

Yesterday, as part of a leadership cohort, I was asked whether my current cost of leadership is sustainable. My answer was a heartfelt **no**. Not a cynical no born out of discontent or an emphatic 'absolutely not' coming from a place of deep exhaustion. Just a simple, honest no.

I was asked to step into my role as lead pastor four and a half years ago. It was with a healthy mix of excitement, anticipation, and the fear of God that I said yes. Come to think of it, Kathy and I said yes. Like so many things in life, I had a pretty good sense of the expectations and the cost. Through the good examples of those who went before me, I had seen it done well. But as any parent knows, it's a wholly different thing to hold your own child.

Before we jump to any conclusions about my answer to the sustainability question, let me explain. **The answer changes significantly when viewed through the lived reality of God's Word.**

First, there is the renewal that comes through the love of God. For me.

In Lamentations 3:22–23, Jeremiah writes: *"The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness."* Then he adds in verse 24: *"The Lord is my portion," says my soul, 'therefore I will hope in him.'"*

When the Lord and His love are my soul's portion, I've got this! Not because I have what it takes, but because He is enough.

The second U-turn in my understanding of leadership sustainability comes from embracing God's response to Paul as he faced the deep challenges of ministry.

"But he said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.' Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me." — 2 Corinthians 12:9
There is a lot about that truth I don't like, but I know I need it. My weakness may be the very place His power is most clearly displayed.

Third is the foundation of a sustainable life in ministry. The bedrock. The cornerstone.

Paul makes both a profound theological claim and a bold practical statement when he says:

"I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me." — Galatians 2:20

Any old sinner like me can build a sustainable life and ministry on that wild truth. Christ lives in me! This Christian life was never intended to be sustainable on my own.

The fourth and final truth comes from a prayer Paul prayed long ago for the church in Ephesus.

I wonder if he was considering their future impact as salt and light in a dark and decaying culture when he prayed:

"I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being." — Ephesians 3:16

I'm not sure Paul was thinking about my sustainability in ministry when he wrote those words, but they have proven true in both the weariness and the wonder of leadership.

So, that's a bit more of the full story. I've learned enough to know that, left to my own capacity, my old-man sleep cycles, and my waning energy, this life of ministry and leadership is not sustainable. **But come on now, that's not all I've been given!**

His mercies are new every morning. His grace is sufficient for my weakness. Christ lives in me. And His Spirit strengthens me with power from within. So, is the cost of leadership sustainable? That depends.