

RANSOM RAMBLINGS

Burned Out?
Exhausted?
Discouraged?
Tears at Night?
Afraid/Fearful?



Pause!
Pray!
Take Heart!
Be of Good Cheer
Plant Seeds!
Go Fishing!

The Empty Cup

Leaving our church camp ground one afternoon, I noticed a white spot on the grass. Curiosity of a cat caused me to grab my phone, hop out of the car, and investigate. No, it was not a gummy, glob of melted marshmallows. Snuggled between the weeds and grass was an empty, styrofoam cup. Never one to pass up an opportunity for a future Ransom Note subject, I quickly snapped a shot. The picture lay hidden in my phone for several days, and then an idea began to bloom.

How did this cylinder land there? Undoubtedly some camper finished her beverage, and not obsessed with tidiness, just dropped it. What did that cup represent, however, was the real question filling my thoughts as I drove home? Several phrases drifted slowly through my consciousness. Could there be a theme on wastefulness, a feeling of uselessness, a recycling challenge, or maybe even memories of a pleasant beverage on a ninety-two degree afternoon? What would work?

Later, while reading the 2023 September/October issue of Christian Standard, a lightening bolt struck home. Alan Ahlgrim began his article with the thought a friend had shared with him. 'There's not a day that goes by I don't find both reasons to MOPE and reasons to HOPE!' Wow! That is powerful. Which of us has not experienced major ups and downs with our emotions and in our life? There are days when joy and anticipation of exciting opportunities cause me to leap forward, but other mornings my heart just wants to snuggle in the covers, forgetting about what the next ten or twelve hours require. Maybe I don't exactly mope, but certainly feelings of exhaustion or even discouragement and inadequacy creep into my thoughts?

The author enumerates fifteen examples of current reasons for 'moping'. As I read number fourteen, my heart stopped for a moment. 'A recent Barna report indicated that an astonishing forty percent of pastors now show a high risk of BURNOUT, and that with younger pastors — those under forty-five, it is at fifty percent.' Stop and think! Nearly half of the 'lead puppies' of our churches are worn out, discouraged, experiencing sleepless nights, or perhaps even considering changing profession.

Now, back to my empty cup analogy. Psalm 23:5 finds the psalmist discussing the concept. "You (the Lord) prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; *my cup overflows*." David began with the idea that the Lord was his shepherd; that he lacked nothing. Imagine the huge number of church leaders whose cup does not run over, but has 'run out.' They are drained from stress, challenges, decision making, and attempts to feed the flock adequately during these post Covid-19 days.

My lonely, empty cup certainly brings home the concept of desertion, emptiness, and isolation. The challenge now for our Christian community is, **how do we** turn this exodus around, and re-fill the cups with joy, love, eagerness, and ministry for our spiritual leaders? Of course, prayer for and with our leaders is a starting spot, but God depends on the earthly troops carrying out some of His wishes. When Jesus' audience, seated on the hill side became hungry, the 'chief' pastor sent the worker bees (disciples) out into the audience to solve the problem. Lo and behold, one wee lad gave up his lunch of a few fish and snacks of bread and the entire congregation was fed and blessed.

Certainly there is no simple answer, but we — 'We The People,' must step up. What if each of us occasionally dropped a note or email of encouragement, listing a very specific, positive comment? Have we checked to see if finances for the church, as well as staff compensation is meeting goals? Could our eyes be opened to the needs of some of the congregation, resulting in members stepping up, without being asked, to help fill the need, thus relieving some staff stress? Is a quick, two night or a week in a borrowed vacation spot by the lake or in a mountain retreat something a group might pool their nickels and give unexpectedly to the staff member?

Horrors of horrors, would it be possible for our grumbling and mumbling to be minimized, and our words filled with encouragement, as we 'water the withered leaders' with kindness? (Remember each staff person. Most are stressed, just as we are.)

Are you ready to help save our leaders, not just at your church,
but throughout the entire kingdom of God? I pray for that!π