Kenosis

A Dead Dog and the Joy of Self-Emptying

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I'm (Andy) a big Jimmy Kimmel fan. I have been for years, all the way back when he was radio shock jock on KROQ in Los Angeles. "Jimmy the Sports Guy," he was called. I'm such a big fan that I even named my lovable but dense golden retriever after him (R.I.P, Kimmel!). So I'm sure I'm biased, but I thought he was best host the Oscars has had in years. The 2017 show wasn't an easy one to host; palpable anxiety was everywhere. Just months earlier the iconic Meryl Streep challenged the new president's immigration order during a Golden Globes speech, leading the president (yes, of the United States) to berate her on Twitter. What would happen at the Oscars?

In a stroke of brilliance, Kimmel set the feel of the night by starting with a song: opening the show was Justin Timberlake, singing his upbeat, celebratory hit, "Can't Stop the Feeling!"

Message received.

This night was going to be fun, a time to relax and laugh. Kimmel had *formed* his audience, transforming their anxiety into joy with one song. One of the most powerful ways to communicate is through music. One of the clearest ways not only to communicate but also to

form the human spirit is through singing. Maybe faith formation in youth ministry isn't different.

In the breadth of this project, all the authors are exploring dispositions and practices that enhance or inhibit young people in living flourishing lives. In this chapter we focus on an enhancer—but a weird one! To enhance something is, by definition, to intensify, increase, or further improve it. Yet our focus here is on the biblical concept of *kenosis*, which attends not to intensification but to renunciation, not increasing but emptying, not for improvement but for humility. It is an enhancer that comes by way of negation. According to Paul, Jesus took on this kenotic nature, coming into the world as a servant, in lowliness. Through this kenotic action, we are given life abundant.

I just said "according to Paul," but actually this assertion that Jesus moves in the world kenotically is not original to Paul. Rather in Philippians Paul is "sampling," drawing from another track, from a song all scholars agree is likely the oldest original piece in the New Testament, called the Christ Hymn. In singing this old hymn, Paul has shaped his vision, seeing this Jesus as the one who enters death for sake of life, suffering for the sake of joy. A life of flourishing is made possible only by emptying ourselves, making it so we can enter the life of another—sharing their place—as the tangible experience of sharing in Christ.

If youth ministry has any concern for helping young people live flourishing lives, then following the beats and rhythms of this kenotic song will be insightful. We believe that following the beats and rhythms of Paul's conception of kenosis will lead us to something remarkable—not only life abundant, as Jesus promises, but joy. A youth ministry practice that takes the distinct and, as we'll argue, practical shape of kenosis is one that not only creates space for young people to encounter the presence of the living God, but also gives them a tune of joy that they can't get out of their heads. What we hope to show in this short chapter is that this kenotic disposition gives direct shape to our ministries, helping us understand how our relationships with young people shaped by kenosis can be events of joy, inviting young people into flourishing lives.

These are a lot of big concepts, and maybe a case study will help us understand them. To show how kenosis, joy, and ministry are connected, we'll take a journey to Barcelona, 1928, looking in on the youth ministry of twenty-two-year-old Dietrich Bonhoeffer.

A Closer Look

It has been often missed, but one of the greatest theologians of the twentieth century, a man who died in a Hitler death camp for his faith, was a youth minister. At the end of 1927, Dietrich Bonhoeffer had finished his doctoral dissertation at the age of twenty-one. Too young to become a pastor and not qualified to be professor, he was encouraged to leave Berlin for a year-long pastoral internship in a German-speaking congregation in Spain. After arriving, Bonhoeffer spent his time doing what he did best, reworking the Sunday school and tending to youth ministry.

One of his most interesting experiences in Barcelona happened about halfway through the internship, when a ten-year-old boy came to him on an errand. We have a detailed report of the experience, because just a few days later Dietrich related it to his friend Walter Dress. Bonhoeffer's letter to Dress is filled with compassion, theological depth, and ministerial sensitivity. As one of Bonhoeffer's best biographers, Ferdinand Schlingensiepen, explains, this story, which "only became known in 1999—when a cache of letters that Bonhoeffer had written in 1928 to Walter Dress, his youngest sister's fiancé, was discovered—reveals just how unusual was Bonhoeffer's gift for dealing with children and young people."[1] There is much we can learn from this letter about how kenosis, joy, and the flourishing life hang together.

Bonhoeffer starts the letter as far from humility as could be conceived: "Did I answer your letter about [Emil] Brunner? I don't really

1 Ferdinand Schlingensiepen, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer 1906-1945: Martyr, Thinker, Man of Resistance (New York: T&T Clark, 2010)* , 43.

remember. When you wrote you seemed pretty impressed by the book; I read up to about the last sixty pages, where I gave up because I didn't expect much more after finding the entire book extremely disappointing." He goes on to express his great disappointment in Emil Brunner's book *The Divine Imperative*. Brunner was one of the most famous and respected theologians of the time, but the cocky young Bonhoeffer has no mercy for him. At the start of the letter, we are light years from humility, let alone kenosis. And if poor Brunner were privy to the letter, his response to Bonhoeffer's words would have been far from joyful.

But quickly, the letter shifts in tone, as Bonhoeffer puts aside academic theology and recounts an experience of ministry:

> Today I encountered a . . . unique case in my pastoral counseling, which I'd like to recount to you briefly and which *despite its simplicity really made me think*. At 11:00 AM there was a knock at my door and a ten-year-old boy came into my room with something I had requested from his parents. I noticed that something was amiss with the boy, who is usually cheerfulness personified. And soon it came out: he broke down in tears, completely beside himself, and I could hear only the words: "Mister Wolf is dead," and then he cried and cried.[2]

Bonhoeffer explains to Dress that he placed the boy on his knee. There was no ulterior motive; he simply heard the call to share in the boy's experience and to be present with him as he suffered.

"But who is Mister Wolf?" Bonhoeffer continues. "As it turns out, it is a young German shepherd dog that was sick for eight days and had just died a half-hour ago. So the boy, ill consolable, sat down on my knee and could hardly regain his composure; he told me how the dog died and how everything is lost now." Inside this moment of shared experience, Bonhoeffer cared for the boy by giving him a space to share his broken humanity, indeed to have his suffering shared. He felt a temptation to rush to answer, but he paused and opened himself to *kenosis*,

2 Quoted in Schlingensiepen, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, 43 (emphasis added).

emptying himself of his need to speak as he became aware that to insert his agenda would avoid the call to a ministry of listening.[3] And so in humility, he just bore the boy's sadness by giving his presence.

This takes the practical form of allowing the boy the opportunity to narrate his experience, to just share his brokenness by sharing his story. So Bonhoeffer reports to Dress that the boy told him how "he played only with the dog, each morning the dog came to the boy's bed and awakened him—and now the dog was dead. What could I say? So he talked to me about it for quite a while."[4]

But then Bonhoeffer relays something fascinating; he says to his surprise that the boy stopped crying, turned to him, and said, "Tell me now, will I see 'Mister Wolf' again? He's certainly in heaven." The theological novice was caught up short, saying to Dress, "So there I stood and was supposed to answer him yes or no." Bonhoeffer wasn't sure what to say, and yet he needed to say something—the boy's humanity demanded it. And so the arrogant young theologian who ripped apart Emil Brunner in the first paragraph of the letter searched for an answer, humbled. He was humbled not in the sense of being put in his place, rather by being taken to holy ground. As he took the form of a minister by kenotically putting aside the debates of the theologian, it became possible for Bonhoeffer to share in the deep experience of a ten-year-old boy. He says to Dress, "And there I stood—I who was supposed to 'know the answer'—feeling quite small next to him."

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3 Here I think of Bonhoeffer's line in *Life Together* in the portion where he is speaking of all the different ministries people have, and he speaks of listening. A paraphrase of that passage: The Christian minister often feels the need to say something when in the presence of others, but he often forgets that listening can be a greater ministry than speaking. If one does nothing but prattle in the presence of his neighbor, then one can imagine he is doing nothing more than prattle before God. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together and Prayerbook of the Bible, Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works, Vol. 5* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2004), 98.

4 Eric Metaxas, *Bonhoeffer: Pastor, Martyr, Prophet, Spy* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2010), 86.

Through the humility of sharing the boy's place, Bonhoeffer encountered the presence of Christ. Emptying himself of his indifference and any condescension, Dietrich cleared his throat and said "Look, God created human beings and also animals, and I'm sure he also loves animals. And I believe that with God it is such that all who loved each other on earth—genuinely loved each other—will remain together with God, for to love is part of God. Just how that happens, though, we admittedly don't know." From this kenotic act—willingly putting aside all theological academia and merely sharing in the experience of the death of a boy's dog—springs joy, from the tomb comes abundant life. Bonhoeffer says to Dress, "You should have seen the happy face on this boy; he had completely stopped crying. "'So then I'll see Mister Wolf again when I am dead; then we can play together again'—in a word, he was ecstatic." We could say that the boy was so overjoyed he was coming out of himself (Gk. *ekstasis*) and touching a reality beyond, a reality that leads from wilting to flourishing.

Without a doubt this was a joy-enhancing experience for the boy. This can be seen no more clearly then in Bonhoeffer's final words: "[It was] one of those cases of 'laughter amid tears,' and doubtless a case of the sort that will not recur very frequently."[5] But why was this? What was it about Bonhoeffer's action that led this boy into an ecstatic experience of joy? And what might we learn from this for ministry, our young people, and our identity as youth workers? As we try to answer these questions, we'll need to turn to Paul, exploring how kenosis itself becomes the disposition that leads us into such experience. And this will take us back to music, because, as we said, Paul learns the practice of kenosis (even discovering that kenosis is the shape of God's own being) from singing.

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5 Dietrich Bonhoeffer, , *Barcelona, Berlin, New York: 1928-1931*, trans. Eberhard Berthge, Ernst Feil, Christian Gremmels, Wolfgang Huber, Hans Pfeifer, Albrecht Schoenherr, Heinz E. Todt, Ilse Todt (Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works, Vol. 10), 138.

Now Back to the Music

Just as the boy with Bonhoeffer, so too Paul had a death experience. In Acts 9 we're told that the young man named Saul, ambitious and zealous in every way, is heading to Damascus, ready to live out his destiny as protector of the law. He has imagined an arc for his life, but instead of being fulfilled, it crashes. At first blush this scene can be called anything but joyful. After being knocked to the ground by a light and voice calling itself Jesus, Saul is bedridden, blind, and broken. The ambitious Saul is now lost on the street called Straight, soaking in the bitter water of a death experience. He is as sullen as a boy with a dead dog; he is a man with a dead dream.

Life is anything but flourishing when Ananias visits Paul and becomes his minister, sharing in his confusion with presence and prayer. It took a kenotic act for Ananias to come and minister to Paul. He had to risk his safety and trust in the call of God to go and pray for a man who had come to town to kill him. But Ananias does more: according to Acts 9:19, he takes broken Paul, who once had plans for murder, into community. It's possible, but speculative, that as he does, the disciples in Damascus teach Paul the song of kenosis, a song Paul is ready to repeat after his experience with Ananias.

New Testament scholars seem to agree that the Christ Hymn, a mere five verses in Philippians 2, has its origins in the earliest days of the church, preceding the epistles or Gospels. It doesn't take much imagination to see Paul, with hood over his head, hesitantly but expectantly entering a small house. Ananias leads him, assuring him all is fine, as the atmosphere of room becomes suffused with anxiety. This small group has been on alert for weeks, knowing that a bloodthirsty man looking to make a name for himself was coming to kill them. But shockingly, they have heard that Ananias has gone to see this man, because the light of Jesus knocked him to the ground as good as dead.

Perhaps the others try not to stare at Paul, but the fear and intrigue make it nearly impossible. But as the singing starts, the anxiety leaves the room, and their voices join in harmony. Those same eyes that just

minutes earlier glanced at Paul in fear now spot him struggling to sing along.

It takes Paul a while to get the words, but as he does, he doesn't so much learn them as recognize them. This song is the very soundtrack to his experience, given a new story of God's action itself, inviting Paul, in the midst of this community, to hang the flesh of his own experience on it. Together they sing,

> [Because] he was in the form of God,
> [he] did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped,
> but emptied himself,
> taking the form of a servant,
> being born in the likeness of [humanity].
> And being found in human form
> he humbled himself
> and became obedient unto death,
> even death on a cross.
> Therefore God has highly exalted him
> and bestowed on him the name which is above every name,
> that at the name of Jesus
> every knee should bow,
> in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
> and every tongue confess
> that Jesus Christ is Lord,
> to the glory of God the Father. (Phil 2:6–11)[6]

6 I've placed "because" in brackets at the beginning because, as I'll describe below, New Testament scholar Michael Gorman thinks that "because" is a better translation than "although," connecting this hymn further to the shape of divine action itself. The other two uses of brackets are to make the hymn more readable. These bracketed words are not in the RSV. I've also used the poetic form of presentation. This is also something the RSV does not do, however, the NRSV does. I chose to put it in this form to give it the more songlike quality it seems to possess.

Paul is told that this hymn encompasses the reality that the crucified Christ brings forth. And he recognizes it because it squares with both his experience on the dusty road and his encounter with Ananias. Ananias has embodied the hymn in his coming to Paul as a humble minister, embracing him through his death experience. This humility to be another's minister mediates the new reality of God's own being—as, to his surprise, Bonhoeffer experienced when he took the boy on his knee and shared in his big questions. Jesus comes to Paul in the death experience of this community, emptying himself to take the form of a servant, the form of a minister.

Paul recognizes that the state of Jesus's own being is kenotic, self-emptying. But what is more radical about this hymn, and what must have been deeply transformational for Paul, is that this kenosis (this self-emptying and self-humiliating) is revealed as the state of God's own being. Paul had imagined that the cross was the smoking gun that eliminated this Jesus of Nazareth from messianic consideration. But now in this community, singing this hymn over and over again, he sees that the cross is not the unavoidable discontinuity between God's being and Jesus's own. Rather Christ's cross is the decisive revelation of what God's self-emptying, self-giving love looks like in human flesh. The cross reveals that kenosis is the shape of God's being. As New Testament scholar Michael Gorman says, "If on the cross Christ conformed to God, then God 'conforms' to the cross. The cross is the interpretive, or hermeneutical, lens through which God is seen; it is the means of grace by which God is known."[7]

Changing the "Although" to "Because"

To makes this point clearer and help move us further in seeing how a ministry shaped by kenosis can lead to joy, we need to get a little

7 Michael J. Gorman, *Cruciformity: Paul's Narrative Spirituality of the Cross* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 17.

nerdy—just for second, so hang with me. Most often when translating Philippians 2:6, the word *hyparchon* is seen exclusively as "although," giving kenosis a sense of slumming it. Too often in youth ministry, particularly, we intuitively translate Philippians 2:6 as something like "*Although* Jesus is in the form of God," which means he's rich, powerful, sexy, and super awesome (because that's who God is); he wasn't cocky about it but was down to earth, even going to the cross to help us out, possibly even in jeans and a Hawaiian shirt—because he's just *that* chill. But there has been a strong movement within New Testament scholarship to translate *hyparchon* in the causative sense, meaning that the lyric that captured Paul's imagination by interpreting his experience is not "although" but rather "because."[8] Jesus humbles himself to the point of death on the cross, not *despite* being in the form of God but rather *because* he is in the form of God. The cross is the revelation of God's own being; it is the very shape of divine action itself. The cross is not a unique outlier to God's own act and being but is rather its very core. The Son takes on humanity as the ultimate act of kenosis *because* this is the constitution of the Father's own being. God as Trinity exists as the communion of Father, Son, and Spirit in and through kenosis, just as this triune God acts in creation by taking the form of kenosis, seeking to be humanity's minister in and through the cross.[9]

Paul recognizes through his own experience and the formative singing of this hymn that "God . . . is essentially kenotic, and indeed

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8 Gorman says, "We would be right, therefore, to join the line of interpreters that runs from Moule to Wright, Hawthorne, Bockmuehl, and Fowl and render Philippians 2:6a as 'precisely because' Christ Jesus was in the form of God and equal with God, he emptied himself." Gorman, *Cruciformity*, 29.

9 T. F. Torrance adds, "The Pauline concept of kenosis was not interpreted in any metaphysical way as involving a contraction, diminution or self-imitation of God's infinite being, but in terms of his self-abnegating love in the inexpressible mystery of the tapeinosis, impoverishment or abasement, which he freely took upon himself in what he became and did in Christ entirely for our sake." T. F. Torrance, *Trinitarian Faith: The Evangelical Theology of the Ancient Catholic Faith* (London: Clark, 1991), 153.

essentially cruciform. Kenosis, therefore, does not mean Christ's emptying himself of his divinity (or of anything else), but rather Christ's exercising his divinity, his equality with God."[10] As orthodox theologian John Behr writes, "By his most human action, an action which expresses all the weakness and impotence of our created nature, Christ shows himself to be God. The profundity of this puts one at a loss for words."[11]

Yet while the causative of *hyparchon* reveals the connection between the kenosis of the Father and the Son, showing the state of the triune being as kenotic, *hyparchon* nevertheless still encompasses a sense of "although"—although in freedom Jesus could have opted to be something other than a minister, he conformed to the kenotic being of the Father, becoming a servant and *the* minister to humanity by taking on the being of humanity, sharing in it fully, even to the point of death on the cross.

Paul, maybe here in this small house with Ananias and the community but for sure in that years that followed, discovers that the structure of this hymn has a practical form. There is an actual pattern we and our young people can live out, making possible the kind of transformational encounters that Bonhoeffer experiences with the boy—those that lead to joy! Gorman says it like this: "The story of Christ crucified is sung, preached, and reenacted, not simply in words and not merely as the means to personal salvation, but as the modus operandi of daily life in this world."[12]

The Pattern of the Disciple

Philippians 2:6–11, as the soundtrack to Paul's own encounter with the living Jesus, provides him with a structure that frames his ministry. The

10 Michael J. Gorman, *Inhabiting the Cruciform God: Kenosis, Justification, and Theosis in Paul's Narrative Soteriology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 28.

11 John Behr, *The Mystery of Christ: Life in Death* (Crestwood: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2006), 32.

12 Gorman, *Cruciformity*, 385.

structure that Paul sees in the hymn is "although [x] not [y] but [z]." Gorman, who has brilliantly fleshed out this structure in Paul's thought, connects it back to Philippians 2 when he says, "As the obedient suffering servant who behaves in the pattern 'although [x] not [y] but [z],' Christ displays not only true divinity but also true humanity. Unlike Adam, he does not exploit his status as God's image-bearer or disobey God the Father. Rather, he acts in obedience to the Father in a way that serves not himself but others, bringing about their redemption from sin."[13]

This catchy chorus of "although [x] not [y] but [z]"[14] ("although/because he was in the form of God [x], he did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped [y], but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of [humanity] [z]") becomes the narrative shape of ministry and the practice of kenosis that delivers a tangible experience of joy. Because God's being is found in God's story of cross and resurrection, those formed in faith must take on this story as well. Faith formation—indeed a flourishing life—is performing the "although [x] not [y] but [z]" narrative by being a minister. The process of faith formation is to allow this kenotic chorus, "although [x] not [y] but [z]," to structure your life, calling you to be a minister in the world. Gorman explains further:

> When Paul describes himself as an imitator of Christ and calls others to be imitators of him and thus of Christ (1 Cor. 11:1), he is speaking, not about an option, but about a nonnegotiable

13 Gorman, *Inhabiting*, 31–32.

14 Gorman provides a little more texture to the "although [x] not [y] but [z]" structure. He says, "This text is famous for the phrase 'emptied himself,' referring to Christ's utter abandonment of self in service to God and others that theologians call 'kenosis,' from the noun form of the Greek verb 'to empty.' The italicized connecting words in this text from Philippians (though . . . did not . . . but) present a common pattern in Paul's letters that indicates the essence of self-emptying, 'kenotic,' or 'cruciform' (cross-shaped) love: although [x] not [y] but [z], meaning although [x] one possesses a certain status, one does not [y] exploit it for selfish gain but [z] acts for the good of others." Michael Gorman, *Reading Paul* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2008), 84.

> mandate in which one does not deny but rather exercises one's true identity as an apostle (and one's true apostolic freedom), or, more generally, one's identity (and true freedom) as a "Christian." Imitatio Christi (or, better, conformation Christi) is nonnegotiable because those whose freedom is defined by being in Christ must be conformed to Christ, as Philippians 2:5 suggests Thus when Paul or the Corinthian community performs the narrative "although [x] not [y] but [z]," this performance is also a matter of "because [x] not [y] but [z]."[15]

Putting our ear to Paul's epistles, we can hear this vibrating chorus of "although [x] not [y] but [z]" everywhere. "Paul adopts and adapts this narrative pattern on numerous occasions," Gorman observes, "not only to tell the story of Jesus, but also to describe his own apostolic life and to exhort others to share in the story of Jesus, too."[16] In other words "although [x] not [y] but [z]" fuses both the process and object of faith. We hear this particularly in the kenotic chorus in 1 Thessalonians 2, where Paul says,

> Though we might have made demands as apostles of Christ [x and y] we were gentle among you, like a nurse tenderly caring for her children [z]. So deeply do we care for you that we are determined to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves, because you have become very dear to us. You remember our labor and toil, brothers and sisters; we worked night and day, so that we might not burden any of you while we proclaimed you the gospel of God. (1 Thess. 2:6–9 NRSV)

It then appears again in Philippians 2:1–4, when Paul says,

> If then there is any encouragement in Christ, any consolation from love, any sharing in the Spirit, any compassion and

15 Gorman, *Reading Paul*, 23.

16 Gorman, *Reading Paul*, 157.

> sympathy, make my joy complete: be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or conceit [x and y], but in humility regard others as better than yourself [z]. Let each of you look not to your own interests [y], but to the interests of other [z]. (NRSV)

This chorus can be seen in many other places as well. Paul uses "although [x] not [y] but [z]" in relation to food sacrificed to idols (1 Cor. 8–10): although one is free [x] to eat such meat, don't [y], for the sake of ministering to the weak [z]. Or in 2 Corinthians 8–9, Paul says, "although you are free to not give money to the church in Jerusalem [x], put away that privilege [y], and partner with me in ministry by giving generously [z]."[17] Or Paul says to Philemon, "You have every right to punish your slave Onesimus [x], but I ask you to abandon that right in the name of Christ [y], and instead embrace Onesimus in a ministry of friendship [z], for he is Paul's son in the faith" (Philem. 1:10).

"Although [x] not [y] but [z]" is the structure of kenosis, the shape of ministry that enters into death experience with new possibility (that, in turn, delivers joy). Bonhoeffer took on the "although [x] not [y] but [z]" form: although he was not sure why the boy was crying and was not even on the clock [x], he put aside his right to tell the boy to go home [y] and entered into his experience [z]. Or although he was a highly credentialed theologian [x], having all the test scores to prove

17 Gorman discusses further how even Paul's decision to be a tentmaker was a living out of the structure of "although [x] not [y] but [z]": "Tent making was normally done by slaves or freedmen recently released from slavery; the artisans worked hard but usually remained poor, and their social status was very low. For Paul, who as an educated Roman citizen came from a significantly higher social class, the decision to work as a tent maker was an act of self-enslavement—deliberate socioeconomic self-abasement, self-humiliation, and status renunciation. Some at Corinth, particularly the few but influential wise, powerful, and noble ([1 Corinthians 1:26), would have viewed Paul as a slave engaged in the most humiliating work and worthy of no respect." Gorman, *Cruciformity*, 183.

it, he put that aside [y] and as minister answered the boy's question about his dead dog [z]. Taking this practical form, Bonhoeffer lived out the kenotic nature of God. He and the boy were transformed: the boy's crying turned into joy because he experienced a ministry that entered his death experience in this kenotic shape, and Bonhoeffer tasted the flourishing life because he had been truly human in the likeness of God. Both were given flourishing life in Christ, because both were given Christ through this kenotic practice of "although [x] not [y] but [z]." This is the very constitution of God's free being. The "although" *acts* of humility are bound in the "because" *being* of God. This becomes the way to seek for divine action, the way to experience a flourishing life in Christ, a life that blooms forth from the act of dying to oneself and living for others. Kenosis leads to joy because it encompasses the fullness of cruciform love.[18]

A big part of faith formation in youth ministry, then, is inviting young people to try on the practice of "although [x] not [y] but [z]," to take on this structure and be a minister, for as we have seen, to minister is to be truly human in the likeness of God. We invite young people to live out in their daily lives "although [x] not [y] but [z]" as the song that moves us through the cross to joy of new life. But this self-emptying pattern is not automatic, not something that comes easily for human beings. This is why Jesus so frequently reminds us that if anyone would follow him, he must "deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me" (Mark 8:34), that "if anyone wishes to save his life, he will lose it, but if anyone loses it for my sake and for the gospel, he will save it" (Matt. 16:25), and that "whosoever wishes to be first in my kingdom, must be last" (Matt. 20:26). More often, than not, however, we seem to find ourselves more like the "sons of thunder," the ones who wish to sit at Christ's right and

18 Gorman points further to the places in the Pauline epistles where this chorus of "although [x] not [y] but [z]" is played as a song of love. "Paul applies the principle of cruciform love to the most mundane of situations and disputes, such as two female church leaders not getting along (Phil. 4:2–3), believers taking one another to pagan courts (1 Cor. 6:1–11)." Gorman, *Reading Paul*, 158.

left, to be exalted with him; but he reminds them, and so reminds us, that the path to exaltation with Christ is that of kenosis, of drinking the cup of voluntary crucifixion for another.

A ministry that is devoted to forming young people into the likeness of Christ, a likeness that *is* the fullness of what it means to live a joyful and flourishing life, must be devoted to practicing kenosis for the sake of preparing young people to share in the hypostatic when the moment demands it. As Bonhoeffer reminds us, too often we feel the need to rush to speak when someone is suffering, often because their suffering makes us uncomfortable. The youth ministry that is dedicated to forming youth to be hypostatic ministers through the kenotic will deliberately take up practices that give youth opportunities to "rehearse" kenosis as it becomes a disposition. Such a youth group may focus on the spiritual discipline of silence, giving youth the chance to get used to feeling comfortable when there is simply nothing to say. It is the kind of youth ministry that will instill in young people a sense of the value of fasting, as young people get used to not getting what they want all the time. They become accustomed to the sense that what they want isn't the most important thing , allowing them to step outside of themselves and focus on the needs of others around them. Kenotic youth ministries exist to make the "although [x] not [y] but [z]" pattern habitual for young people, as it is this pattern that leads to a truly joyful, flourishing life.

So although you're busy with exams and college dreams, and don't have time to hear your classmate's story [x], you decide to see her person, putting aside the task [y] to share her place and be her minister [z]. Although you are nervous of social status and find it easy to ignore the lonely lunch eater [x], you put that aside [y] and sit down, providing a small act of friendship [z]. Although you can't wait to watch the new season of *House of Cards* after working all day and you come home to your roommate's dishes in the sink, which he has continually promised to clean himself [x], you put Netflix on hold [y] and do the dishes yourself as an act not of passive aggression but of love [z]. Indeed the opportunities for kenotic ministry, for self-emptying love, are endless, if only we can step outside ourselves long enough to see the possibilities around us.

Summing It Up

This narrative chorus of "although [x] not [y] but [z]" is transforming, bringing encounter with joy because it is the song of God's own being. To take on the kenotic acts of "although [x] not [y] but [z]" is to be a person in the likeness of the image of God—Jesus himself. This is to say, to be a person in the likeness of the image of God is to be *truly human.* A flourishing life is not one that we think of in contemporary terms as being "fully alive" but rather is one that is manifest as self-emptying love, as death of the self for the sake of another. For Paul we are conformed (and deeply formed) to Christ not when we manifest some spiritual power or even do some great thing (Paul chooses not to boast of these in 2 Corinthians 11) but when we are humble enough to enter the personhood of our neighbor and be his or her minister, answering questions about a dead dog or giving a small act of friendship.

"Although [x] not [y] but [z]" is not do-goodism; it has no ambition through human action to change the world for good or for God. It has no ambition to meet a goal that would swallow the personhood of another. Rather "although [x] not [y] but [z]" is only the moving chorus that invites us to enter the death experiences of the persons around us, to share in their very being by emptying ourselves of our own discomfort and humbling ourselves to experience their personhood. It is a humble act but a powerful one, because when the death experience is shared by practical form of "although [x] not [y] but [z]," it creates a union that turns what is dead into life; it infuses the broken narrative of death experience with a story of new possibility. The boy is beside himself; joy has been born within him, because he has found a minister who shared in his being by hearing his story, bearing his loss, and embodying a new story of hope and possibility. The joy is the reality of finding your death experience remade into life. And it is remade by the power of the crucified God, who sends a minister in God's kenotic form—practicing the "although [x] not [y] but [z]."