

1-1-2002

Ministry From the Heart: Reflections on 2 Corinthians 6.11-13 and 7.2-4

Kindalee Pfremer DeLong
kdelong@pepperdine.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.pepperdine.edu/leaven>



Part of the [Biblical Studies Commons](#), [Christianity Commons](#), and the [Religious Thought, Theology and Philosophy of Religion Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

DeLong, Kindalee Pfremer (2002) "Ministry From the Heart: Reflections on 2 Corinthians 6.11-13 and 7.2-4," *Leaven*: Vol. 10: Iss. 4, Article 8.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.pepperdine.edu/leaven/vol10/iss4/8>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Religion at Pepperdine Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Leaven by an authorized editor of Pepperdine Digital Commons. For more information, please contact bailey.berry@pepperdine.edu.

Ministry From the Heart: Reflections On 2 Cor 6:11-13 and 7:2-4

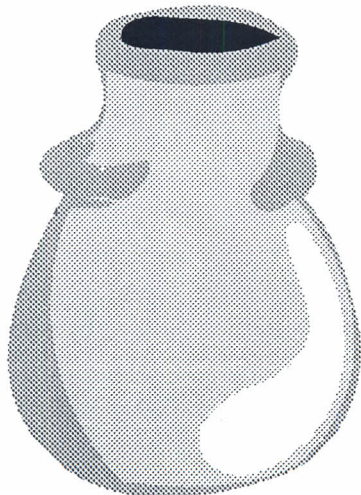
KINDALEE PFREMMER DE LONG

A 1985 song by Sting, *Fortress Around Your Heart*, expresses a longing for reconciliation, with the songwriter using military imagery to convey this hope:

And if I built this fortress around your heart
Encircled you in trenches and barbed wire
Then let me build a bridge
For I cannot fill the chasm
And let me set the battlements on fire.

This refrain expresses a basic truth about human relationships: when emotionally injured, we construct barricades to protect our inner lives. And yet, Paul's example in 2 Corinthians calls believers in Jesus Christ to respond to Christian brothers and sisters in just the opposite way. In the face of false accusations and personal attacks, Paul throws open the gates of his heart and urges those who doubt him—the Christian community at Corinth—to do the same. Moreover, despite a direct assault on his character, he feels deep compassion for the believers at Corinth while, at the same time, continuing to hold them accountable to God's truth. Paul's model of openhearted, caring, and truthful relationships in 2 Cor 6: 11-13 and 7: 2-4 offers both challenge and hope for Christian ministry today.¹

Paul's plea for open hearts in these verses punctuates a sustained appeal for reconciliation throughout 2 Corinthians. The passage employs not the imagery of battle but of the body—mouth, bowels, and heart—as metaphors to communicate four characteristics of Paul's ministry: an inner connection with God, hospitality of heart, prophetic sincerity, and deeply felt compassion. Together, these qualities represent Paul's method for bridging a widening chasm between himself and the community.



A STRAINED RELATIONSHIP

In order to appreciate Paul's reconciliation effort in these verses, it will be helpful to summarize the story of his conflict with the church at Corinth.² After founding the church, Paul left on good terms. But in his absence, factions and serious ethical problems developed. The ensuing correspondence reveals Paul's dogged pursuit of two topics that were straining the relationship. He continued to censure the Corinthians' behavior and to raise funds in an effort to alleviate the poverty of the Jerusalem church.

After learning of problems at Corinth, Paul wrote a letter that predated 1 Corinthians.³ The congregation replied with a letter of its own; and in response, Paul penned 1 Corinthians, a straightforward critique of their disunity and immorality. Sometime during this exchange, the apostle made a second, “painful” visit to Corinth. Afterward, he sent a letter “written in tears,” which caused great distress but also led to some sort of repentance.⁴ If the painful, second visit occurred after he wrote 1 Corinthians, then perhaps Paul returned to Corinth to enforce discipline related to the Corinthians’ immorality (1 Cor 4: 21), and such an exchange would surely have heightened tensions with the community.⁵ Whatever the exact sequence of events, the apostle’s insistence on high standards of ethical behavior clearly resulted in a gulf between Paul and the church he had founded. And even as the Corinthians distanced themselves from Paul, they became attracted to other apostles whom they perceived to be more impressive or straightforward.⁶

Concurrently, Paul began fundraising efforts on behalf of the Jerusalem church.⁷ For Paul, the collection provided believers an immediate and pressing opportunity to practice the church’s ideal of sharing with those in need. The apostle also saw it as a

Thus, like a clay pot hiding a treasure, Paul may appear outwardly fragile or unimpressive, but within, he carries the life of Jesus made visible in human flesh.

tangible means for bridging the divide between Gentile converts and the Jerusalem church,⁸ a gap that was attributable, at least in part, to his own uncompromising stance on the message of grace.⁹ Paul’s urging of the Corinthians to contribute to this effort weaves throughout the complex fabric of their dialogue. However, the Corinthians misunderstood Paul’s work to reconcile Gentile and Jew by means of the collection, and so his efforts drove deeper the wedge between them. For example, the Corinthians seem to have accused Paul of duplicity and fraud in handling of the fund.¹⁰ Nevertheless, Paul still hoped to pick up the Corinthian contribution personally during a future third visit on his way to Jerusalem.¹¹ But first, he would need to restore his relationship with the Corinthians. Ironically, in order to reconcile the Jewish and Greek churches, he would also need to reconcile himself with his congregation.¹²

INNER SPIRITUALITY

Much of the letter of 2 Corinthians is dedicated to this effort at reconciliation, and a key element of Paul’s bridge-building language is the word “heart.” In general, the word “heart” may carry a number of meanings, but in 2 Corinthians, Paul uses it to refer to the center of one’s inner being.¹³ The word occurs eleven times in the letter, and seven of these occurrences appear in arguments leading up to 6:11-13 and 7:2-4, where it then plays a central role.

In chapter 1, the apostle states that the Lord has anointed him through the spirit in his heart, producing God-given frankness and sincerity (1:12-2: 2). This talk of an anointed, spirit-led heart recalls the young David, chosen and anointed not for his impressive stature or position but for his inner qualities. In the story of David, the word “heart” signals God’s focus on inner rather than outer things; the Lord looks not on the outward appearance but on the heart (1 Sam 16:7). Just as David’s anointing was linked with his inner life, so Paul’s anointing by the Spirit results in genuine, from-the-heart ministry.¹⁴ In turn, he has poured out his heart to the Corinthians by letter (2:4).

Paul’s emphasis on the inner life of the heart continues in the first part of chapter 3, where he draws upon another image from the Hebrew Bible—the new covenant, which the prophet Jeremiah proclaimed would be written on people’s hearts. Paul views the Corinthians as a letter of recommendation on behalf of his ministry, written by the Spirit of the living God—not outwardly on tablets of stone but inwardly on their hearts. As the focus of God’s spiritual inscription, the heart hosts the relationship between minister and congregation; and Paul is urging the Corinthians to base their judgment of his ministry on his inner spiritual life empowered by the Spirit, not on outwardly impressive qualities.

In chapter 4, Paul connects this inward, new-covenant relationship, written on their hearts, with honest speech. The heart-based minister must speak frankly, proclaiming the “open truth” of God, and the sincerity of the message is then validated by the light that shines in “hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (4:1-6). Thus, like a clay pot hiding a treasure, Paul may appear outwardly fragile or unimpressive, but within, he carries the life of Jesus made visible in human flesh (4:7-15).

At 4:16-17, he makes explicit the letter’s emphasis on the inner spiritual life:

Even though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day. For this slight momentary affliction is preparing us for an eternal weight of glory beyond all measure, because we look not at what can be seen but at what cannot be seen; for what can be seen is temporary, but what cannot be seen is eternal.

Feeble and untrustworthy, the outer, visible parts of a human being lack eternal significance; but God’s spirit constantly renews the heart in preparation for glory beyond measure. Because of this work of God inside his human heart, Paul can be transparent (manifest) both before God and the consciences of the Corinthians (5:11). This transparency, if they would only recognize it as such, would be sufficient to answer Paul’s opponents who, unlike God, “boast in outward appearance and not in the heart” (5:12).

What are these inner qualities, the criteria of the heart? In the argument leading up to the passage on open hearts, Paul lists purity, knowledge, patience, kindness, holiness of spirit, genuine love, truthful speech, and the power of God (6:6-7).¹⁵ Yet this list of virtues reflects a paradox central to the Christian faith: the very qualities endowed by the Spirit often appear weak and ineffective from a human point of view,¹⁶ and this quandary signals a difficulty for Paul. He cannot simply cite his pastoral credentials. He must instead get them to look below the surface of things in order to recognize his anointing as a minister. A series of contrasts—presented immediately prior to the passage on open hearts—keenly outlines the dilemma. His spirit-led inner life seems to produce dishonor (falsehood, incomprehensibility, death, punishment, sorrow, poverty, and emptiness) but, in fact, demonstrates the honor of God (truth, knowledge, life, resilience, joy, wealth, and abundance) (6:8-10). The inner qualities of God result in true blessing.

HOSPITALITY OF HEART

However, recognizing these qualities requires attentiveness to inner spirituality, and Paul goes on to assert, at the beginning of the passage on open hearts, that he has opened this interior space to them: “Our heart is wide open to you” (6:11). Paul has made himself personally vulnerable to the community. Likewise, he desires renewed, genuine intimacy in their spiritual relationship, a closeness created by the Spirit of God. “In return—I speak as to children—open wide your hearts also. . . . Make room in your hearts for us” (6:13). If only the Corinthians would “enlarge their hearts” toward him, they would recognize God’s blessing of Paul’s ministry.

The word for enlarge (*platynō*) well suits Paul’s hope in this regard because in the Hebrew Bible it typically recalls God’s covenant promise of blessing: broad borders and increased prosperity.¹⁷ The similar word translated “make room” (*chōreomai*) seeks a reversal of their narrowed, confined (*steno* + *chōreomai*) compassion. Paul petitions his readers to allow God to broaden, enrich, and renew their inner spiritual lives so their relationships (in the immediate case, with him) will be characterized by genuine love, allowing them to see “what cannot be seen:” each other as they truly are.

Without referring to this passage explicitly, Henri Nouwen reflects its linking of inner spirituality with open-hearted relationships. In several books, he describes a quality that I will refer to as hospitality of the heart. To practice this hospitality, we as hosts prepare to invite guests into the home of our hearts. The work of preparation involves feeling at home in our houses (the centers of our lives in our own hearts) in order to

then create a “friendly empty space where we can reach out to our fellow human beings and invite them to a new relationship.”¹⁸ Unfortunately, the busyness and clamor of our lives leave little space within our hearts for anyone else. To clean house, to “make room” in our hearts for others, we need stillness and silence, time to commune with the Lord. We need an opportunity for God to reveal to us our own condition in all its beauty and misery.¹⁹

Without this inner life with God, our interactions with others become more about meeting our own unrecognized needs—such as longings for sympathy, popularity, or success—than about providing enough space for other people to be themselves. However, the opposite is also true. Nouwen writes:

When we are not afraid to enter into our own center and to concentrate on the stirring of our own soul, we come to know that being alive means being loved. This experience tells us that we can only love because we are born out of love, that we can only give because our life is a gift, and that we can only make others free because we are set free by Him whose heart is greater than ours. When we have found the anchor places for our lives in our own center, we can be free to let others enter into the space created for them and allow them to dance their own dance, sing their own song, and speak their own language without fear. Then our presence is no longer threatening and demanding but inviting and liberating.²⁰

Writing similarly about this space in the heart, Jim Cotter reflects, “Let there be space. Remember that the ones you love in your heart are but guests in your soul.”²¹

BOLDNESS AND COMPASSION

Paul indicates that his welcoming, inner space is also furnished with two qualities: the boldness of an open mouth and compassion from the gut. He states, “We have spoken frankly to you Corinthians” (6:11). Literally, he has “opened his mouth” to them. In other words, he has expressed himself with candor and honesty.²² Earlier in the letter, he attributed this sincerity to true proclamation of the word of God, contrasting himself with some who have sold God’s word duplicitously (2 Cor 2:17).

The Hebrew Bible similarly connects the phrase “open mouth” with true expression of God’s word. In Ezekiel, for example, an “open mouth” twice refers to prophetic speech.²³ A few sentences earlier in 2 Corinthians, Paul notes that he has spoken the “word of truth” (6:7). This phrase recalls Psalm 119, where it refers to proclamation of the Lord’s commands and precepts.²⁴ Perhaps then we should best understand his “open mouth” not as candor for candor’s sake but rather as prophetic sincerity: unrestrained proclamation of God’s word. By this reading, Paul’s assertion includes a subtle criticism of the Corinthians. The apostle has not withheld the Lord’s truth, yet the Corinthians resent him for speaking it.

Neither has Paul restricted the great compassion that he feels for the community. On this point, he writes: “There is no restriction in our affections, but only in yours” (6:12). The word translated affections (*splagchna*) refers literally to the inner organs or bowels (lungs, liver, intestines, heart, and uterus) and figuratively—in both noun and verb form—to the strongest human emotions.²⁵ Among Jewish writers of Paul’s day, this colorful Greek word for guts became associated with the Hebrew word for uterus, *rehem*. In the Hebrew Bible, *rechem* and its related forms denote the deepest compassion, mercy, and love: how a mother feels for the child of her womb.²⁶ Most often, these Hebrew words refer to God’s infinite mercy and grace.²⁷

Both the Hebrew and Greek backgrounds converge in the New Testament, where *splagchna* describes positive emotion: womb-compassion and mercy felt so intensely as to create gut-wrenching turmoil.²⁸ Such genuine mother-compassion Paul has bestowed upon them, his children, but they have withheld theirs in return. They have constricted (*stenochōreomai*) their compassion. The word *stenochōreomai* stands in stark contrast to the surrounding language of open hearts. The Corinthians have contracted their insides—crushed their compassion—to shut Paul out, but he continues to make room for them in his heart.

The womb-compassion metaphor, like hospitality of heart, suggests relational space. Phyllis Trible points out that the “womb protects and nourishes but does not possess and control.” Its goal is “wholeness and well-being.”²⁹ Like Paul’s heart (and Nouwen’s hospitality of heart) womb-compassion expands to provide room for growth. Womb-compassion also suggests the power of pain; in a fallen world, suffering brings forth life. Reflecting the pain inherent in the womb metaphor, God’s mercy expressed through the Hebrew prophets and in the Psalms often appears alongside life-giving language of divine suffering.³⁰ This connection becomes most clear in Jesus’ ministry, in which suffering achieves full salvation.

Nouwen makes a similar point. As we make space for others by exploring our inner spiritual life, we are bound to come face to face with our own weakness and pain. But we should not view this pain as a liability for ministry. In contrast, Nouwen argues that pain is a cherished gift “to be protected and nurtured as a means of ministry.” Just as Jesus’ wounds generated his healing power, our brokenness and alienation serve as a source for ministry. “The wound of loneliness is like the Grand Canyon—a deep incision in the surface of our existence which has become an inexhaustible source of beauty and self-understanding.”³¹ Hospitality of heart creates unity “based on the shared confession of our basic brokenness and on a shared hope.”³² Or, as Paul describes the paradox in 2 Cor 12, weakness is actually strength. Broken beings come together in a shared hope of healing through the suffering of Christ.

Bringing Paul’s metaphors together, we find a compelling perspective on ministry. Inner spirituality (union with the Lord through the Spirit) creates a welcoming heart that boldly proclaims truth with motherly compassion. Truth balanced by compassion, communal intimacy by solitude. Uniting these seemingly opposite qualities is difficult, to say the least. In our world, bold proclamation of truth joins more easily with a closed heart and lack of compassion, whereas hospitality and compassion too quickly give way to relativism. Those who retreat to the desert, focusing on inner spirituality, often find it hard to return to the city, where expansive hearts are easily bumped and bruised. And individuals who engage easily with others often find silence, stillness, and meditation foreign. Depending upon our basic natures, each of us has a human tendency to lean in one direction or the other. The call to ministry—and the educational preparation received for it—exert further pressure against this four-part unity of the interior life. Helmut Thielicke reminds young ministers that their training can ignite pride. He writes:

Truth and love are seldom combined. . . . Truth seduces us very easily into a kind of joy of possession. . . . Knowledge is power. . . . Anyone who deals with truth, as [ministers] certainly do, succumbs all too easily to the psychology of the possessor. But love is the opposite of the will to possess. It is self-giving. It boasteth not in itself, but humbleth itself.³³

But Paul’s depiction of the inner life—spirituality with hospitality, truth with compassion—offers an alternative to temptation of theological pride.

MINISTRY FROM THE HEART

At a local park, my children play on a sort of springing seesaw: two poles crossed at the center with ride-on characters at each of the four ends. When I think of Paul’s description of ministry in the passage on open hearts, I envision this piece of equipment. Two sets of seemingly opposite qualities—inner spirituality and openness of heart, prophetic truth and motherly compassion—“bounce” life into each other. Christ’s redemption and the anointing of God’s Spirit, at the center of the crossing poles, unite the four qualities and dispense energy to the whole. This dynamic creates a vibrant, free, and upbuilding community, one that encourages retreat, authenticity, correction, and care, all centered on connection with the Lord.

These crisscrossed, dialectical, interior qualities carry a number of implications for ministry. First, they suggest that ministry at its core consists of an ongoing inner communion with God. But perhaps because this point is so foundational, congregations overlook it when structuring their external processes related to

ministry. For example, when searching for a minister, do we focus primarily on appearances such as rhetorical skills, education, knowledge, or personality? Such criteria may be useful, and they are surely easier to assess, but this passage directs us first to discern a prospective minister's commitment to and plan for nurturing his or her inner spiritual life.

Similarly, in the course of a minister's tenure, do we regularly provide space and time for significant retreat? And, although the latest program, method, or model for ministry might have its practical use, we need to make sure these correspond to our inner focus. Eugene Peterson makes this same point, reflecting on David's preparation to battle Goliath. He writes that just as David discarded ill-fitting armor, so must the modern minister. The "weaponry urged upon" ministry by modern science and knowledge might give the air of effectiveness, but the minister of the heart (like the king of the heart) cannot work effectively with that imposed from the outside. Peterson notes that David was bold and modest enough both to reject Saul's armor as inauthentic and to seek out "that which he had been trained to use in his years as a shepherd (his sling and some stone). And he killed the giant."³⁴

Second, the passage calls all members of faith communities to open their hearts to each other in authentic, non-intrusive relationship, with ministers leading this activity by example. If, as Paul relates, the minister's very weakness is his or her greatest asset in reaching out to others, then we should be seeking as ministers the flawed, fragile, and unimpressive. Of course, we have no choice in this matter; in fact, every minister is a chipped and damaged clay pot. But the true minister, Paul implies, remains deeply aware of this fact, with as few illusions of grandeur as possible. A minister in touch with his or her own humanity can make room for all kinds of people, for their individual dreams and perspectives. In turn, the community of faith must strive to open its heart to ministers who model Paul's transparency, even when this intimacy becomes uncomfortable.

Discomfort introduces a third point. Conflict can arise precisely as a result of authentic ministry. Hospitality of heart may not always be accepted. Sometimes, sincere believers misinterpret good intentions and might even question a minister's integrity. Other times, God might call ministers to pursue an unpopular subject or activity that creates a chasm between minister and congregation. We need look no further than the ministries of Jeremiah or Jesus for illustrations. Paul's response is illustrative for us today. He does not back down on his proclamation of truth, but he marries his boldness with womb-compassion. This fact issues a warning to ministers whose words are creating conflict. In the midst of tension, we must ask ourselves, can we speak to and act toward those who oppose us with the deepest love? If not, then self-examination might reveal that the source of conflict is not God's truth but our own brokenness. However, if compassion does exist, then we need not compromise on speaking the word of truth. In this case, the passage warns congregations not to oppose a compassionate minister whose work causes conflict.

Finally, for all parties in need of reconciliation, Paul's statement urges opening up rather than closing down. As Christians in relationship with each other, we do not have the option of shoring up the defenses around our hearts. Instead of digging trenches and laying barbed wire, Paul challenges us to expose our inner lives even more fully. Such an unnatural response to assault reveals the high calling in this passage, the very calling of the cross. Fortunately, Paul also reminds us that the four-part balancing act he describes finds its center not in the human will but in the anointing of the heart by the Spirit. It is God's doing not ours. Thus, Paul ends his call to open hearts with great hope: "I said before that you are in our hearts, to die together and to live together. I often boast about you; I have great pride in you; I am filled with consolation; I am overjoyed in all our affliction" (7:3-4).³⁵ Relationships from the heart create deep bonds of intimacy that produce real consolation and joy, sustaining believers through any external affliction.

KINDALEE PFREMMER DE LONG

Ms. De Long, a M.Div. graduate of Pepperdine University, is working on a Ph.D. in New Testament at Notre Dame University.

ENDNOTES

- 1 Verses 6:14 to 7:1, which occur between Paul's plea for open hearts, discuss Christian partnerships. The current analysis does not mention these intervening verses because most scholars understand them to be either a digression or interpolation. Victor Furnish's commentary, *II Corinthians*, (New York: Doubleday, 1984), 378-383, provides a thorough overview of the varied perspectives on how the partnership section may relate to the argument about open hearts that surrounds it.
- 2 The historical summary in the current and following paragraphs is adapted from Luke Timothy Johnson's reconstruction of the exchange between Paul and the Corinthians in *The Writings of the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1999), 312-313 and 319-320. Other scholars have proposed alternative scenarios.
- 3 See 1 Cor 5:9. This letter predating 1 Corinthians may have been lost, but some scholars believe it was incorporated into 2 Corinthians at 6:14-7:1, amidst the passage on open hearts.
- 4 See 2 Cor 2:1-14 and 7:8-13 and Rudolf Bultmann, *The Second Letter to the Corinthians*, Trans. Roy A. Harrisville, (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1985), 56.
- 5 If the second visit occurred prior to writing 1 Corinthians, then 1 Corinthians might be the "letter of tears." If the visit occurred after Paul wrote the first canonical letter, then the "letter of tears" would represent a third of Paul's letters, now either lost or contained within 2 Corinthians at chapters 10 to 13.
- 6 The letter reveals that Paul's rivals work miracles and speak ecstatically (2:17, 4:2). By contrast, the Corinthians find Paul to be neglectful (1:17-18), insensitive (1:24), and unloving (2:4). They even criticize him for not accepting support from them for his ministry (11:7-11). Paul's criticism of the outwardly impressive opponents becomes more explicit at 11:12-15.
- 7 The appearance of the collection effort in a number of New Testament contexts reflects its significance for Paul. In addition to the references in notes 8 and 9 below, see 1 Cor 16:1-4 and 2 Cor 4:15.
- 8 See Rom 15:25-27 and 1 Cor 9:11-14.
- 9 Gal 2:1-10.
- 10 See 2 Cor 12:14-18 and Furnish, 369.
- 11 See 1 Cor 16:3-5 and 2 Cor 8:16-18 and 12:14.
- 12 Johnson, 312-313.
- 13 "Heart" can also refer to the seat of human understanding ("mind" in English) or to the will.
- 14 Paul's use of the verb "anoint" here is striking because it often signals messianic connection with the Davidic line of kings. It is applied elsewhere in the New Testament only to Jesus.
- 15 This list is similar to those found at Gal 5:22, Rom 12:2 and 14:17, Phil 4:8, and Col 3:12-14. Bultmann (172) understands the term genuine love—a virtue related to transparency of character—to sum up all the virtues in the list.
- 16 Furnish, 349.
- 17 For example, Exod 34:24 and Deut 12:20. However, expansion can also carry negative associations: the wide, devouring mouth of an enemy or a proud heart (e.g., Deut 11:16; Ps 35:21). Curiously, Paul employs a swallowing image (without using the word "mouth") positively in 2 Corinthians. Death will be swallowed by life (5:4; cf. 1 Cor 15:54-55).
- 18 Henri Nouwen, *The Wounded Healer* (Garden City, New York: Image Books, 1979), 89-90; and *Reaching Out* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1975), 54.
- 19 Nouwen, *Wounded Healer*, 91.
- 20 *Ibid.*, 91-92.
- 21 Quoted in Hannah Ward & Jennifer Wild, *The Doubleday Christian Quotation Collection* (New York: Doubleday, 1998), 254.
- 22 The passage is written predominately in the second-person plural, as Paul is arguing that the Corinthians accept both him and his associates. For ease of discussion, I will refer only to Paul.
- 23 Ezek 16:63 and 29:21.
- 24 The two-word combination appears in Ps 118:43, 89, and 160 in the Septuagint. (In Bibles translated from the Hebrew text, this Psalm is numbered 119). An open mouth and prophetic words also occur together in Ps 81:5 and 10. Here, the Greek word used to translate open (*rehem*) is *platynō* (which is also used by Paul in 6:11 but to describe his heart rather than his mouth).
- 25 Helmut Koester in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Vol. 7, Ed. Gerhard Friedrich, Trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971), 548-557.
- 26 For a thorough exploration of the womb-compassion metaphor in the Hebrew Bible see Phyllis Trible, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978), 31-59.
- 27 As Trible, 51, points out, the poetry of Isaiah portrays God's mercy as even greater than that of a mother for a child at her breast (Is 49:15). Even a nursing mother might "fail to show womb-love for the child of her own womb," but the Lord's compassion will never fail.
- 28 The gospels frequently depict Jesus as being moved with gut-wrenching womb-compassion.
- 29 Trible, 33.
- 30 Terence E. Fretheim, *The Suffering of God: An Old Testament Perspective* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 127-166.
- 31 Nouwen, *Wounded Healer*, 84-87.
- 32 *Ibid.*, 93.
- 33 Helmut Thielicke, *A Little Exercise for Young Theologians*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 17.
- 34 Eugene Peterson, *Five Smooth Stones for Pastoral Work*, (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1980), 187-8.
- 35 The phrase "to die together and to live together" is a figure of speech referring to an unbreakable bond between two people (Bultmann, 178), in this case achieved when spirit-filled hearts make room for each other.