

HOW DO YOU DO IT, LORD?

A Prison Chaplain's Psalm

Written by Carl Wake in April 2019

Each morning I gather written requests, read e-mails and listen to phone messages. There is so much work waiting for me to triage as I come through my office door. How do you do it, Lord? How do you decide what to do first? *Selah*¹

Then there are the daily tasks of updating the religious diet sheet and smudging list, drawing up lists of individuals to be invited out to programs, logging incoming requests and marked correspondence courses, responding to requests and referrals, and keeping a log of all my activities. How do you do it, Lord? Keep track of everything for later reference. *Selah*

How about the mandated weekly visits to all individuals in segregation? I knock on their cell windows and ask each the same question, "Do you need anything from Chaplaincy this week?" Some don't even know what a chaplain is. Some are sleeping, so I just make sure they are breathing and move on. Some are out at court or at "Time Out of Cell" or in the shower. (How am I going to find time to come back and catch these in their cells?) Some are so glad to see me and request many things (e.g., address books, daily diaries, memo books, Bibles, daily devotionals, testimonial books), adding even more to the requests with which I am already dealing. How do you do it, Lord? Deal with never-ending requests. *Selah*

Just when I think that I am making progress on the cell-to-cell visiting, a person dressed in "baby dolls"², who barely survived an attempted suicide, wants to talk. I remember baptizing him under a year previous. Sigh. I have no place to take him, so we chat face to face³ at his hatch. All too soon I tell him that I have to move on and do. Eight cells later, I speak through the crack between the door and the door frame to a person who wishes God would kill him so that he did not have to live anymore. I tell him that makes me sad and he asks me why. He wants to talk more and more and more. But eventually I have to move on as well. My heart is aching because I have so many responsibilities and tasks that need accomplishing, when all I want to do is give these two all the time they need to talk and pray. How do you do it, Lord? You have a whole world of people calling out to you and I cannot even handle two! *Selah*

I have Chaplaincy volunteers and professional visitors to track and e-mail. I monitor my supply of religious materials and order more, if necessary. I am

¹ I like the Amplified Version's translation of the Hebrew term *Selah*: "Pause, and calmly think of that".

² A garment that is rip and fire proof and given to an inmate to wear.

³ This was written pre-Corona virus. Now I speak with a mask on and through the glass.

in daily communication with the suppliers of religious items and courses. I go and pick up clothing donated by Value Village for inmates who are being released. I also have the privilege of supervising one placement student per semester⁴, which calls for more time. But it is so worth it to be a mentor. On and on and on and on it goes. How do **I** do it, Lord? I reach out to you because at the end of day, this is **YOUR** work. *Selah*

You are my strong Fortress and Refuge. You are my Defender and Guide. You alone know how to do it all. I know that everything I do is ministry and I am okay with that. But somehow the work of tracking statistics, updating lists and responding to inconsequential requests, does not compare with being a lifeline to those who have given up on life. Surely time spent with those who are grieving their loss of freedom, lost loved ones, broken marriages, ruined lives through addictions, or long sentences is time well spent. Take me and use me today in ways that I cannot comprehend. I am yours, Lord.

⁴ With COVID-19, all placement students and volunteers were denied access to our institutions.