Luther comforts a depressed pastor: Luther’s letter of consolation to George Spalatin—analysis and reflection

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The addressee of the following letter of consolation, George Spalatin, was one of Luther’s intimate and long term friends. As a canon of the Cathedral at Altenburg in 1544, Spalatin had been party to advice given to a local pastor that it was permissible for him to marry the stepmother of his deceased wife. The advice was incorrect and Luther later had to countermand Spalatin’s decision. Distressed and humiliated by his mistake, Spalatin fell into deep depression and could not be comforted. When Luther heard of this, he wrote this letter of consolation to help his old friend recover.

Grace and peace from God in Christ and the consolations of the Holy Spirit to my worthy master in Christ, George Spalatin, superintendent of the churches in Misnia,¹ most faithful pastor of Altenburg, my beloved in the Lord. Amen.

My dearest Spalatin, I heartily sympathize with you and earnestly pray our Lord Jesus Christ to strengthen you and give you a cheerful heart. I should like to know, and am making diligent inquiries to find out, what your trouble may be or what has caused your breakdown. I am told by some that it is nothing else than depression and heaviness of heart, caused by the matrimonial affair of a parson who was publicly united in marriage to the stepmother of his deceased wife. If this is true, I beseech you most urgently not to become self-centered and heed the thoughts and sensations of your own heart, but to listen to me, your brother, who is speaking to you in the name of Christ. Otherwise your despondency will grow beyond endurance and kill you; for St. Paul says, 2 Corinthians 7:10: ‘The sorrow of the world worketh death.’ I have often passed through the same experience and witnessed the same in 1540, in the case of Magister Philip, who was nearly consumed by heaviness of heart and despondency on account of the

¹ Part of Spalatin’s responsibilities as a canon (member of the cathedral chapter) at Altenburg was supervision of the evangelical churches and their pastors in the neighbouring town of Misnia (Meissen).

LTJ 45/3 December 2011
landgrave’s affair. However, Christ used my tongue to raise him up again.² I say this on
the supposition that you have sinned and are partly to blame for the aforementioned
marriage, because you approved it.

Yea, I shall go further and say: Even if you had committed more numerous and grievous
sins in this present and other instances than Manasseh, the king of Judah, whose
offenses and crimes could not be eradicated throughout his posterity down to the time
when Jerusalem was destroyed,³ while your offense is very light, because it concerns
a temporal interest and can be easily remedied; nevertheless, I repeat it, granted you
are to blame, are you going to worry yourself to death over it and by thus killing yourself
commit a still more horrible sin against God?

It is bad enough to know that you made a mistake in this matter. Now do not let your
sin stick in your mind, but get rid of it. Quit your despondency, which is a far greater sin.
Listen to the blessed consolation which the Lord offers you by the prophet Ezekiel, who
says, chap. 33:11: ‘As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the
wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live.’ Do you imagine that only in your
case the Lord’s hand is shortened? Isaiah 59:1. Or has He in your case alone forgotten
to be gracious and shut up His tender mercies? Psalm 77:10. Or are you the first man
to aggravate his sin so awfully that henceforth there is no longer a High Priest who can
be touched with the feeling of our infirmities? Hebrews 4:15. Do you consider it a new
marvel when a person living this life in the flesh, with innumerable arrows of so many
devils flying about him, is occasionally wounded and laid prostrate?

It seems to me, my dear Spalatin, that you have still but a limited experience in battling
against sin, an evil conscience, the Law, and the terrors of death. Or Satan has removed
from your vision and memory every consolation which you have read in the Scriptures.
In days when you were not afflicted, you were well fortified and knew very well what the
office and benefits of Christ are. To be sure, the devil has now plucked from your heart
all the beautiful Christian sermons concerning the grace and mercy of God in Christ by
which you used to teach, admonish, and comfort others with a cheerful spirit and a great,
buoyant courage. Or it must surely be that heretofore you have been only a trifling sinner,
conscious only of paltry and insignificant faults and frailties.

Therefore my faithful request and admonition is that you join our company and associate
with us, who are real, great, and hard-boiled sinners. You must by no means make Christ
to seem paltry and trifling to us, as though He could be our Helper only when we want

² Luther here refers to the crisis of conscience suffered by Philip Melanchthon over a different matrimonial
controversy: the bigamous marriage of Philip, Landgrave of Hesse in 1540, who deceived Melanchthon
and Luther into approving the union. This scandal threatened to damage the Reformation cause in
Germany as gossip spread. Melanchthon fell ill with fever and depressive melancholy in response to
the stress and almost died. Luther rushed to Melanchthon’s side and prayed fervently for his recovery
(Brecht 1993: 207–211).

³ Manasseh reinstated pagan worship in Judah and passed on the practices to his descendants (2 Kgs
21:2–16; 2 Chron 33:2–19).
to be rid from imaginary, nominal, and childish sins. No, no! That would not be good for us. He must rather be a Saviour and Redeemer from real, great, grievous, and damnable transgressions and iniquities, yea, from the very greatest and most shocking sins; to be brief, from all sins added together in a grand total.

Dr. Staupitz comforted me on a certain occasion when I was a patient in the same hospital and suffering the same affliction as you, by addressing me thus: Aha! you want to be a painted sinner and, accordingly, expect to have in Christ a painted Savior. You will have to get used to the belief that Christ is a real Saviour and you a real sinner. For God is neither jesting nor dealing in imaginary affairs, but He was greatly and most assuredly in earnest when He sent His own Son into the world and sacrificed Him for our sakes, etc. Romans 8:32; John 3:16. These and similar reflections, drawn from consolatory Bible-texts, have been snatched from your memory by the accursed Satan, and hence you cannot recall them in your present great anguish and despondency.

For God’s sake, then, turn your ears hither, brother, and hear me cheerfully singing—me, your brother, who at this time is not afflicted with the despondency and melancholy that is oppressing you and therefore is strong in faith, so that you, who are weak and harried and harassed by the devil, can lean on him for support until you have regained your old strength, can bid defiance to the devil, and cheerfully sing: ‘Thou hast thrust sore at me that I might fall; but the Lord helped me.’ Psalm 118:13. Imagine now that I am Peter holding out my hand to you and saying to you: ‘In the name of Jesus Christ, rise up and walk.’ Acts 3:6. For I know I am not mistaken, nor is the devil talking through me; but since I am laying the Word of Christ before you, it is Christ who speaks to you through me and bids you obey and trust your brother who is of the same household of faith. It is Christ that absolves you from this and all your sins, and I am a partaker of your sin by helping you to bear up under it.

See that you accept and appropriate to yourself the comfort I am offering you; for it is true, certain, and reliable, since the Lord has commanded me to communicate it to you and bidden you to accept it from me. For if even I am cut to the quick by seeing you in such awful distress because of your deep melancholy, it gives God a far greater displeasure to behold it; for ‘He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repenteth Him of the evil.’ Joel 2:13. Therefore do not turn away from him who is coming to comfort you and announce the will of God to you and who hates and abominates your despondency and melancholy as a plague of Satan. Do not by any means permit the devil to portray Christ to you differently from what He is in truth. Believe the Scripture, which testifies that He ‘was manifested that He might destroy the works of the devil.’ 1 John 3:8. Your melancholy is a work of the devil, which Christ wants to destroy if you will only let Him. You have had your fill of anguish; you have sorrowed enough; you have exceeded your penance. Therefore, do not refuse my consolation; let me help you.

Behold my faithful heart, dear Spalatin, in dealing with you and speaking to you. I shall consider it the greatest favour that I have ever received from you if you allow the comfort
which I am offering you, or rather the absolution, pardon, and restoration of the Lord Christ, to abide in you. If you do this, you will, after your recovery, be forced to confess yourself that you have offered the most pleasing and acceptable sacrifice to the Lord by your obedience; for in Psalm 147:11 it is written: 'The Lord taketh pleasure in them that fear Him, in those that hope in His mercy'; again, in Psalm 34:18: 'The Lord is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart and saveth such as are of a contrite spirit'; and in Psalm 51:17: 'The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, Thou wilt not despise.' Therefore let the accursed devil with his despondency scamper away like a whipped dog. He wants to make me sad on your account; he wants to blast my joy in the Lord; yea, if he could, he would swallow us all up at one gulp. May Christ, our Lord, rebuke and chastise him, and may He strengthen, comfort, and preserve you by His Spirit! Amen.

Comfort your wife with these and your own more effectual words. I have not the leisure to write also to her.

Given at Zeitz, August 21, AD 1544.
Your Martin Luther.

(WA Br X. No.402)

Historical background

George Spalatin was born Georg Burkhardt in 1484 at Spalt, near Nuremburg. He assumed the Latinised name Spalatinus in his youth, following the humanist trend of the time. A brilliant young humanist scholar and linguist, Spalatin quickly rose through the ranks, becoming a teacher in the monastery at Georgenthal, where he was ordained a priest in 1508. The following year he was employed by the Elector of Saxony, Frederick III (the Wise) as a tutor to his nephew. He distinguished himself quickly in this post, and was rewarded by being named a canon of the Altenburg Diocese. He was soon after made private librarian, secretary and chaplain to the Elector, handling all his public and private correspondence. In time Spalatin became Frederick's trusted confidential advisor and remained with the Elector until his death in 1525.

Being close to Elector Frederick, Spalatin became acquainted with Luther almost from the beginning of the Reformation. He formally converted to Luther's teachings around the time of the Diet of Worms (1521). Although ordained, Spalatin did not serve in any pastoral capacity until after 1525. He never had a deep interest in theological matters, but he was attracted to humanist literature and the classical languages. However, right from the beginning of their 30-year association it seems that Luther had a profound effect on Spalatin, and he became his counsellor and friend. In the early period of the

4 This English translation from the Latin (WA Br X. 402) was made with the aid of a translation from Latin to German by C F W Walther in the 19th century (St Louis edition X.1729) and an English translation published online at the Mission Lutheran Church Website. http://www.missionlutheranchurch.org/content/luthers-pastoral-letter)
Reformation, during which Elector Frederick was Luther’s protector and ally, Spalatin played a key role in facilitating the contact and communication between the two men. Lyndal Roper goes so far as to assert that this was one of the key relationships that made the Reformation possible (Roper: 283-95). Because of his position at court and its proximity to both Frederick and Luther, Spalatin was involved in some way with almost all the important early developments of the Reformation movement. He often translated and read Luther’s writings to the Elector. He accompanied Frederick to the Diet of Augsburg in 1518 and the Diet of Worms in 1521. He drafted much of the diplomatic paperwork for the difficult negotiations and communications with other political leaders.

After Elector Frederick’s death, Spalatin moved away from the Court of Saxony, to take up his position as canon in Altenburg, a position he had formally held since 1512. There he was involved in promoting the evangelical cause and engaged in visitation programs in the schools of Saxony. During this period Spalatin, now an old man, became somewhat unstable and volatile in his moods and often fell out with his colleagues and the Altenburg town council. Luther was forced to intervene twice in such conflicts and was able to convince the city’s leaders to tolerate the eccentricities of Spalatin’s old age.

Over the years of their long friendship, Spalatin and Luther exchanged many letters. Spalatin’s letters to Luther have been lost, but diligent and organised secretary as he was, Spalatin kept all Luther’s correspondence to him, which is among the most enlightening historical documentation of the early Reformation. Sadly, despite efforts by Luther and others to comfort him, Spalatin never recovered from his deep depression. He died only a few months after this letter was written, in January 1545.

Analytical comments

Like most of Luther’s other letters of consolation, this one closely follows the traditional \textit{consolatio} letter format of the period (Mennecke-Haustein: 206–214), putting forward an \textit{argumentatio} in order to persuade the reader and then an \textit{exhortatio}, calling the reader to faith and action. It is written in a high rhetorical style, using evocative and persuasive language. Like all such letters in the early Renaissance, it was what might be termed ‘publicly private’ (Roper: 291–93). It would have been read to others, copied, collected and eventually published. For all this, it is still the letter of an intimate friend and is very

5 Various historical sources (Junghans, Hös, Brecht 1986 & 1993, Roper: 283–95) were used in bringing together this historical summary.

6 This ancient rhetorical format had been richly developed through the Middle Ages and Early Modern period and was extensively used in letters, orations and other kinds of literature at the time of Luther (Mennecke-Haustein 18–30).

7 Traditionally this was not some kind of intellectual or scholarly ‘argument’, but a reasoned formulation interpreting the sufferer’s situation in a positive light, so as to show that there was hope for the person even in difficult circumstances. Luther of course makes use of this ancient rhetorical device in order to proclaim the Gospel as the ultimate hope and comfort.

8 As the complementary counterpart of the \textit{argumentatio}, this called the sufferer to specific attitudes and actions which helped them move forward through their difficult situation so as to overcome it. Luther once again uses the literary form in his own evangelical way, as can be seen throughout this letter.
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bold in its honesty yet tender in its empathy. Luther's love for his old friend is evident in his passionate appeals for him to let go of his shame, accept God's forgiveness and move on with life. Luther writes here with special empathy because of course he himself has been ‘a patient in the same hospital’ and knows the affliction of depressive melancholy only too well from his own long experience of the illness (Pietsch: 5–9).

Luther's insight into Spalatin's character and world-view is also evident. Although Spalatin was a professed believer in the gospel, as a Renaissance humanist he was also positive and optimistic about human nature, and valued highly the human will, reason and perception. In this letter Luther challenges this high humanist self-understanding by presenting the doctrines of sin and grace, not as theoretical constructs but as concrete realities that impact directly and profoundly on life in all its aspects (Mennecke-Haustein: 209,210). In doing so, Luther makes use of rather edgy irony and sarcasm in order to make Spalatin understand what it is to be a real sinner who relies on Christ as a real saviour. Luther deftly exposes the point that Spalatin's depression is the 'other side' of his proud desire to justify himself and ultimately retain his spiritual autonomy.

The rich use of Scripture in this letter exemplifies Luther's skilful pastoral handling of the biblical text in giving pastoral counsel. He both quotes and alludes to biblical texts in constructing his consolatory argumentatio. However, he also uses the biblical text in quite a daring and imaginative way. His appeal towards the end of the letter, in which he depicts himself as St Peter reaching out his hand to Spalatin, saying, ‘In the name of Jesus Christ, rise up and walk’, as at Acts 3:6, stands out among all his letters of consolation as a most moving and powerful enactment of the gospel. Luther's choice of scripture for this exhortatio is highly significant too. The man whom Peter and John meet (Acts 3:1–10) is a man crippled from birth who is begging for alms in the temple, a telling portrayal of the reality of Spalatin's situation. He too needs to recognise his own identity as a crippled beggar, to whom Christ, through Luther, is stretching out a saving hand in order that he might restore him to health. This is typical of Luther's way of visualising the word as a concrete bodily reality and event, involving not just the mind or intellect but physical touch and healing. Note here that Luther wants Spalatin not so much to read the word as hear it as a living address, just as he also appeals to his old friend earlier in the letter to 'turn his ears and listen' to him who is speaking in Christ's name.

Luther's comfort to Spalatin in this letter, as in his other consolatory writings (Mennecke-Haustein: 18–20), is deeply Christological. He understands his own role as a comforter to be part of the apostolic office, so that when he speaks the Gospel to his reader, it is none other than Christ himself who brings comfort. It is on the basis of this authority that he says, 'since I am laying the Word of Christ before you, it is Christ who speaks to you through me, and bids you obey and trust your brother'.

A central element in Luther's understanding of depressive melancholy is his conviction that it functions as part of the devil's spiritual attack on believers (Pietsch: 20-26). Satan is the one who snatches away our knowledge and memory of God's word and promises and puts in their place his false accusations and judgements, portraying Christ as a
harsh judge. This vicious attack on the conscience is a strategic move on Satan’s part, through which he wants to gain entry to the whole body and soul of believers in order to destroy them. Lining the devil up for a good hiding is part of Luther’s anti-depression treatment (Oberman: 59–82). Its immediate spiritual benefit is that it provides a way to externalise and declare war on the black moods suffered in depression and the temptation to despair which they induce. Luther concludes this letter by evoking a powerful image of the devil being forced by Christ to ‘scamper away like a whipped dog’, rebuked and chastised.

**Contemporary reflections**

1. **Depressed pastors**

This letter of comfort was written to a depressed pastor, whose struggles were related directly to guilt and shame over a serious mistake he had made in the context of his pastoral role. Many pastors today also suffer depression associated with their work in ministry. While there are no comprehensive figures available yet, clergy and leaders in Australian churches agree that depression among pastors is becoming a significantly larger problem.9

Luther’s letter to Spalatin does not, of course, speak to the experience and situation of every depressed pastor. Each journey is unique. However, it does offer insights into some recurring themes and patterns in the lives of pastors who suffer with depressive illness.10

There are many and varied causes of depression among clergy. In the wider context of Australian culture, Christian clergy have lost the trust and esteem of the general public through the revelation of terrible sexual abuse by some clergy in recent decades. This crisis of credibility has come on top of the church’s general loss of importance in Australian society over the last 50 years, and the associated loss of respect that had traditionally been accorded to its ordained ministers.

My own pastoral contact and conversation with depressed pastors in the Lutheran Church of Australia (LCA) suggests that increased stress and conflict arising from heightened vocational expectations are key factors. Part of this is an emergent ‘performance theology’ of ministry in which pastors are evaluated on the basis of measurable results and outcomes. Sometimes clergy themselves have bought into this theology, and the

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9 No specific research has been done in recent years on the incidence of depression among Australian clergy, so no absolutely reliable figures can be quoted. However, from recent discussions with two Australian church leaders, it has become clear to me that the numbers of clergy on stress leave or sick leave after being diagnosed with depression has increased dramatically in the last decade. Australian religious journalist and researcher, Chris McGillion has also identified depression among other mental health issues significantly affecting Roman Catholic priests in Australia (Crampton: 1). This reflects the same trends in the USA, where clergy depression-associated suicide has also become a problem (Warner: 2009).

10 The reflections I offer here are based on my reading of literature in the field and on observations and experience in conversation and counselling with pastors in the LCA.
negative evaluation of their ministry comes not only from external detractors but from their own internal self-critique (Warner: 1). These can quietly eat away at a pastor’s confidence and sense of validity in ministry. A colleague said it well when he commented that pastors experience increasing frustration because they ‘want to be people of power, not people of the cross’.

2. Hungry for friendship

I would also observe that pastors are often lonely and isolated. Ministry-success theology builds a climate of competition instead of a culture of mutual support and consolation. Pastors may not lack company, but they are hungry for friendship. One of the noticeable things in this letter to Spalatin is Luther’s loyal friendship which stretches out a loving hand to the fallen brother. He writes: ‘I am partaker of your sin by helping you bear up under it’. This friendship is more than words. It is a willingness to share deeply in another’s personal mess. It calls the friend to stand by his brother in his humiliation before God and the world.

This kind of Christian friendship, in which trust and love have been built over time, is a precious place of safety and healing. Friendships of this quality allow for honest talk and truth-telling, of both the law and grace varieties. They are very powerful weapons against depression because they break the cycles of isolation which contribute to its onset and continuation (Swinton: 36–52).

3. Distorted consciences

One of Luther’s great contributions to understanding depression, also evident in this letter, is the insight that depression attacks the conscience. His view of the conscience is far deeper and richer than our post-modern notion of it as ‘moral awareness’ or a ‘system of values’. For early modern thinkers and theologians, the conscience is the ‘switching yard’ of the soul where our spiritual, emotional, imaginative and rational selves intersect and are wired together (Pietsch: 65,66). When the conscience is attacked, the shockwaves flow out into every part of a person’s being. As in Spalatin’s case, guilt, shame and confusion shred a person’s confidence in their relationship with God and others. Even for a Christian living faithfully in repentance and faith, depression can seriously distort and mislead the conscience. As Luther puts it in this letter, all awareness and memory of the gospel’s comfort is snatched away. The gift of grace and restoration is lost in the fulminating inner negativity. Self-doubt and self-accusation grow into self-loathing and despair.

A good conscience, at peace and comforted by Christ’s forgiveness and grace, is the foundation of our spiritual wellbeing. For pastors and church workers, however, a pure conscience is crucially important to their wellbeing in ministry and for the wellbeing of those they serve.11 It is hard to teach, preach, care and administer God’s grace if

11 St Paul makes this point in his pastoral epistles several times, especially in relation to the pressures placed on the pastors by the conflicts and tensions that arise in pastoral leadership (1 Tim 1:5; 1:19; 4:2 and 2 Tim 1:3; Tit 1:15).
the conscience is burdened and darkened, as it often is when suffering depression. In Spalatin’s case it is evident that he had completely broken down under the weight of his depressed conscience. The pain of guilt, confusion and self-doubt is sharpened as the pastor experiences the dissonance between his outward ministry of hope and healing and his own inner sickness and hopelessness. Describing his growing feelings of hypocrisy and sense of spiritual falsehood, one depressed pastor said, ‘I feel I am being torn apart inside’. In such spiritual danger, pastors need the means of the church ministered to them: spiritual care and counsel, confession and absolution, friendship, consolation and prayer.

4. Pride before a fall

It is clear from Luther’s letter that Spalatin descended into his depression largely because his pride could not cope with being confronted with his own human sin and failure. As Luther points out, such pride pushes Christ and his work aside and insists on punishing itself. This is dangerous because it leads further down the road towards despair (Warner: 1). It is not appropriate and godly sorrow over sin, but morbidly self-centred misery which would rather see us die in our failure than live in the forgiveness and restoration of Christ.

Luther comments that Spalatin, though a confessing Christian, seemed to ‘lack experience’ of dealing with the basic reality of his own sin. It was as if he had not yet faced up to the fact that he was truly a sinner and had therefore not yet gained firsthand experience of living by the grace of God’s forgiveness. Luther advises Spalatin that his depression is connected to this issue and urges him to come clean and admit that he is a true sinner—so he can be healed by God’s life-giving grace, before he dies of his own foolish spiritual pride.

While such pride does not underlie all clergy depression, there is nevertheless a warning here for today’s pastors. The risk is that because of their professional immersion in spiritual reality, they begin over time to think they can live ‘above it’, so that sin and grace effectively become theoretical terms instead of personal experiences. Such inexperience of their own guilt and God’s grace is dangerous. It leads to a pretence or trivialisation of sin and grace, as if a pastor were, to use the image Staupitz gave to Luther, merely a ‘painted sinner’ (peccator fictus) and Christ were merely a ‘painted saviour’ (salvator fictus).

Such pride turns a pastor away from the grace of God in Christ and throws him back onto his own resources. There is the need to work harder and longer hours, to ‘step up’ to the challenge. Ultimately, he must get it right and if he does not, he faces the harshest critique of all—his own broken professional pride. Tragically, as in the case of Spalatin, pastors who encounter such a sense of ‘failure’ through a severe episode of depression sometimes withdraw completely from ministry, feeling ashamed and embittered, even when healing, forgiveness and restoration are offered to them.
5. **Hard-boiled sinners**

Should pastors’ lives be of high moral and spiritual quality so that they may set an example to others? The answer must be ‘yes.’ Will they nevertheless sometimes fall and fail because they are true sinners? Of course! Will they commit sins against themselves, others and their office? Undoubtedly. While pastors seek to adorn the office with holy lives, the only way they may dare to undertake the work of ministry is by the very grace of which they are servants and proclaimers.

In a certain sense Spalatin had set himself up for depression by thinking that he should and would be able to live his life and conduct his ministry free of real or serious mistakes and failures. While we may shake our heads at Spalatin’s folly, it is harder to be aware of how the very same distorted thinking may be quietly taking root in one’s own heart and mind. Under the influence of changing theological values in ministry, pastors do sometimes fall into this attitude, mistaking it for leadership, professionalism, dedication, or some other virtue. In so doing they create the conditions in which depression and other spiritual-psychological problems can in time readily find a foothold in their lives.

6. **Cross-shaped life and ministry.**

One thing that emerges clearly from this letter is that God’s forgiveness and grace is truly able to restore and rehabilitate depressed pastors who have in some way failed or fallen, or feel that they have done so. What stands behind Luther’s repeated urgings to Spalatin to let go of his shame and receive God’s grace is his own long experience of failing and falling into depression. Luther’s life was punctuated by serious bouts of depression from which he was repeatedly brought back from the edge of destruction by the gracious word of God, spoken to him by others at crucial moments (LW 54:15–17, and Brecht, 1986: 206–208). It is this same service of Christian comfort and hope he sought to offer to his despairing friend.

In his excellent account of his journey through severe depressive suffering, American pastor Todd Peperkorn reflects on the way in which the illness led him to a deeper love and appreciation of God’s grace delivered to him through the objective agencies of word and sacrament. It was with this same renewed appreciation that he returned to ministering these gifts to others in their suffering, having experienced their value and power in the context of his own utter weakness and vulnerability (69–71, 82–85).

Depression is a terrible experience, but as with suffering of all kinds, over time Christ is able to bring benefit and blessing from it. Peperkorn reflects on his return to pastoral duties: ‘Coming back to the vineyard may be difficult. You have been down the dark road. With patience and endurance, you can give them [your parishioners] what you did not have to give before’ (85).

12 See also his reference in this letter to the wise and patient ministry of Johann Staupitz to Luther in his depressions as monk.
Over a life-time Luther learned from his depressive *Anfechtung* not only how deeply one may suffer but how deeply Christ's gifts of joy and peace may transform suffering. He learned how such deep experiences may afford pastors a certain depth of compassion and dimension of insight which enable them to walk more humbly and authentically with others.

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