

Theological Musings from Dave's Laptop

June 29, 2016

As you can tell from the frequency with which I write about it, I've given a good bit of thought to the idea of "hope" over the years.

One fairly obvious reason for this interest is that hope is a common theme in the Bible, with Hebrews 6:19 being paradigmatic as it speaks about the Hope we have through our Lord Christ:

"We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure."



In those seasons of my life when I was more clinically focused, I spent a good bit of effort on the project of "operationalizing" Hope—trying to discover statistically valid ways of measuring Hope that could be useful in pastoral conversations. Forty years ago, psychologist Paul Pruyser noted that when persons bring their problems in living to a pastor (as distinct from other possible choices), they are signalling that they want a theological perspective on their lives and situations.¹



What something "is" depends on the framework of meaning within which it is understood. Theological realities do not become inoperative or inapplicable in the face of life stresses or mental turmoil. There is no dimension of our lives, no circumstance we face, to which our relationship with God is irrelevant.

I won't bore you with the details, but I conducted four "national" surveys over a period of ten years, running statistical analyses of each, and eventually was able to reduce the inventory from over 400 items to only 15 that are statistically robust.²

These 15 items give a quick read on four areas (factors) that influence our experience of Hope. The interpretive handout that accompanies the inventory explains those areas:

Understanding the

Spiritual Values Inventory

The *Spiritual Values Inventory* is designed to assist you in examining your life in the context of spiritual values. Your responses to the *Inventory* will be used by your Pastor or Counselor to determine areas of your life that are already strong contributors to your feelings of Hope, as well as identifying areas where additional work may cause your experience of life to be more positive. The *Inventory* is divided into four areas that have been found to affect a person's experience of spiritual well-being. These areas are summarized here so that you can begin already to consider how you feel about these aspects of your life—even before you discuss your responses with your Pastor or Counselor.

Area One: Vocation

Area One looks at your experience of relationship with God. It has been found that certain beliefs about this relationship contribute to a sense of well-being, while other beliefs tend to make

¹ Paul Pruyser, *The Minister as Diagnostician: Personal Problems in Pastoral Perspective* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1976), p. 46.

² If you want the details, many of them are available at www.dcstancil.com/the_spiritual_values_inventory.

persons feel discouraged and hopeless. While your Counselor will not try to change your mind about what you believe, she or he may suggest to you other ways to think about questions of faith or books to read to get a different perspective. The final decisions, of course, are up to you.

Area Two: Responsibility

Area Two examines your perception of how effectively your life is working at the moment. The statements in this section invite you to examine your awareness of negative emotions that seem to come from “nowhere,” and to consider how much you worry about things in the future. In addition, you look at how much you feel guilty about things in the past, and consider how “needy” you feel with respect to important persons in your life.

Area Three: Community

Area Three takes a look at your interpersonal relationships. Do you see yourself as a person with many friends and with meaningful, enduring relationships, or do you feel pretty isolated? Are your friendships mutual relationships, or do you seem to have to carry what seems to be more than your share of the effort to keep things going?

Area Four: Hope

Area Four, the final section of the *Inventory*, looks at some focused dimensions of Hope. An important aspect of Hope is the sense that who I am, what I think, what I feel, and what I do affects my environment—especially the people who are important to me. This area of the *Inventory* also asks about whether you feel able to change your life for the better, and about the extent to which you are able to celebrate life as a gift.

This quick survey of the *Inventory* gives you an idea of the things you and your Pastor or Counselor may discuss together soon. Perhaps some things have occurred to you that you would like to talk about further. You have taken some significant steps toward becoming a more Hope-full person already: you have taken the initiative to ask your Pastor or Counselor to work with you in discovering more about yourself; you have given thoughtful responses to the statements in the *Inventory*, and now you have taken the time to review this handout. All of these actions indicate a willingness to grow!

I've attached a self-scoring version of the *Spiritual Values Inventory* with this *Laptop*, so you can check yourself if you wish. It doesn't take very long at all—sort of like “taking your spiritual temperature.”

I've also attached a 90-item version of the inventory that was one of the iterations as items were improved and removed. There is no scoring process for this one, because that's not what I was doing at this point in the process.

At the same time, this version of the inventory is the one about which I received the most appreciative feedback. People's responses to these questions tended to be something like **“Thank you for giving me a chance to reflect on these questions. I never get to talk about things like this with anybody!”** And so, if you'd like to talk, I'd be glad for such opportunity.

Dave

