonderful thing that happens to you in the next year, what would it be?”

2. **Guided Imagery.** Forming mental pictures of a new future. See number 6 below.

3. **“As If” Conversation.** By-passing reality at hand and assuming that certain, more hopeful things, can be true.

4. **Deleting the Problem.** Envisioning a future without the problem and describing what it looks like. The belief is that once you’ve described the future without the problem you also describe a solution.

5. **Imagining a Miracle.** Fantasizing a major change in life by waving a magic wand, and the life you imagine is reality.

Miracle Questions.

“You wake up one morning and find that your main problem is gone

Your husband no longer uses alcohol.

You and _____ are remarried.

Your depression has completely lifted.

You no longer experience conflict between you and _____

The cancer is gone!”

Then discuss what life will be like now that the problem is gone. How will life be different?

How will you feel, act, use money differently. Where will you live? What will you be doing?

What would be necessary to maintain this new problem-less life?

6. **WWJS?** If Jesus were here right now, sitting beside you, and the two of you were talking, what would he say? This may also be used in imaginary conversation with a deceased one using a method called, **“Empty Chair.”**

²⁶²Lester, 144-148. Also, Capps, *Reframing*, 27-51.

Appendix 5—Participant Story Guidelines

Write a one-page story about your life by describing something which has happened to you that has affected you in one of the following ways:

A. Ask the Question(s):

1. Can you recall a time when you doubted God was present?
2. Can you recall a time when you seriously doubted whether the pain of what you had experienced would go away?
3. Can you recall a time when you wondered if you would ever be happy again?
4. Can you recall a time when you had considerable anxiety about your future?
5. Can you recall a time when you wondered if your best days were behind you?
6. Can you recall a time when you felt as if you were at a dead-end in your life? Could you imagine how things could be different?
7. As you think about your past, do you have deep regrets?

B. Write a Story. The story can be very brief. Do not worry about details. Simply recall the story, the moment, the time, the occasion in your life.

C. Imagine Hope. After you have written a story, spend a few minutes thinking what you would like God to do for you to make things different.

Appendix 6—Listen For God Always (L.F.G.A)

Four Steps for Conversation with Yourself, God, and Each Other²⁶³

1. **LISTEN** to the story of a person in your group.

Story-tellers will read aloud a slice-of-life story about an event that has stuck with them in some way, a real experience, a moment that stands out.

2. Take turns expressing the **FEELINGS** this story evokes in you. When did you feel mad, sad, glad or afraid? Or, something else? What does it connect with in your own life experience? With whom do you identify?

3. **GO FIND GOD** in this story. Where does this story remind you of a story, parable or saying in the Bible? What Christian practices (such as hospitality, feeding, grieving, prayer, etc.) do you see in the story? How does this story remind you of what you know about God? Where do you feel the absence of God?

4. What kind of **ACTION** of “**Aha**” does this story call forth for you, for the story-teller, for the church? Is there something about reflecting on this moment that you want to take forward with you? Is there some simple action this moment makes you want to take?

²⁶³ Dori Baker, *Doing Girlfriend Theology: God-Talk with Young Women* (the Method), 188; also presented for use in Doctor of Ministry course, *Narrative Pedagogies*, Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary, Dr. David White, January 25, 2010. Baker’s Girlfriend Theology Method (also referred to as “story theology”) was developed further in Baker’s *The Barefoot Way*, L.I.V.E., a four-step practice for theological reflection, 112.

Appendix 7—Hope Study Meetings

Small Group Meeting Objectives

- Give each participant the opportunity to share a personal story of faith related to the loss of hope
- Practice reframing
- Practice presence of God using prayer and one of the Gospel of John “sign” stories to reinforce the promise that God acts in powerful ways to reshape our expectations about the future.

Small Group Meeting Agenda

6:00 Informal Gathering

6:10 Opening Prayer

Opening Meditation – Signs of God (John 2:1-11)

“Filling Dry Wells” – Week #1

“Averting Death” – John 4:46-54, Week #2

“After 38 Years” – John 5:1-18, Week #3

“Daily Bread” – John 6:1-15, Week #4

“A Way through the Storm” – John 6:16-21, Week #5

“Now I See” – John 9, Week #6

“He Comes In Time” – John 11 (Optional)

6:15 Participant Story & Reframing Practices

- (L) Tell the story while participants listen carefully
- (F) Invite participants to identify the feelings in the story
- (G) Name ways that God is present in the story
- (A) Identify actionable applications, either ways that the story-teller can act on the story to change the outcome, or ways that God might be invited to change the story

7:00 Theology of Hope Presentations (as time permits)

7:30 Closing Prayer

Appendix 8—Definitions of Eschatology

Hope Study, Fall 2011

Greek word, **ESCHATON**, meaning: discussion about the final things. Refers to the completion or consummation of God's Kingdom, the sense that what has begun here, through Jesus Christ and the establishment of the Church, will, in some indeterminate time, be brought to fullness by God.

Therefore, we may say that Christian hope is an "eschatological hope": it is a hope that is based on our understanding and belief that God promises to bring all creation to completion.

SOME UN-BIBLICAL NOTIONS OF ESCHATOLOGY

1. Doctrine of human progress. Hope that is based on confidence of human powers to transform. ("Pragmatic humanism")
2. Social improvement.
3. Power of positive thinking (Present-tense optimism).
4. Psycho-therapeutic Gospel. Inherent goodness of humanity. (Freud: we are neurotic; Bible: we are sinful)

SOME BIBLLICAL-LITERAL NOTIONS OF ESCHATOLOGY:

Predictions based on **literal interpretations of scripture**. Exact time. Exact manner. See 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18, also Revelation 20:4 with specific reference to 1000 years.

These literal interpretations may include:

- 1. Pre-millennial** the notion that God's reign will be ushered in with a terrible rapture, leaving the unsaved behind while the saved are drawn up to God; after 1000 years God will destroy the earth. Tends to base hope on God's imminent return. Dismisses the importance of present time.
- 2. Post-millennial:** the belief that in Jesus Christ, God's 1000 reign has already happened. We are living in the 1000 year period of God's reign on earth. At the end of the 1000 years, God will come. Tends to base hope on social progress.

SOME ADDITIONAL BIBLICAL NOTIONS OF ESCHATOLOGY:

1. Full disclosure of God not fully contained in the present tense. And so the phrase, “already-not yet” (also note, delay of Parousia and stress on the work of the Spirit in present)
2. Affirmations, “Christ is risen!” and “Jesus is Lord!” give us reason to anticipate the future and to celebrate the present.
3. The hope of Jesus Christ is both promise and a judgment.
4. Creates possibility of ethical action in the world. We are called to participate in coming future, even though God’s future not dependent on our success. God is open to our labors.
5. Promise of God’s fullness flows into present, drawing up towards consummation.
6. Belief that life under providence of God has a shape (purpose), and that this shape is end-stressed. What happens in the middle is finally defined by the end.
7. Hope lies in the God who goes ahead of us. Mark 16:1-8; Revelation 7:13-17, John 14. We live in the present with hope, anticipating the final redemption. This makes the present not only tolerable, but hopeful.

ILLUSTRATION OF HOPE BASED ON FUTURE (OR ESCHATOLOGICAL HOPE)

Coen Brother movie adaptation of Cormac McCarthy’s *No Country for Old Men*, based on interpretation in Thomas Long’s *Preaching from Memory to Hope*, Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009, Chapter 5, pages 120-22.

Story synopsis: Ed Bell, aging Texas county sheriff investigating a desert drug deal gone terribly wrong. Results in deaths and the disappearance of two million dollars. Two main characters, Bell and Anton Chigurh. They assume symbolic character:

Bell—a Pauline figure, a man who used to trust in law, but now overwhelmed by power of evil in the world, knows that law cannot save him or society. Fighting not just crime, but principalities. He says, “*Part of it was I always thought I could at least somehow put things right and I guess I just don’t feel that way no more.*” He goes on to say, “*I wake up sometimes way in the night and I know as certain as death that there ain’t nothing short of the second comin of Christ that can slow this train.*”

Chigurh: Embodiment of random, chaotic meaningless evil. Kills at whim and without remorse.

PLAY CLIP: In the final scene (15), Ed Bell, now retired, remembers a dream. The dream describes what I would call eschatological hope.

Appendix 9—View of God

To what degree do I feel that God is like this toward me?					
	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
Gentle					
Harsh					
Loving					
Aloof					
Sympathetic					
Unconcerned					
Close					
Distant					
Kind					
Angry					
Supportive					
Demanding					
Gracious					
Provider					
Ignores me					
Rejoicing over me					
Consistent					
Unpredictable					
Just					
Unfair					
Chart adapted from Norman Wright's <i>Tomorrow Can Be Different</i>					

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²⁶⁴ René Schlaepfer, *The Hope Experience*, 14. As adapted from H. Norman Wright, *Tomorrow Can Be Different* (Grand Rapids, MI: Fleming H. Revell, 1995), 53-59. See suggested correction for pairing #7 (Gracious-Disciplining), 121.

Appendix 10—Views of Theodicy

I. THEODICY. Theories of theodicy²⁶⁵ are designed to respond to the problem of evil: namely, how to justify the existence of an omni-benevolent and omni-potent God in the face of evil and suffering in the world. Theodicy is more concerned to explain moral evil (evil which is intended) and natural evil (which seems to happen randomly, such as disease, tornadoes, etc.)²⁶⁶

In his book, *Disappointment with God*, Philip Yancey, thinks of the theodicy question in terms of our “disappointment” with God. God is not who we think God should be. The troubling circumstances of our lives force us to ask three questions:

1. Is God unfair? The difficulty of reconciling our miseries with the biblical promises of rewards and happiness. Conversely, the difficulty of understanding why those who openly deny God prosper anyway. See Psalm 1. Or consider the righteousness of suffering Job.

2. Is God silent? Why, in the face of our persistent prayers for resolution is God seemingly silent? Consider Jesus’ cry from the cross. Or Paul’s prayer that God remove the thorn from his flesh.

3. Is God hidden? Where is God? Elie Wiesel in his book *Night*: Wiesel and his fellow prisoners were forced to watch the hanging of a young boy by the Germans. The child was still alive when he filed past the scaffold and heard someone behind him wonder aloud, “Where is God? Where is He?” And I heard a voice within me answer him: “Where is He? Here He is — He is hanging here on this gallows...” That night the soup tasted of corpses.”

II. SOME THEODICY THEORIES

A. Augustinian Theodicy: Free-Will Agents

The theodicy was developed by Augustine of Hippo in his works, *Confessions* and *City of God*. He argues that suffering is not caused by God, nor is it his responsibility. Rather, Augustine suggests that the free will of humans has led to suffering in the world. This position is supported by Thomas Aquinas, who also suggests that evil is necessary for the appreciation of good. John Calvin was also inspired by Augustine in developing his theology.

²⁶⁵ Unless otherwise noted, materials adapted from, <http://www3.dbu.edu/mitchell/theodicy.htm>; William H. Willimon, *Sighing for Eden: Sin, Evil, and the Christian Faith* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1985), 38-64.

²⁶⁶ Some explanations of “natural evil” include: work of demonic forces, punishment for sin, good cannot exist with evil, evil makes “higher-order” possible, natural laws that must be in place for intelligent beings to exercise free will.

C. S. Lewis writes in his book *The Problem of Pain*:

*We can, perhaps, conceive of a world in which God corrected the results of this abuse of free will by His creatures at every moment: so that a wooden beam became soft as grass when it was used as a weapon, and the air refused to obey me if I attempted to set up in it the sound waves that carry lies or insults. But such a world would be one in which wrong actions were impossible, and in which, therefore, freedom of the will would be void; nay, if the principle were carried out to its logical conclusion, evil thoughts would be impossible, for the cerebral matter which we use in thinking would refuse its task when we attempted to frame them.*²⁶⁷

B. Alvin Plantinga: Free Will Defense

Alvin Plantinga presented his version of the free will defense in response to the logical problem of evil - his argument attempts to demonstrate that the coexistence of God and of evil is not a logical contradiction. Plantinga argues that evil does not make God's existence impossible.

The first way in which the free-will defense works, then, is by distancing God from the moral evil in the world. Moral evil is not brought about by God, the free-will defense argues, but by free agents. God is therefore not the author of moral evil, and so is not responsible for it.

The second way in which the free-will defense works is in justifying the existence of moral evil by justifying God's creation of free agents. The existence of moral evil, the free-will defense argues, is a consequence of the existence of a greater good: free will. Without free will there could be no moral goodness; a world without free agents would be morally void. The good that is the existence of free moral agents, it is suggested, therefore outweighs the bad that is the existence of moral evil, and God therefore did well in creating free agents even though he knew that some of them would commit moral evils.

C. Irenaean Theodicy: Evil as Occasion for Spiritual Growth

The so-called 'Irenaean theodicy' comes in two parts. The first stems from St. Irenaeus (130-202 AD), a Father of the early Christian Church, who thought that humanity was not created perfect, but that they required growth in order to approach spiritual perfection. However, God does not necessarily intend evil to provide a means for this growth (i.e. by providing challenging situations), for a person could grow to spiritual perfection simply by obeying God's laws. Also, from Irenaeus' point of view, God does not intervene in human affairs to prevent evil because that would be to interfere with free will.

The philosopher John Hick has developed this view further. Hick agrees with Irenaeus that God created us with the potential for spiritual growth. However, Hick then sees the process of 'soul making' (as he calls it) to be a response to the evil in the world. So, if cancer did not exist, or the evil actions of others, then we would not have the means whereby we could develop spiritually. Also, Hick argues, there exists what he terms an 'epistemic distance' between human beings and

²⁶⁷ C.S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain* (New York City, NY: The Macmillan Company, 1970), 33.

God, so that we are not born knowing of God's existence, and it is not something which is easy to gain certain knowledge of. Therefore, the process of soul-making also involves a battle to attain religious faith.

Two further consequences of Hick's theodicy should be borne in mind here: firstly, because some individuals do not seem to have opportunity to develop spiritually (e.g. in the case of infant death), Hick argues that we must bring the possibility of an afterlife into the equation (so that such souls receive a heavenly reward); secondly, because there is such a great amount of evil in the world, and not all suffering seems fair or understandable, we must finally admit that we cannot fully understand God's reasons or His plan

D. Process theology: Power of Divine Persuasion. Process theologians argue that the reality of God is not fixed and that God himself is still developing. From this point of view, God is "dipolar"—that is, has two "poles," one mental and one physical. The physical pole is the material world itself, which acts almost as God's "body."

Because of this relationship, God is partly distinct and partly immersed in the world - just as we are in our bodies. As a result, any suffering in creation is also undergone by God, and creation itself is seen as a cooperation between God and all other beings. Whether this cooperation actually takes place is thus up to humanity - in other words, God cannot force humans to do His will, but can only influence them.

III. MAIN DIFFERENCES. The Irenaean theodicy and the Augustinian theodicy differ in where they claim evil comes from.

Saint Irenaeus argues that evil ultimately comes from God and is required for human beings to achieve full development. John Hick, a major proponent of this position, argues that the world serves as a "vale of soul-making," which allowed humans to achieve the likeness of God in moral and spiritual maturity. In contrast, the Augustinian theodicy argues that evil does not come from God but from the abuse of free will exhibited by humans and angels.

In addition, the Augustinian theodicy attaches no fundamental purpose to the existence of evil, whereas the Irenaean theodicy does.

Appendix 11—Walk in the Rain: a Personal Story

I remember that it was about two in the morning. June 4, 2003. We were trying to sleep in a small hospital room. Megan, my daughter, about 14 at the time, was leaning over a chair, trying to lay her head on the armrest. I was trying to sleep on a small couch. My feet were hanging over the end. It was so completely uncomfortable that my back was hurting. My wife, Jenny, was completely exhausted. She had fallen asleep in another chair. She was resting her head on our son's bed. Throughout the night she would awaken briefly, look at Zach, lying in the hospital bed sleeping, and then drift back to sleep. He was burning up with fever. And his breathing seemed so hard. He hadn't spoken or opened his eyes for several days now. I remember I kept watching to see if his chest was still moving.

It had been a hard week. Zach had been treated for septic shock, just a little infection that turned into something much bigger. We had been at the hospital that day to get another treatment. He was waiting to see the doctor, but when they came to get him, he collapsed and lost all bowel function. They finally figured out that he had gone into septic shock and that a blood infection had taken over his body. His blood pressure dropped to about 40 before they stabilized him, and I was afraid he was going to die and that it had been my fault for not seeing what was happening sooner. They finally got the infection under control, but then he began to experience what the doctor called "ascending paralysis." He was losing feeling in his legs and it was moving up. I remember listening to the song "Bittersweet Symphony" one day. I was in the room with Zach but had my back turned to him. I heard him slam his arms down on the bed. I knew he was angry, mad at what was happening to him, but I didn't know what to say. Now every time I hear that song I remember that moment, and I wish I'd said something to him. Gone to be with him. But I didn't know what to say.

I was hopeful that they'd be able to help him. They kept pouring steroids into him. But one Friday his doctor came to tell me that there was nothing more they could do. I called Jenny. She and Megan got on the first flight out of Dallas to New York. I was afraid he'd die before they got there. Later that night, they got there, but by then, Zach was beginning to hallucinate and to talk non-stop.

Now it was Tuesday of the next week. The doctors were surprised he was still alive. They said, "He's a fighter." We had managed to sleep, even laugh a little that weekend. But that night Megan and I couldn't sleep. We could hear the sounds of the hospital outside our room. Occasionally, a nurse would come in, glance at Zach, and then leave quickly. She never spoke. She simply looked at him and then left.

I remember it was raining that early morning. A little after midnight it started raining so hard that it sounded like someone was throwing little rocks at the window. I tried to sleep, but couldn't. I kept watching the blinking light on Zach's ventilator machine. Every time his oxygen level would drop the machine would make a sound. They told us that it needed to stay at about 90%, but it was dipping down into the 70's. I tried to look away. Tried to shield my eyes but I couldn't keep my eyes off of it. I think at some point I decided to move the monitor into a

corner so that it wouldn't bother me so much. But every time the light flashed or the monitor made a sound, I could still see and hear it.

Megan was watching the monitor, too. She couldn't sleep either. So, at a little past 2 a.m., June 4, 2003, we put on our rain coats, went down the elevator and started walking down 1st Avenue in New York City. There was a 24-hour Duane Reade store a couple of blocks away. We were soaked by the time we got there. We went up and down the aisles putting little items in our basket. We both got eye masks. We bought ear plugs. We also bought a big chocolate candy bar. This was Jenny's birthday. We were away from home. We wanted to give her something.

I do not remember much about the rest of that night. Zach died a few hours later. But I remember our trip to the Duane Reade Store on 71st and First Avenue, running to and from that store in a driving rain with our little knick-knacks from the drug store.

Appendix 12—Participant Evaluation

Hope Study Fall 2011

Thank You! I wish to thank you for your willingness to participate in this study of Christian hope and practice. The opening retreat and the small group meeting times were planned as an important part of completing my doctoral project on Christian hope. In order to evaluate the project, I need your candid responses. My hope is that your participation in this program has been an opportunity for spiritual growth and reflection. Additionally, I hope that having participated in this study, you are experiencing a greater sense of hope about God's place in the broken places of your life.

What I Set Out to Accomplish. I had three objectives for this study:

1. I wanted to introduce the group to a theology of Christian hope based on the selected writings of Christian theologians Jürgen Moltmann, Flora Keshgegian and other theologians including Ellen Ott Marshall and Victor Frankl.
2. I wanted to provide a supportive, affirming and safe place for members of the group to share stories of personal brokenness.
3. I wanted to introduce and practice ways of re-imagining our broken life stories so that together we might begin a process of experiencing the possibility of deeper hope about the place of God in our futures.

Understanding the Experience from Your Perspective. The questions below are for the purpose of gathering your responses about the degree to which you personally feel these three objectives were achieved. You do not have to sign your name to the evaluation, although it would be of great benefit to my study to be able to talk further with you about your insights should I need further clarification. I have conducted this study as a “participant-observer”—entering this study not so much as your teacher, but as a careful listener and student. As such, I want to maximize the value of our time together by learning as much as I can from you about the meaning and practice of hope.

Questions - Please answer as honestly as possible.

1. Feeling New Hope?

- Do you feel more hopeful about your future now than you did before you started this study? If yes, how? If no, what do you feel might help?

2. About the Theologians. In formulating a theology of Christian hope, some main ideas were drawn from:

- **Jürgen Moltmann**, who contends that Christian hope is a passion for what is yet possible, an expectation for those things which Christ's resurrection has already foreshadowed. Although Moltmann contends that Christ's crucifixion is an indication of the depth of God's nearness to us in times of travail, he tends to emphasize that the substance of Christian hope is what God promises to do in God's future. Hope, in this regard, is future-oriented.

Is this a new concept for you? Do you find it a helpful way to think about the stories of your life? If so, please briefly describe why. Or if not, please also describe.

- **Flora Keshgegian**, on the other hand, says the practice of Christian hope is less about looking to the future and more about remembering our past and living faithfully into our present. In remembering, she says, we remember to take note of how God has been at work in our lives and draw hope from these signs of God's presence today (as God has been, so God will be). Keshgegian also contends that there is evidence of God's beauty in the finite things of this world, and these simple things of life are the work of God's redemptive presence.

Is this a new concept for you? Do you find it a helpful way to think about the stories of your life? If so, please briefly describe why. Or if not, please also describe.

- **Victor Frankl**, contends that the will to live, and to hope, is a choice that we make even in the most dark, depressing times of life. Hope, Frankl says, is not contingent on circumstance. In fact, if one looks hard enough, one can find signs of beauty, truth, love and God in every "Holocaust" moment of one's life. Yet the end, hope is about choosing to live and not die.

Is this a new concept for you? Do you find it a helpful way to think about the stories of your life? If so, please briefly describe why. Or if not, please also describe.

- **Ellen Ott Marshall**, argues for something she calls "process eschatology"—a notion that God is in creative and mutual relationship with us in every moment of our lives today: Not simply watching over from his divine post, but actively engaged with us in all the occasions of life. She says that Christian hope should not focus so much on an end time when God will make everything right, but rather, on the in-breaking of God's Kingdom wholeness today. Where Moltmann tends to focus on the "not yet" aspect of Christian hope, Marshall tends to focus on the "already," or what can be expected in this life.

Is this a new concept for you? Do you find it a helpful way to think about the stories of your life? If so, please briefly describe why. Or if not, please also describe.

3. About the Opening Retreat:

Did you feel as if you were given enough instruction on what to expect from the small group times?

- What was most helpful?

- What was least helpful?

4. About the Small Group Meetings:

- Were you given enough instruction on how to write and share your story? If not, what would have helped?
- Was it helpful to hear other people tell their stories? If so, in what ways was it helpful? If not, what could have been done differently to make the experience more helpful?
- Did you find it helpful to begin each meeting with a meditation on a Bible story? Is there one Bible story or passage that was especially meaningful to you? If so, which story was it?
- Throughout the study you were given the opportunity to complete various hope measurement forms including a Hope Scale (from earliest memory to present). Was this a helpful exercise in self-evaluation and discovery?

5. About the Practices of Hope

- Several methods of reframing including “as-if” conversation, guided imagery, dreams, deleting the problem, storytelling and imagining a miracle, were introduced at the opening retreat and group meetings. Did these methods help you experience more hope about your future? If so, which ones? If not, what do you think would have helped?
- We also practiced naming overlooked signs of God’s presence in our past as promises of God’s presence in the future. Was this a helpful way to “reframe” your life experiences?

6. About the Leader:

- Was the project organized in a way that helped you grow in your understanding of Christian hope?
- Did the facilitator present a good balance of theological ideas and practical ways to use those ideas? If not, which did you feel was emphasized more?

7. About Use with Future Groups:

- What would you say to another church person who told you that he or she was planning to go through this same process of Christian hope and practice? Would you recommend it? If so, why? If not, why?
- Is this process, as you experienced it, suited for church lay-people? Or are there other groups of people for which you feel this process would be better suited?

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²⁶⁸ I asked participants to sign their forms so that I could evaluate their responses using information that had already been received from the various instruments of hope measurement administered in the beginning of our small group study.

ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

Theological Analysis of Christian Hope

This project drew from a selection of contemporary theologians in a conversation about the experience, understanding and subsequent practice of hope. Primary theologians included Jürgen Moltmann, Flora Keshgegian, and Ellen Ott Marshall. Because of the relative complexity of Moltmann's writings, a number of secondary theologians were brought into the discussion for theological-conceptual clarification.

Primary Theologians

Bonhoeffer, Dietrich. *Life Together: A Discussion of Christian Fellowship*. San Francisco: Harper & Row Publishers, 1954. His work described how the Christian community is the means of God's solidarity with us. Writing from an autobiographical viewpoint, Bonhoeffer spoke to the experience of hope in difficult circumstances. This work and portions of his *Letters and Papers from Prison, Volume 8*, provided the theological foundation for a discussion of the importance of community for the formation of hope.

Brueggemann, Walter. *The Message of the Psalms*. Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House, 1984. Brueggemann's three-fold characterization of the Psalms as ones that progress from orientation (the assumptive world), lead to disorientation (loss of the assumptive world) and may lead to new-orientation (a new assumptive possibility), suggests a possible method of evaluating the staging of the journey through loss to new hope. The work served as the conceptual framework for the goal of pastoral care.

Keshgegian, Flora A. *Time for Hope: Practices for Living in Today's World*. New York, NY: Continuum Books, 2006. Keshgegian tempers the relatively triumphalist tone of Moltmann's descriptions of hope with a more modest assessment of the celebration of Christian hope's partial victories. Where Moltmann tends towards a linear-progressive view of eschatological hope, with God in this world becoming increasingly more manifest, Keshgegian speaks of an experience of hope that is messy, incomplete, halting and essential cyclical. At work in Keshgegian's reflections is an argument for the meaning of time. For Moltmann, time is the context for God's forward-moving progress. For Keshgegian, a Christian's being in time is less a celebration of progress and more a willingness to claim and experience the beauty of the present moment.

Kierkegaard, Søren. *Sickness Unto Death: A Christian Psychological Exposition for Upbuilding and Awakening*. Edited by Howard V. Hong and Edna Hong. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1980. Of particular interest to this study is Kierkegaard's discussion of the three fundamental components of human existence: necessity, freedom and possibility. Hope, or movement from despair, is claiming the freedom to choose possibility.

Marshall, Ellen Ott. *Though the Fig Tree Does Not Blossom: Toward a Responsible Theology of Hope*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2006. Marshall is helpful in mediating the relative strengths of Moltmann's triumphalism and Keshgegian's more cautious, modest hope. Marshall points to the necessity of our belief in the future orientation of hope (the essential ground of hope that God's Kingdom rule will come to full completion), but also insists that in the meantime Christian hope must be grounded in ethical responses of hopefulness. Of particular value is Marshall's description of an "ethic of risk" suggesting that in the context of life's inherent ambiguity, acts of hope must emerge out of a courage to act without yet knowing the possible efficacy of our actions.

Moltmann, Jürgen. *Church in the Power of the Spirit: a Contribution of Messianic Ecclesiology*. Translated by Margaret Kohl. New York: Harper & Row, 1977. Specifically pages 76-108. This work was especially helpful in understanding the practical application of the theological implications of his two earlier works—*Theology of Hope* and *The Crucified God*. Moltmann stresses that the Church is God's agent of hope working for a "conversion of God's future."

_____. *The Crucified God: the Cross of Christ as the Foundation and Criticism of Christian Theology*. Translated by R.A. Wilson and John Bowden. London: SCM Press, 1974. This work is essential to a description of a complete pastoral theology of hope. In *Theology of Hope*, Moltmann addresses the ground of hope in the promise of God's future. But in *The Crucified God*, Moltmann speaks to the problem of hope in times of suffering.

_____. Moltmann, Jürgen. Interview with Barbara Rossing. *God's Unfinished Future: Jürgen Moltmann Biography*. www.trinitywallstreet.org/webcast/video/profiles/biographies/gods-unfinished-future-jurgen-moltmann-biography. (Trinity Church, 74 Trinity Place, New York, New York). Moltmann reflects on the personal experiences that led him to ponder a theology of hope.

_____. *In the End—The Beginning: the Life of Hope*. Translated by Margaret Kohl. Minneapolis, MN: The Fortress Press, 2004. Of particular interest to this study is Moltmann's discussion of "New Beginnings in Catastrophes," and a development of a so-called "biblical catastrophe theology." Moltmann offers Noah and the flood, Israel's history in exile, and Jesus in Golgotha as major biblical examples of how hope rises from the context of significant loss.

_____. "Justice for Victims and Perpetrators," *Reformed World* 44, no. 1 (March 1994): 2-12. Especially helpful to this project is a continued reflection on a theme described in Moltmann's earlier work, *In the End—The Beginning*: nothing is lost to God—neither the victim that experiences arbitrary evil, nor the perpetrator. In an especially moving recasting of the traditional doctrine of justification, Moltmann shifts the focus away from a Pauline notion of "wages of sin" to the will of God to heal all that is broken, incomplete or less than what God intends. For life's victims, there is liberation from the pain of

suffering. For life's perpetrators, there is liberation from guilt, shame, and regret and opportunity for new life.

_____. *On Human Dignity*. Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress Press, 1984. Of particular value to this work is Moltmann's discussion of the Church as "co-creators" with God in God's process of bringing liberation to those who are oppressed, especially the section beginning on page 111, and also noted in Gutteson's discussion of Moltmann's Christologically-founded ethic on page 97.

_____. "Politics and the Practice of Hope." *The Christian Century* 87, no. 10 (March 11, 1970): 288-291. This article gives substance to a relatively muted theme in Moltmann's first work, *Theology of Hope*. Only towards the end of that work does Moltmann turn from discussion of promise and orientation of hope in God's future to a description of what the Church is to do in the mean time between the already-ness of Christ's resurrection and the completion of God's Kingdom. In this article, Moltmann makes the connection clear. Hope is more than anticipation. It is also active engagement in all the places where liberation is needed.

_____. *Theology of Hope: On the Ground and the Implications of a Christian Eschatology*. 5th edition. Translated by James W. Leitch. London: SCM Press, 1967. Moltmann speaks of hope not so much as a doctrine but as an orientation of the believing community of faith. Hope is our reasonable expectation that God is at work to bring to completion that which he demonstrated in the death and resurrection of Jesus. In Jesus' resurrection we have the prospect of a "passion for possibility." As such, hope is God's promise for the future based on our understanding of God's past (Exodus forward to the Cross), and the little glimpses of God's presence today.

_____. *The Spirit of Life: A Universal Affirmation*. Translated by Margaret Kohl. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992. Moltmann offers a thoroughly Trinitarian theology of hope. In God, we are given promise of future; in Christ, we experience God's solidarity with us; and in Spirit, we are given the power, the creative energy, and the vista-making capacity to live into this emerging experience of God's future. While Moltmann's prior works, *Theology of Hope* and *The Crucified God* effectively described theological groundwork for a theology of hope, it seemed they insisted on hopeful practice by dint of human will. Moltmann's *The Spirit of Life* serves an essential work in a complete understanding of not why we practice hope in difficult times, but how we might be empowered to do it.

The New Oxford Annotated Bible with Apocrypha: New Revised Standard Version, 4th edition. Edited by Coogan, Michael D., Marc Brettler, Carol A. Newsom and PHEME PERKINS. New York: Oxford University Press, 2010. All scripture in this project are taken from the NRSV.

Volf, Miroslav. "Communities of Faith and Radical Discipleship—an Interview with Jürgen Moltmann." *The Christian Century* 100, no. 8 (March 16, 1983): 246. Cited from <http://www.religion-online.org/>. Discipleship is radical in the sense that faith is summons in the name of Christ to partner with God to heal human oppression. The status quo cannot be passively accepted.

Secondary Theologians

Bauckham, Richard. *The Theology of Jürgen Moltmann*. Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1995.

Bauckham gives a concise overview of Moltmann's primary theological themes. For the reader who is not well-versed in the work of Moltmann, Bauckham offers a sort of systematic summary.

_____. From preface in, Jürgen Moltmann's *Theology of Hope*. St. Albans Place, London: SCM Press, 1967. A newcomer to the works of Jürgen Moltmann, Bauckham was especially helpful in offering a way to access the core of Moltmann's thought.

_____. "Jürgen Moltmann." In *The Modern Theologians*, edited by David F. Ford, 209-224. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 1997. This work offers an excellent cursory overview of Moltmann's primary theological themes

Bentley, W. "The Kingdom of God in Moltmann's Eschatology: a South African Perspective." PhD diss., University of Pretoria, 2003. Viewed June 6, 2012, <http://upetd.up.ac.za/thesis/available/etd-10132003-170757/> Concise description of Moltmann's method of theological inquiry. This description was important to the writing of the chapter on methodology.

Dawn, Marva J. *Joy in Our Weakness: A Gift of Hope from the Book of Revelation*. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2002. Dawn argues that the message of Revelation is one not of predictive timelines but of how all of life, especially the occasions of suffering and weakness, points us in the direction of God's ultimate victory demonstrated in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Of particular value is chapter 19, "The Third Reason for Praise: Hope for the Future," where Dawn argues that the Christian hope not only promises the fulfillment of God's ultimate purposes for our lives and world, but that through God's spirit presence we begin to experience "first fruits" of that promised victory.

Fiddes, Paul S. *The Creative Suffering of God*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988. This work efficiently unpacked the assumptions of Moltmann's view of God's passability. This project leaned heavily on this particular theme in addressing God's solidarity with us as a foundation consolation of Christian hope.

Guttesen, Poul. *Leaning into the Future: The Kingdom of God in the Theology of Jürgen Moltmann and the Book of Revelation*. Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publishing, 2009. This work highlights some of the dialectical thought that courses through Moltmann's work. God has acted decisively in the world through Jesus Christ to give victory over death; and yet, God's work is still not finished. The Church looks to the future with great anticipation; and yet, in conformity to Christ's suffering we are drawn in discipleship to those places where suffering continues. Also helpful, is Gutteson's four-fold critique of Moltmann's theology of redemption. Though Gutteson claims the benefit of Moltmann's

de-emphasis of suffering as consequence of sin, he nevertheless names the problems Moltmann's view holds.

Hamman, Jacob J. *When Steeples Cry: Leading Congregations Through Loss and Change*. Cleveland, Ohio: The Pilgrim Press, 2005. Hamman speaks of experiences of loss as liminal moments of spiritual growth, occasions where individually or corporately, we may embark on a journey that "takes us in the 'in-between' world of what is present and what is yet to come. The 'in-between' world of faith and mourning is a creative space that invites new life." Loss is the context of the work of hopefulness. This work also affirms with David Jensen (see below) that the experiences of hopelessness and subsequent hope are corporate experiences. As individuals suffer loss, so too do whole communities of faith. Loss has corporate implications.

Harvie, Timothy. *Jürgen Moltmann's Ethics of Hope: Eschatological Possibilities for Moral Action*. Surrey, England: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 1988. This work helped clarify the implications of Moltmann's notion of Christo-praxis, the ground of this work's third consolation of Christian hope: the belief that because of God's promised future, and God's solidarity with us, we can begin to move from despair to new action.

Hauerwas, Stanley and William Willimon. *Resident Aliens*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1989. Of particular interest to this project are chapters 3 & 4. In chapter 3, the authors describe life as a serial process of hopeful discovery. Christian hope is not a final destination but, as Keshgegian argues, a life-long journey. Along the way of Christian hope, we participate in God's future through acts of social-ethical engagement.

Hiebert, Theodore. "Reclaiming the World: Biblical Resources for Ecological Crisis." *Interpretation* 65, no. 4 (October 2011): 341-352. Hiebert's article is part of an entire *Interpretation* edition, "Creation Groaning," which describes the cosmic, this-worldly significance of God's promise of new creation. Hiebert (with Jensen) makes an argument for the value Scripture places on the world and how our lives of faithfulness, therefore, must extend beyond the local community to the larger issues of environmental stewardship. Hiebert and Jensen broaden the parameters of a primarily individualistic view of Christian hope.

Jensen, David H. *Living Hope: The Future and Christian Faith* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010). This work critiques the notion of Christian hope as individualistic experience. God's future also encompasses the larger concerns of society and all of God's creation. Jensen also offers an especially helpful discussion also noted in Moltmann, that nothing is lost to God—all things, even especially the broken pieces of life, are drawn into God's eschatological future.

Kellner, Douglas. "Ernst Bloch, Utopia and Ideology Critique," www.uta.edu/huma/illuminations/kell1. Provides a cursory description of the connection between Bloch's notion of progressive humanism and Moltmann's later theology of hope in God's future which is more than the sum of human possibility. As Bauckham writes in the preface to Moltmann's *Theology of Hope*, "God's future is about 'transcendent possibilities and not mere human progress.'"

Long, Thomas G. *Preaching From Memory to Hope*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009. Of particular interest is Long's chapter on preaching and eschatology. Long's commentary on the themes of eschatology in *No Country for Old Men* is particularly useful. Long argues that Christian hope is eschatological: it gives a vision of an alternate reality in the context a broken world.

MacLeod, Donald. "Christology of Jürgen Moltmann." *Themelios* 24, no. 2 (Fall 1999): 35-47. In thinking about Moltmann's doctrine of God's passability, MacLeod makes the point that Christ's suffering on the Cross is an "active" suffering. Christ chooses to suffer as a voluntary identification with the downtrodden. MacLeod succinctly answers the question of how God can be God and suffer.

McWilliams, Warren. *The Passion of God: Divine Suffering in Contemporary Protestant Theology*. Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1985. Specifically, Chapter 1, "Jürgen Moltmann: *The Crucified God*." This work helped clarify the implications of Moltmann's notion of God's passability, the ground of this work's second consolation of Christian hope: the belief that our suffering is made bearable because God is with us. McWilliams is also helpful in pointing out that Moltmann's concern was to emphasize God's response to suffering, not describe its origin. McWilliams also offers history of the main arguments for and against God's passability.

Marty, Martin E. *A Cry of Absence: Reflections for the Winter of the Heart*. San Francisco: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1983. Marty draws an important distinction between two kinds of spirituality, a wintry spirituality and a summery spirituality, and suggests that in the Church we tend to privilege summery spirituality. This privileging often precludes the important work of lament.

Neal, Ryan A. *Theology as Hope: On the Ground and Implications of Jürgen Moltmann's Doctrine of Hope*. Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2008. Of particular interest to this project is Neal's second chapter, "Crucifixion as Hope." Neal highlights one of Moltmann's essential dialectical principles that "the deity of God is revealed in the paradox of the cross."

Schilling, S. Paul. "Ernst Bloch: Philosopher of the Not-Yet." *The Christian Century* 84, no. 46 (November 15, 1967): 1455-58. Schilling offers a concise, accessible history of how Moltmann's theology of hope was influenced by and adapted from the earlier work of Ernst Bloch.

Soelle, Dorothee. *To Work and to Love: A Theology of Creation*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984. Soelle's final chapter, "*Created for Hope*," is an eloquent description of creation as God's unfinished business to which we Christians are called to participate. She makes the bold statement that "he or she who does not fight back lives wrongly. From a religious standpoint, the person who does not fight back lives wrongly towards God." At this point, Soelle joins with Keshgegian and Marshall in emphasizing the necessity of human agency in the process of new hope.

Woodbridge, Noel B. "Review of Thomas Groome, *Sharing Faith: The Way of Shared Praxis*." *Conspectus* 10 (September 2010): 114-132. This work was helpful in understanding Moltmann's notion of Christo-praxis: what begins in reflection on context and God in context leads finally to engagement. The basic premise is that reflection and new understanding necessarily lead to action.

Autobiographical Narratives of a Theology of Hope

Bonhoeffer, Dietrich. *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works, Volume 8: Letters and Papers from Prison*. Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress Press, June 2010. A description of the practice of hope from the confines of imprisonment. The work recalls the Apostle Paul's affirmation that hope is possible in all circumstances.

Claypool, John R. *The Hopeful Heart*. New York, NY: Morehouse Publishing, 2003. This brief book draws from both his own experience of loss and C.S. Lewis' in offering an apologetic for Christian hope. This book continues to ground my understanding of the practice of a theology of hope for pastoral care.

_____. *Five Smooth Stones for Pastoral Work*. Atlanta, GA: John Knox Press, 1975. Drawing from the book of Lamentations, Claypool describes the necessary flow of grief: from full-throated and raw lament, to praise. There is a time for raw lament. There is also a time for raw lament to cease.

_____. *Tracks of a Fellow Struggler*. Waco, TX: Word, 1974. Claypool describes the anguish of losing his daughter to leukemia. Several years later, Claypool reflects on what he has learned about Christian hope and how it assisted him to go forward from that time of great loss.

_____. Sermon, "What Can We Expect of God?" in *This Incomplete One: Words Occasioned by the Death of a Young Person*. Edited by Michael D. Bush, 33-52. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2006. This was Claypool's first sermon after his daughter's death.

Frankl, Viktor E. *Man's Search for Meaning*. 10th edition. New York City, NY: Washington Square Press, Inc., 1967. Although Frankl is primarily concerned to describe the framework for his practice of logotherapy, he touches deeply on personal experiences of emotional and spiritual anguish of the Holocaust.

Hallie, Phillip. *Lest Innocent Blood Be Shed: The Story of the Village of Le Chambon and How Goodness Happened There*. New York City, NY: HarperCollins Publishers, 1994. Hallie recalls the insistent ministry of solidarity this French community of faith practiced. The story provides narrative substance to the second and third consolations of hope: God's solidarity expressed through our practices of solidarity with those who suffer.

Lewis, C.S. *A Grief Observed*. New York, NY: Bantam Books, 1976. Written following his wife's death. Lewis comes as close as any writer in describing the raw, emotional essence of grief's pain.

Sittser, Jerry. *A Grace Disguised: How the Soul Grows Through Loss*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1995. This is a book that argues that all suffering, all loss, has redemptive possibility, that precisely in our times of loss we may be more open to transformation. Yet it is much more a book that begins with Sittser's loss of his wife, mother, and four-year-old daughter in a horrible accident. In the immediate aftermath, Sittser writes: "All I wanted was to be dead. Only the sense of responsibility for my three surviving children and the habit of living for forty years kept me alive."

Wiesel, Elie. *Night*. New York City, NY: Bantam Books, April 1982. Wiesel joins Frankl as a Holocaust survivor who looks into the abyss of human darkness and describes what he sees. There is no redemption to be found in Wiesel's book. Only a description of hope as a will to fight against the darkness. Wiesel's book produces the often quoted "God in the gallows" narrative.

Wolterstorff, Nicholas. *Lament For a Son*. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1987. Wolterstorff writes of the processes of his grief following the death of his son. This book, more than any other, deeply resonated with my own experiences of grief following my son's death. As with Lewis, the author makes clear that grief finds no easy consolation.

Examples of the Processes of Hope

Film

No Country for Old Men, directed by Joel D. Coen & Ethan J. Coen (Miramax Films and Paramount Vantage, 2008 DVD Release). Scene 15, "Best I Can Do." In closing sequence, the film offers a moving description of Moltmann's promise of God's future.

Rachel Getting Married, directed Robert Altman (Sony Pictures Classics, March 2009 DVD release). The film illustrates the problem of the inability to forgive self in the process of new hope.

The Tree of Life. Directed by Terrence Malik (Fox Searchlight Pictures, DVD release October 11, 2011). The film explores Job's question ("Why?") and suggests two possible responses—either to impose one's will on the chaos of the world or to accept its mysteries with grace. The film does not finally answer the dilemma. Rather, it points to the experience of struggle in the face of life's unexpected and seemingly arbitrary sufferings.

Today, featuring Rob Bell, number 17 in a Nooma Films series created and produced by Flannel. This short piece provokes small group conversation on hope as willingness to move into God's future.

Literature

Camus, Albert. *The Plague*. 1st ed. Translated by Stuart Gilbert. New York City, NY: Vintage Books, 1991. The dialogue between the priest and the town doctor frames the question of Christian faith in tragedy and provides a critical part of this project's chapter 2.

Carroll, Lewis. *Through the Looking Glass*. Philadelphia: Henry Alterus Company, 1987. C.S. Song quotes a passage from "Alice in the Looking- Glass House" (121) to emphasize the importance of allowing others to tell their own stories of struggle. The passage illustrates one of Song's guiding principles of "dialogical conversation": that as pastors, we engage others where they are and not necessarily where we would want them to meet us.

Cather, Willa. *Death Comes For The Archbishop*. New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1990. Cather's short chapter, "December Night" describes the essential role of pastor as the presence of Christ in solidarity.

Deraniyagala, Sonali. *Wave*. New York City, NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 2013. Deraniyagala's memoir offers a rich description of the emotional complexity of loss recovery. Her memoir follows the stages of loss recovery from immediate aftermath to eight years following.

Hemingway, Ernest. *The Old Man and the Sea*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1952. Hemingway's short novel illustrates that at least part of the substance of hope is not final victory but a continued willingness to engage in life.

O'Brien, Tim. *The Things They Carried*. New York City, NY: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Publishing Company, 1990. O'Brien tells the story of his experiences as a soldier in Vietnam. This moving memoir speaks to the importance of story in making meaning of experience, especially tragic ones.

Thurman, Howard. *The Inward Journey: Meditations on the Spiritual Quest*. New York City, NY: Harper & Brothers, Publishers, 1961. Of particular interest to this project is Thurman's use of T. S. Eliot's poem, *The Hollow Men*, as a commentary on the experience of spiritual dissonance in the hope-making process, in Thurman's meditation, "The Idea and the Reality," 68-69.

Visual Art

Anastasis (icon). Provided by *Theologic*, found at http://lent.goarch.org/holy_pascha/learn/. The work movingly illustrates the context from which Christ's resurrection emerges: from all the broken places of our lives. Of particular importance to this project is the artist's depiction of Adam and Eve, having carried not only the loss of their innocence, but the loss of a son, now lifted up by God into a new future.

"And Jesus Wept," statute located immediately west of the Murrah Building Bomb memorial site in Oklahoma City; erected by St. Joseph's Catholic Church, one of the first brick-and-mortar churches built in the city. Jesus faces away from the devastation, covering his face with his hand. In front of Jesus is a wall with 168 gaps in it, representing the voids left by each life lost. Go to the website, St. Joseph Old Cathedral, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, for information about the statue. The statue portrays Jesus' emotion in the face of great human tragedy. Here, Jesus is the great Moved Mover, not aloof, but involved in the complexity of human suffering.

Kiff, Ken. *Flower and Black Sky* (1987-88). In Wendy Beckett, *Art and the Sacred: the Mystical Now*. New York City, NY: Universe, 1993. See Beck's commentary, 74-75. Beck writes that Kiff's work seems to illustrate that hope is at least partly a decision to claim life despite the surrounding darkness—a visual description, perhaps, of the choice to stand in protest against the forces of destruction.

The Practice of Hope in a Pastoral Care Setting

Attig, Thomas. *How We Grieve: Relearning the World*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1996. Of particular interest is Attig's concept that the work of hope is to engage in the process of "relearning the world." Although Attig is primarily concerned to describe the phenomena of grieving, he alludes to hope by speaking of the "spiritual" process of relearning the worlds that loss has challenged. As pastor, this description of the work of grief as "relearning the world" resonates.

Buechner, Frederick. *A Room Called Remember*. New York City, NY: HarperCollins Publishers, 1992. Just as lament is an essential part of the process of hope-making, so too is remembering God's history of solidarity with us. Buechner makes a case for God's future which is founded on a memory of God's faithfulness to us in the past.

Billman, Kathleen and Daniel Migliore. *Rachel's Cry: Prayer of Lament and Rebirth of Hope*. Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2006. Billman and Migliore draw on the biblical Rachel in describing the necessity of prayer and spirituality that give voice to cries of protest in the face of suffering. Though this project argues for Christian hope, it is also careful to describe the intermediary steps along the way to new hope.

- Blumenthal, David R. "Liturgies of Anger: the Lost Art of Imprecation." *Crosscurrents* 52, no. 2 (Summer 2002): 179-199. Of particular interest to this project is Blumenthal's argument that spirited lament is a necessary part of the process towards hope.
- Calderwood, Kimberly A. "Adapting the Transtheoretical Model of Change to the Bereavement Process." *Social Work* 56, no. 2 (April 2011): 107-118. Calderwood gives a concise description of both the history of development and conceptual description of the Transtheoretical model of change first offered by J. Prochaska and C. DiClemente in their 1984 work, *The Transtheoretical Approach: Crossing Traditional Boundaries of Therapy*. Calderwood's use of the Transtheoretical Model to the process of change in bereavement is especially helpful to this project.
- Capps, Donald. *Agents of Hope: A Pastoral Psychology*. Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2001. Although Capps does not offer a "how-to" approach to hope in pastoral ministry, he argues that clergy need to recover the language of theology in "diagnosing" the maladies of the human condition. Of particular interest to this study is Capps' description of the human origins of the capacity to hope (trust), what hoping is and is not, and what promotes hope. Like Andrew Lester, Capps speaks of "reframing of time" in the future. But Capps also suggests that the past can also be reframed.
- . *Reframing: A New Method in Pastoral Care*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1990. Of particular to this study is Capps' description of reframing, not as a merely therapeutic skill, but as one which Jesus practiced. Of additional interest, Capps' more detailed descriptions of the methods of reframing.
- Cutcliffe, J.R. "The Principles and Processes of Inspiring Hope in Bereavement Counseling: a Modified Grounded Theory Study—Part One." *Journal of Psychiatric and Mental Health Nursing* 13 (2006): 598-603. The article offers clinical verification of the importance of Dori Baker's concept of "listening to speech" in the narrative process of faith development. Cutcliffe emphasizes that suffering ones are most able to move forward in the hope-making process when they feel they are being listened to and understood non-judgmentally by the care-giver.
- Duff, Nancy. "Recovering Lamentation as a Practice in the Church." In *Lament: Reclaiming Practices in Pulpit, Pew and Public Square*, edited by Sally A. Brown and Patrick D. Miller, 3-14. Louisville, Westminster John Knox Press, 2005. Duff joins with Blumenthal (reference above) in claiming the necessity of lament in the process of move towards renewed hope. Duff and Blumenthal supported one of this project's assumptions: that in the church we tend to suppress experiences of what Brueggemann names "seasons of disorientation."

- Kauffman, Jeffrey, ed. *Loss of the Assumptive World: A Theory of Traumatic Loss*. New York: Routledge, 2002. Of particular interest is the concept that the work of hope is a process of reconstructing meaning in the context of loss. Practically, this process may require “narrative reconstruction.” Kenneth Doka, in his chapter, “*How Could God?*” addresses loss and the “spiritual assumptive world,” arguing that the process towards hope involves re-imagining the presence of God, or of God’s character. This concept provided a primary metaphor for describing the places from which we begin to reconstruct hope. Chapter 1, for instance, draws from the experience of the Hebrews in exile to describe an occasion of the “loss of an assumptive world.” (Psalm 137).
- Lester, Andrew D. *Hope in Pastoral Care and Counseling*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995. Lester develops a “creative methodology for nurturing hope” and suggests several strategies for “reframing and constructing hopeful future stories.” Lester argues that a discussion of hope needs to begin with a thorough understanding of the existential experience of human living (anthropological theology) rather than a more theoretical discussion of theological doctrine.
- Lynch, William. *Images of Hope*. South Bend, IN: Notre Dame Press, 1990. Lynch says very simply, “The sense of hope is: There is a way out.” Of particular interest to this study is the connection Lynch draws between hope and the capacity or willingness to imagine.
- Norris, Kathleen. *The Quotidian Mysteries: Laundry, Liturgy and “Women’s Work.”* New York, NY: Paulist Press, 1998. Norris was a helpful companion to Flora Keshgegian’s notion of the experience of hope in the simple things of life. Norris writes that signs of God’s presence are experienced not necessarily in great moments of spiritual drama, but in the performance of life’s routines.
- Nouwen, Henri J.M. *The Wounded Healer*. Garden City, NY: Image Books, 1979. Of particular interest to this project is Nouwen’s description of “Ministry to a Hopeless Person,” as a ministry of “waiting for tomorrow,” 75-77.
- O’Connell-Killen, Patricia. “Assisting Adults to Think Theologically.” In *Method in Ministry: Theological Reflection and Christian Ministry*, edited by James D. Whitehead and Evelyn Eaton Whitehead, 103-111. Kansas City: Sheed and Ward, 1980. An excellent essay on the pastoral role of assisting others to make meaning of their life stories. The author lists four important steps to constructive theological reflection.
- Oden, Thomas C. *Pastoral Theology: Essentials of Ministry*. San Francisco: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1983. See especially Chapter 15, “A Theodicy for Pastoral Practice,” 223-248, where Oden describes twelve “most recalled classical pastoral consolations” of soul care in times of loss. The passage offers a way to contrast classical consolations of pastoral care with Moltmann’s theology of hope.

- Oz, Mehmet. "Goal Power." *Time* 180, no.12 (September 17, 2012): 46-49. The article gives a reader-friendly, non-academic summary of the otherwise complicated intricacies of the transtheoretical model of change and includes a visual chart of the major stages of changes especially helpful for introducing the theory to first-time hope-study participants.
- Pargament, Kenneth I., Joseph Kennell, William Hathaway, Nancy Grenvengoe, Jon Newman and Wendy Jones. "Religion and the Problem-Solving Process: Three Styles of Coping." *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 27, no. 1 (1988): 90-104. Of particular interest to this project is the description of the three main ways that religion works (or inhibits) what the authors call a healthy coping style (self-directing, deferring and collaborative). The authors give clinical credence to Moltmann's assumption that the human aspect of hope begins in the reshaping of our thoughts about the world. The work also points to the importance of human agency in the process towards new hope.
- Prochaska, James O., Carlo C. DiClemente, John C. Norcross. *Changing for Good*. New York City, NY: Avon Books, Inc., 1994. The book suggests a practical application of the transtheoretical theory. Of particular interest to this project is chapter 2, "When You Change," which briefly discusses the various stages of the authors' theory of change.
- Rupp, Joyce. *Praying Our Goodbyes: Understanding the Spirituality of Change in our Lives*. 1st revision. Notre Dame, IN: Ava Maria Press, 2009. Of particular interest is Rupp's practical discussion about how we "Pray our Goodbyes," which begin in acknowledgement of what has been lost and leads to "re-orientation."
- Schlaepfer, René. *The Hope Experience: 50 Days of Hope*. Santa Cruz, CA: Twin Lakes Church, 2009. This work includes several ways to help participants think about Christian hope. Especially helpful to this work were Schlaepfer's measures of the experience of hope.
- Shapiro, Johanna and Valerie Ross. "Applications of Narrative Theory and Therapy to the Practice of Family Medicine," *Family Medicine* 34, no. 2 (2002): 96-100. Of particular importance to this project is Shapiro's Table 1, "Types of Narrative Questions." The suggestions guide the care-giver in developing questions to help the suffering one begin to think about the meaning of one's personal narrative of loss.
- Snyder, C.R. *The Psychology of Hope*. New York, NY: The Free Press, 1994. Of particular interest to this project is Snyder's description of hope as a simple equation willpower (the desire to be hopeful) and way power (the capacity to act on one's desire). Snyder's concept of way power provides a clinical segue to Moltmann's notion of Spirit and energy to be hopeful.
- Steinke, Peter L. *Congregational Leadership in Anxious Times*. Herndon, VA: The Alban Institute, 2006. Of particular interest to this project, Steinke's discussion in chapter 4, "Holy Tissue," about the neuro-biology of hope-filled thinking, 56-58.

Stone, Howard. *Depression and Christian Hope: New Insights for Pastoral Counseling*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998. An insightful reworking of Soren Kierkegaard's descriptions of despair and hope for pastoral care.

Stone, Howard and Andrew Lester. "Hope and Possibility: Envisioning the Future in Pastoral Conversation." *The Journal of Pastoral Care* 55, no. 3 (Fall 2001): 259-269. Of particular value to this project is the discussion about "Methods for Envisioning a New Future."

Welker, Michael & Cynthia A. Jarvis, eds. *Loving God with Our Minds: the Pastor as Theologian*. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2004. Specifically, Jürgen Moltmann, "Praying with Eyes Open," 196-97, where he speaks of hope as watchfulness.

Measures of Hope

Ellison, Craig W. "Spiritual Well-Being: Conceptualization and Measurement." *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 11, no. 4 (1983): 330-338. Ellison's tool, "Spiritual Well-Being Scale," included in the article's appendix, was used as an instrument of hope assessment in this project.

Herth, Kaye. "Abbreviated Instrument to Measure Hope: Development and Psychometric Evaluation." *Journal of Advanced Nursing* 17 (1992): 1251-1259. The article suggests three factors of hope including sense of possibility for the future, readiness to change, and interconnectedness with a caring community.

_____. "Development and Implementation of a Hope Intervention Program." *Oncology Nursing Forum* 28, no. 6 (2001): 1009-1017. Of particular interest to this project, and future studies, is Herth's Table 1 which outlines the steps, goals and activities for a "Hope Intervention Model."

Mahoney, Michael J. and Donald K. Granvold. "Constructivism and Psychotherapy." *World Psychiatry* 4, no. 2 (June 2005): 74-77. The article discusses two critical aspects of the hope-making process—acknowledgement of the suffering one to realize personal agency for change and of the need of the care-giver to foster "respectful collaboration."

Pattengale, Jerry. "The Hope Scale: A Measurement of Willpower and Waypower." In *Proving and Improving. Volume II: Tools and Techniques for Assessing the First College Year. The First-Year Experience*, Monograph Series No. 37, edited by Randy L. Swing, National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience and Students in Transition (2004), 157-160. The article cited in this paper was downloaded from http://www.semo.edu/ustudies/images/StuTrans_Pattengale_HopeScale_2009.pdf Pattengale gives a good summary of Snyder's expansive work on the clinical definitions of hope and its measurements.

Snyder, C.R. "Conceptualizing, Measuring, and Nurturing Hope." *Journal of Counseling & Development* 73 (January/February 1995): 355-360. The article includes a copy of the "The Hope Scale" used in this project and instructions for administering the tool of assessment.

Snyder, C.R., Jennifer S. Cheavens, and Scott T. Michael. "Hope Theory: History and Elaborated Model." In *Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Hope*, edited by J. Elliott, 101-118. Hauppauge NY: Nova Science Publishers, 2005. The article offers a good discussion of the implications of the two primary concepts of Snyder's hope theory—pathway thinking (possible paths to resolution) and agency thinking (the degree to which persons believe they have the capacity to successfully access possible pathways to change).

Snyder, C. R., Cheri Harris, John R. Anderson, Sharon A. Holleran, Lori M. Irving, Sandra Sigmon, Lauren Yoshinobu, June Gibb, Charyle Langelles & Pat Harney. "The Will and the Ways: Development and Validation of an Individual-Differences Measure of Hope." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 60 (1991): 570-585.

The Oxford Book of Prayer, ed. George Appleton. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1985. See especially Gabrielle Hadington, 89. Hadington's prayer frames one of the major findings in the study of hope—that new hope is not found in "once-and-for-all" moments of spiritual drama. Rather, in the little stirrings, the tiny resolves to move forward." As pastors in looking for signs of new hope we may do well to train our focus on these moment of "tiny resolve."

Weingarten, Kaethe. "Reasonable Hope: Construct, Clinical Applications, and Supports." *Family Process* 49 (2010): 5-25. Of particular interest to this project are Weingarten's thorough descriptions of five characteristics of "reasonable hope." Additionally, Weingarten's rich, conceptual phrase, "co-creating conversational hope spaces," provided another way to think about Dori Baker's critical step "listening to speech," in her story-theology process.

Narrative Theory in the Practice of Hope-Making

Baker, Dori. *Doing Girlfriend Theology: God-Talk with Young Women*. Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 2005. Baker's description of a four-fold process of story theology was the foundation for the practice of hope-making with this project's small group. Baker, and others, points to the spiritual value of telling stories as a way to not only acknowledge the facts and feelings of our lives, but to begin the process of making connections to God and God's future claims upon us.

_____. *The Barefoot Way: A Faith Guide for Youth, Young Adults, and the People Who Walk With Them*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2012. Numerous illustrations of Baker's paradigm of story theology.

- _____. "The Barefoot Way." *Windows* 127, no. 2, Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary (Spring 2012): 12-13. Thumbnail sketch of Baker's story theology methodology.
- Crites, Stephen D. "Narrative Quality of Experience." *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 39, no. 3 (September 1971): 291-311. Crites description of the shaping power narrative on page 304 is worth the relative difficulty of this read. Crites writes, "The stories people hear and tell, the dramas they see performed, not to speak of the sacred stories that are absorbed without being directly heard or seen, shape in the most profound way the inner story of experience." Through narrative, all of time, past, present and future is shaped, experienced and given meaning.
- Dinkler, Michal B. "Telling Transformation: How We Redeem Narratives and Narratives Redeem Us." *Word & World* 31, no. 3 (Summer 2011): 287-296. Of particular interest to this project is the role of story theology in healing our pasts and in shaping outlook on the present and future.
- Gillingham, Richard. "Praxis and the Content of Theology in Gustavo Gutierrez's Theological Methodology: A Comparative Critique." *Quodlibet Journal* 7, no. 2 (April 2005): Cited from <http://www.quodlibet.net/articles/gillingham-gutierrez.shtml>. Of particular interest to this project is Gillingham emphasis on the hermeneutical circularity of liberation theology. Practice emerges from reflection on one's life, and then moves from practice to new reflection. This hermeneutic is at the center of Moltmann's understanding of orthopraxis: we ponder the circumstances of life and then engage in it based on what we know of God and the mandates of Christian faith.
- McClendon, James William. *Biography as Theology: How Life Stories Can Remake Today's Theology*. Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1974. Story theology with focus on biographies of Christian lives which "show how certain archetypical images of faith do apply to their own lives and circumstances, and by extension to ours." (75)
- Meilaender, Gilbert. "Theology in Stories: C.S. Lewis and the Narrative Quality of Experience." *Word & World* 1, no. 3 (Summer 1981): 222-229. Meilaender provides helpful elaboration of Stephen Crites' narrative theory.
- Oden, Patrick. "Jürgen Moltmann and the Emerging Church in Conversation," Cawings Blog, www.dualravens.com/cawing/essays/emergingMoltmann.html (accessed February 1, 2012). Of particular interest to this project, Oden remembers the context from which Moltmann's interest in developing a theology of hope arose. Quoting Moltmann, who recalls the pain and shame that resulted from the death of World War II, Oden gives us a chance to understand the "locus theologicus" of Moltmann's thought. For Oden it is important to say that Moltmann's theology did not develop in a vacuum. It began with contextual analysis and then proceeded to theological inquiry.
- Phan, Peter C. "Method in Liberation Theologies." *Theological Studies* 61 (2000): 40-6. Description of the similarity between Moltmann and liberation theology methodology: the importance of contextualization to a development of theology.

Rhodes, Ron. "Christian Revolution in Latin America: The Changing Face of Liberation Theology." Part 1. Rancho Santa Margarita, CA: Reasoning from the Scriptures Ministry, home.earthlink.net/~ronrhodes/Liberation.html. Rhodes writes of theology that begins with "a view below," that is dynamic and in flux—something more than adherence to "a systematic collection of timeless and culture-transcending truths that remains static for all generations." As such, Rhodes describes the spirit of Moltmann's theology: one that moves beyond the constraints of classical theology to address the particular circumstances of the human dilemma.

Song, C.S. *Tell Us Our Names: Story Theology from an Asian Perspective*. Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 1984. Of particular importance to this project is Song's insistence on contextual theology. Only as we tell our own stories, not the dominant stories of culture, do we find a window to understanding God. At this point, Song echoes one of the guiding premises of Baker's story theology: the value of listening to other unto speech. Part of the process of new hope is finding the freedom to tell one's own story.

The Theodicy Question in Pastoral Care

Blumenthal, David. "Theodicy: Dissonance in Theory and Practice." *Concilium* 1 (1998): 95-106. Cited from, <http://www.js.emory.edu/BLUMENTHAL/Theodicy.html>. Although I do not agree with Blumenthal's conclusion that the solution of the theodical problem is to say that "God is not perfect," his concept of healing as a "seriatim process" was particularly helpful.

Oden, Thomas. *The Living God: Systematic Theology, Volume 1*. San Francisco: Harper Row & Publishers, 1987. See especially Chapter 15, "A Theodicy for Pastoral Practice," 223-248, where Oden describes twelve "most recalled classical pastoral consolations" of soul care in times of loss.

Rupp, Joyce. *Pilgrims of the Heart: Lenten Prayer*. Edited by Steve Mueller. St. Louis, MO: All Saints Press, 2011. Especially, "Holy Saturday: In the Tomb of Our Darkness," 30. Meditation may be found at: <http://www.allsaintscatholicpress.com/Pilgrims%20of%20the%20Heart%2002-341.pdf>

Steimle, Edmund. *From Birth to Death*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1973. See especially sermon on finding God in times of darkness, "Address Not Known," 58-65.

Tillich, Paul. "The Right to Hope," a sermon preached at Harvard's Memorial Church, March 1965, published in *The Christian Century* 107, no. 33 (November 14, 1990): 1064-1067. Tillich's sermon was especially helpful for its discussion of how to distinguish between "genuine and foolish hope." This distinction is particularly germane to this project's development of a reasonable hope.

Willimon, William H. *Sighing for Eden: Sin, Evil, and the Christian Faith*. Nashville: Abingdon, 1985. See especially chapter 2, “The Problem of Evil,” and chapters 3 & 4, “Augustinian Theodicy” and “Irenaeian Theodicy.”

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