

a spiritual guide for the
UNEMPLOYED

TIMOTHY MULLNER, DMIN



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FOREWORD

One of the deep principles underlying our contemporary way of life is the principle of pragmatism: What has value is what works! But pragmatism has a nasty underside; its reverse also appears true: What doesn't work isn't of value. We live in a culture that, for the most part, values us for what we do, rather than for who we are. For the most part, our self-image is inadvertently formed on that basis. When we are doing something useful, we feel useful. When we aren't achieving something, we feel useless.

To lose a job brings much more than the worry and anxiety of paying bills, meeting mortgage payments, and supporting a family. Unemployment is, first and foremost, a crushing blow to our self-image. The additional side effects of job loss can bring humiliation before our family and friends, an experience of being cast aside by colleagues, a forced exile from where the action is in our profession, or exclusion from the work relationships we may have developed at our job. All of these "symptoms" can cause a painful tear in the very fabric of our sense of self-worth.

When we find ourselves unemployed, the deeper questions are not: "How do I pay my bills? How will I pay my mortgage?" These are worrisome questions; however, they are not our deepest pain. We know we most likely will not starve. More deeply, we question, "Who am I? What does my life mean if I can't work? Am I of value?" The powerful stigma attached to unemployment can affect even the healthiest pride. Because unemployment is so humbling and painful, the deep blow it brings to

self-esteem is not immediately recognized. The wound is noticed only later in unanticipated anger or depression as the humiliation, too painful to admit, seeps out anyway.

As I read Timothy Mullner's *A Spiritual Guide for the Unemployed*, two phrases kept coming to mind: A symptom suffers most when it doesn't know its identity. And: Not everything can be fixed or cured, but it should be named properly. Using a mixture of poetry and prose, Timothy Mullner names well what happens to us when we find ourselves unemployed. As a physician of the soul, he skillfully connects our symptoms to their real root. Beyond that, he offers valuable prescriptions to help turn the pain of humiliation into renewed personal depth and peace of soul. *A Spiritual Guide for the Unemployed* is a valuable and much-needed book.

RONALD ROLHEISER, OMI

INTRODUCTION

Unemployment wasn't at the top of my bucket list, but on June 27, 2009, I joined the 15+ million Americans who were unemployed or underemployed.

After five years with a Fortune 500 company, my position was eliminated. I had terminated staff before. It was a painful process as a manager and terrifying for employees. Now it was my turn.

In a culture where the number of zeros in a bank account brings status and identity, I was left with my family, my faith, a bunch of degrees, and a lot of experience. Without my VP title, staff, and expense account—who was I? And where was God calling me on my journey of faith? I was about to find out.

Thanks for taking this adventure with me. I hope these stories, prayers, and reflections will help guide your own experience. This isn't a book to be read and put away. Take some time with each chapter. Throughout the text I emphasize certain words or ideas through capitalization, punctuation, or lack of punctuation. As you read the book, imagine that we are having a conversation through the text.

Also, by noticing what's happening within and around you, a pattern may emerge, or a new path might present itself. Start a Reflection or Journal folder on your computer for your entries. Better yet, grab a pen, a notebook, or a bound journal and write your thoughts and feelings as you sense the "tug" of the Holy Spirit.

While you are looking for work, remember you are NOT your job. You were created in the image and likeness of God (*imago dei*) and you are *very good* (Genesis 1:31). Your value comes from WHO you are, not only what you DO!

Be willing to explore fresh options and open new doors as you reflect on your gifts, strengths, and skills.

Never forget your inherent dignity as a human person. Your understanding of the real value of your work can make this period of unemployment a time of discernment and hope, as well as personal and professional growth.

May these challenging days of waiting, job hunting, and longing for reconnection lead you to inner peace. They did for me.

TIMOTHY MULLNER, DMIN

CHAPTER 1

HEARING THE NEWS

*Oh Lord, I've been pushed off a cliff.
I am falling—and fast.
My heart is racing, aching for peace.
Hear my prayer, O God. Stop this free fall
With your healing hand.*

Amen

Accidents and unemployment happen. Are we ever really prepared for either one? But it's different when you lose a job. There are no obvious broken bones—it's all inside...How do you repair an entire life—or a lifestyle for that matter? What do you do first? Especially when all you want is to go back to how things were before?

The root of the word "obey" means "to hear." And that's the only choice I had...Except I couldn't hear anything—just a rushing sound in my ears. There was no discussion, no other option. No one asked what I thought about the decision to terminate me. All I could do was obey... And I had to do it quickly—and most of all—quietly.

Does that sound like how you felt? Large job or small—downsizing, layoff, or restructuring. All you can do is obey and leave. Clear out your office, close any accounts, empty your desk, and hand over your keys. "Hand over my keys??" Wait—How will I get back in? Oh, that's right... I'm not coming back in.

Part of obeying is listening. It's hard when you feel like you have just been punched in the gut—but try...Try to hear what is really going on with your emotions and your thoughts, even while life as you knew it is whirling around you. Are you BREATHING? The most common response to stress and trauma is to hold your breath. So stop it! Take a deep breath—Yes—right now. IN and out. Slowly...in and OUT. And again—No—really try it—now repeat...

So are you breathing? Was leaving such a bad thing? Are you sad, or in shock, or numb? Or do you feel relief? The key is not to avoid reality—it

will still be there when you get back! Wade through the pain and allow these prayers to be a mental, emotional, and spiritual “life jacket.” You are not alone. The Spirit of God is as close to you as your very life-breath. You also have family and friends—and people you haven’t even met yet—for support. If you don’t think you have anyone—try to reach out and ASK for support! If you can’t, it’s OK...

So don’t panic and be sure and congratulate yourself—You picked up this book! Now slooowww down and listen to what’s going on in your life—pay attention to your deepest, truest inner self. This is your time to listen, to hear, and to obey the Lord’s call. God only knows what will happen next!



A New Beginning...

My world came crashing down

Not in a violent fashion

but over the phone

My intuition was on "high alert" Lord

The memo the day before

was all I needed to clean my office

rearrange my desk

and create room for the news

It was not good. At least at first

The phone rang and my heart was still

Mind-racing, heart percolating, no fear

The voice on the other end

delivered the news of separation

Carefully positioned

to cover the HR-legal angles

A "Termination and Release Agreement" is coming

Who agrees to be terminated?

How does one release 5 years, 1,825 days, Lord?

How do you measure 5 years in a life? In...

sales orders or monthly reports?

In airline miles, lost luggage, or hotel points?

In company car miles and time away from family?

My world came crashing down Lord...

I hung up the phone
with initial numbness
yet the presence of mind to breathe deeeeeeep

And then it came. Out of nowhere
A prayer from deep in my heart and soul
Words came without thought or created syntax

My first syllables were "Thank you, God!"
For what?
For being fired?
For the coming "Termination and Release Agreement?"

No. "Thank you, God!"
I had a choice...
Via negativa—the negative way
or *via positiva*
And my soul had spoken

It was the path of grace
The choice of joy and hope
in the midst of pain, hurt, and loss

My world came crashing down Lord...

But I was not really hurt, Lord.
In fact I was being healed
Pushed out, forced by the Spirit
to follow my passion, my hopes, my dreams

Now my life is being rebuilt
One day at a time
One phone call at a time
One breath and one dream at a time



*You are my servant,
I chose you, I have not rejected you—
Do not fear: I am with you,
Do not be anxious: I am your God.*

ISAIAH 41:9–10