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Pastoral Well-Being & Beyond: Three Streams of Pastoral Health and Personal Development

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GEORGE FOX UNIVERSITY

PASTORAL WELL-BEING & BEYOND:
THREE STREAMS OF PASTORAL HEALTH AND PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF PORTLAND SEMINARY OF GEORGE FOX UNIVERSITY
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DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

BY

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CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

DMin Dissertation

This is to certify that the DMin Dissertation of

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has been approved by
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ABSTRACT

Every year, the North American church experiences an overwhelming percentage of pastors who leave the ministry, citing internal and external pressures for their decisions to abandon what they once perceived as their divine calling. Many pastors are forced into a personal development strategy that is neither helpful, nor holistic, pursuing scads of resources outside of Christian and theological disciplines, many of which are misapplied. These drastically affect the long-term health of pastors and their overall health and effectiveness in ministry. How can pastors develop a personal development strategy that adequately accounts for the major areas of health in the life of a minister? How can this strategy equip them for interminable seasons of ministry? There are three particular streams of pastoral health and personal development that are necessary for developing a personal development strategy that takes into consideration the overall health of the pastor. These three streams will take into consideration the personal, vocational, and systemic demands of life and ministry. Section One highlights the present condition of many ministers, adequately building a case for personal development. Section Two covers two perceived methods of personal development and pastoral health: pop psychology and executive authority. This section concludes that pop psychology and isolated forms of leadership can be temporarily effective, but long term they are detrimental to the health of the minister. Section Three builds the case for three streams of personal development, providing pragmatic research that can be variably applied in local settings. This is advocating for a descriptive form of ministry, illuminating what healthy functions of life and ministry can look like. Sections Four and Five detail an artifact, and proposal, in book form titled, *Sad Pastor: An Imaginative Story of Healing*

for Clergy. Sad Pastor will be a humorous, pragmatically-heavy resource designed for creating healthier lives of pastors.

SECTION 1: THE PROBLEM

The Story

Several years ago, I witnessed a staff minister on the teaching team at a megachurch in Wichita, KS announce to his congregation that after ten years of faithful service he would be stepping down to “take a break.” He cited that an internal conflict regarding his identity and “no clear direction” for his life and family, as well as not feeling adequately prepared to do ministry, to be the reasons for stepping out of his calling. I watched him closely for the next hour, people coming up and giving him and his wife hugs in the middle of the service, wiping away the occasional tear and reminding the people talking to him that there were other things going on that morning, all while squeezing the shoulder of his hesitant elementary-aged son. I watched him in the lobby where they did a makeshift celebration in honor of his service and family.

“We’re doing just great! God has blessed us.”

“We’re not sure what’s next, we’re waiting on the Lord.”

“Oh no, I assure you, it was a mutual decision. The leadership agreed that we were making the right choice.”

“We’re just going to rest, study, and pray. Thank you for caring for us.”

Those are just a short list of the things that were said to people in a tone that appeared to be chock full of Christian platitudes, the same ones we use when we’re trying to convince ourselves of uncertainty. I watched him exit the building and walk dejectedly across the parking lot and I told myself that I hoped I never had to see another thing like it, ever

again. Unfortunately, it wasn't the last time I ever heard it, in fact, it wasn't the only time that week that I had heard a similar story.

Mass Exodus

Droves of pastors are leaving the ministry every year to find other work, leaving due to moral failure, or from complete exhaustion due to the demands of Christian ministry. According to J. Michael Godfrey (DMin, PhD, PCC)¹ 10% of what pastors are called to do is covered by formal training,² leaving the other 90% of duties to be covered by extensive personal development efforts, and what is often not addressed becomes an issue of poor pastoral health, and as a result of not tending properly to the myriad of demands within Christian ministry, many pastors leave the ministry. The reason for departure is often broad and convoluted, but such reasons include: moral failure, vocational burnout, unrealistic job expectations coupled with poor staff culture, and improper life and work balance, just to name a few. The process of ordination, and most seminary and Bible college programs, is insufficient to prepare pastors with the tools necessary for practical ministry, and the safeguards that should accompany a lifetime of service to God.

Given the chasm between the percentages above, we should see the already apparent, and undeniable, pressures that those in pastoral ministry must undergo in order

¹ PRWeb, "Clergy Personal Development and Coaching Services to Be Major Emphasis," PRWeb, accessed January 18, 2016.
http://www.prweb.com/releases/true_course_members_only/clergy/prweb11754855.htm

² Training should be defined as, "Training is the acquisition of skills to perform a job to agreed standards. It improves human performance. The tools of training are instruction, demonstration, practice, and evaluation." Skip Bell, "Learning, Changing, and Doing: A Model for Transformational Leadership Development in Religious and Non-profit Organizations," *Journal of Religious Leadership* 9, no. 1 (2010): 96, accessed January 20, 2016, *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials*, EBSCOhost.

to survive and develop into healthy, thriving, and ambitious contributors in their respective religious circles, and specifically, a tribe I am familiar with, the American Restoration Movement, which is composed of ministers from independent Christian churches and Churches of Christ.

The Suffering Silent & Do-gooders

It's true that there are a lot of pastors that do leave the ministry due to poor personal development habits, or from burnout, or from moral failure, but what about those who cannot leave? Or how about the ones who don't want to leave? Each week there are those who are silently struggling between their callings and the welfare of their own lives, or those who just want to get it right because they believe in a job well done. Due to the seemingly inseparable nature of our identity as one who is called by God,³ we get caught in the midst of the link between ministry and life, that the things we do get caught up in who we are, or who we are called to be. Ministry is about what we do,⁴ identity is about who we are. Maintaining the nuances of identity will prove to be paramount for those who have answered the call to vocational ministry.⁵ One author puts

³ This statement assumes that what we do and who we are are closely tied together. There's some strain of thought that believes the two are disconnected, but humans are shaped by their actions and habits. What we do is also formed by our own experiences, particular gifts, and range of preferences, making the nuance between who we are and what we do even harder to distinguish. More is explained in the following paragraphs.

⁴ Robert Steven Kaplan, *What You Really Need to Lead: The Power of Thinking and Acting Like an Owner* (Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Publishing, 2015), 21.

⁵ The above footnote regarding the difficulty of maintaining a proper balance between what we do and who we are still stands. This statement is not in contradiction as our identity must begin with who we are in Jesus Christ, the initial mold of identity for all who claim allegiance in following Jesus. For example, we are not workers, per se, but we are made in the image of God. This is further explained in the following paragraphs.

it this way, “God calls us to both our shared vocation and the various stations where we can “work out” our faith concretely.”⁶

Richard Rohr helps us see the beginnings of the fine lines in creating, and understanding, identity boundaries as he says that the body and soul work together,⁷ pulling together the idea that our spiritual being is affected by the nature of our flesh, or our everyday actions, which include the work we do. If we do neglect our own growth and maturation, we’re neglecting the call that we’ve received, thus affecting our continued health as pastors. One author, writing about the spiritual life of the believer, Marjorie Thompson, says, “We need structure and support. Otherwise our spirituality grows only in a confused and disorderly way.”⁸ That quote warrants a question: how do you measure structure and support? We can reflectively measure on past successes as an evaluation tool in moving forward in our ministry. Our successes in ministry are going to be partially dependent on the well-thought-out strategy we’ve developed that works to accomplish the vision we’ve been given, or compiled with others.⁹ Within that strategy we ought to account for our own personal development. If we’re committed to this journey in advancing the Kingdom of God, we need to have a plan.

⁶ The author here defines “stations” as a place where one keeps watch, typically in the best interest of others and doing so in a way that serves the Lord. These are places we work out our faith in everyday life: work, home, while doing leisure activities, etc.... Quentin J. Schultze, *Here I Am: Now What on Earth Should I Be Doing?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2005), 15.

⁷ This statement helps affirm that what we do and who we are difficult to disconnect. Richard Rohr, “Nature and the Soul,” *The Huffington Post*, accessed April 14, 2016, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/fr-richard-rohr/nature-and-the-soul_b_919602.html.

⁸ Marjorie J. Thompson, *Soul Feast, Newly Revised Edition, An Invitation to the Christian Spiritual Life* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 2014), Kindle edition, location 3473.

⁹ Max De Pree, *Leadership Is an Art* (New York: Doubleday, 1989), 18.

Central to the personal development of clergy, or anyone, is the understanding of identity: who we are matters before what we do – even though the two are closely connected. In ministry, our identity must first be rooted in being a follower of Jesus Christ. Many pastors fall prey to tarrying only in their duties and identities of pastor, preacher, or teacher, that while they acknowledge their followership to Jesus, where they spend their time, and what they spend their time on are usually the indicators of what their identity is. According to Boyatzis' Theory of Self-Directed Learning,¹⁰ we first need to know where we want to be, or in terms of identity, who we want to be. The next step is owning up to who we are. "If you do not know where you are," or who we are in life, "all the technology and information available to you about your journey are of little use."¹¹ Pastors have to take an introspective look and answer some questions. What are our particular strengths and weaknesses? What do we spend our time on?¹² What are the personality traits that we carry with us? How do we rank our likes and dislikes, wants and needs? Are there elements of our history that need to be addressed?¹³ We should be answering whether or not we are comfortable in our own skin, which usually involves a certain degree of transparency and shows itself when we share our vulnerabilities with

¹⁰ Daniel Goleman, Richard E. Boyatzis, and Annie McKee, *Primal Leadership: Unleashing the Power of Emotional Intelligence* (Boston, MA: Harvard Business Publishing, 2002), 110.

¹¹ Rick Thoman, "Leadership Development: Churches Don't Have to Go It Alone Part II," *Christian Education Journal* 8, no. 1 (2011): 33, accessed January 20, 2016, *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials*, EBSCOhost.

¹² Wayne Muller, *Sabbath: Restoring the Sacred Rhythm of Rest* (New York: Bantam Books, 1999), 205.

¹³ Stanley Ross, "A Conceptual Model for Understanding the Process of Self-Leadership Development and Action-Steps to Promote Personal Leadership Development," *The Journal of Management Development* 33, no. 4 (2014): 301. <http://search.proquest.com/georgefox.idm.oclc.org/docview/1515071446?accountid=11085>. 302, 310.

others.¹⁴ “When leaders accept who they are,” which can mean eliminating the false perceptions of others, or just simply accepting their own painful, and often, unexplored personal histories, “they can be comfortable in their own skin.”¹⁵ Establishing identity should get close to following the existential theme of choosing our life and following it,¹⁶ but instead of choosing, we come to terms with the life we have currently, and build upon that foundation. Professor of Pastoral Theology at Princeton Seminary, Robert Dykstra, uses metaphors to describe the relationship of pastoring and pastoral work and builds off of the life of Anton Boisen, the father of clinical pastoral education, as a precursor for how those in ministry develop personal meaning, and how their ministerial functions play an active role into who they are, and what they do.¹⁷ James K.A. Smith says that humans are like “existential sharks,” in order to survive, they have to stay in motion.¹⁸ What we do is tied to who we are, and vice versa.

Maintaining a correct perspective on our identity isn’t the only factor in helping create a sustainable personal development plan that aides in pastoral health. Ministers need a strategic plan that is adjustable for the duration of our lives. Why? Because it

¹⁴ Bill George and Peter Sims, *True North: Discover Your Authentic Leadership* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass/John Wiley & Sons, 2007), 71.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 80.

¹⁶ Tony Fusco, Siobhain O’Riordan, and Stephen Palmer, “An Existential Approach to Authentic Leadership Development: A Review of the Existential Coaching Literature and Its Relationship to Authentic Leadership,” *Coaching Psychologist* 11, no. 2 (2015): 68, accessed January 20, 2016, *SPORTDiscus with Full Text*, EBSCOhost.

¹⁷ See this work: Robert C. Dykstra, *Images of Pastoral Care: Classic Readings* (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2005). In it, Dr. Dykstra covers the metaphorical gamut on identity in ministry. In the story of Anton Boisen, he had to become a mental health patient before he could begin ministering to one. To some degree or another, the pastor must explore what it means to be incarnational. Boisen encouraged people to view themselves as “human living documents.”

¹⁸ James K. A Smith, *You Are What You Love: The Spiritual Power of Habit* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2016), 8.

provides a format in which successes and goals can be measured, as well as account for the ephemeral seasons that happen within ministry. There are a number of varying strategic plans that could be put in place, but for the sake of brevity, we need one that helps chronicle personal development. Such a plan needs to include goals, what do we want to achieve; strategies¹⁹ for every goal, how we are going to get there; and action steps per every strategy, what the necessary steps needed are to achieve said strategy to achieve said goal. This is what the Boyatzis' Theory of Self-Directed Learning calls establishing a learning agenda, building on the strengths and learning how to reduce the gaps in what we know and don't know.²⁰

An influential pastor and communicator said, "The first thing you have to do is throw yourself into whatever it is you're doing,"²¹ which may not exactly sound like a plan but it is answering the question of, "What feeds my soul?" and then doing it,²² or as James K.A. Smith says, it is answering the call of Jesus in our life. Smith suggest that instead of reading Jesus' question as, "Will you follow me?" Jesus is essentially asking the question, "What do you want?"²³ Another author gives us an idea, similar to previously mentioned content, of how to answer that question, "Whatever we place at the center of our lives will get the bulk of our care and attention."²⁴ Self-motivation will

¹⁹ These are also called "task behaviors," things you do that helps reach specified goals. Litfin, "The Nature of the Pastoral Role: The Leader as Completer," 60.

²⁰ Goleman, Boyatzis, and McKee, *Primal Leadership: Unleashing the Power of Emotional Intelligence*, 110.

²¹ Rob Bell, *How to Be Here: A Guide to Creating a Life Worth Living* (San Francisco, CA: HarperCollins, 2016), Kindle edition, location 1177.

²² Ibid., location 1467.

²³ Smith, *You Are What You Love*, 1.

²⁴ Muller, *Sabbath: Restoring the Sacred Rhythm of Rest*, 204.

require more effort in order to achieve the goal.²⁵ Perhaps the first step on our road to personal development is learning our passions,²⁶ which are many times what we perceive to be our strengths, developing those, give healthy direction to our weaknesses, and then using the “as if” principle in navigating everything else. The “as if” principle comes from acting, where an actor may not feel up to their part, or may not feel particularly comfortable in their approach to the character or the scene, but they imitate it until they believe the part they’re playing.²⁷ Regardless of the approach, we still need a plan for development. “The final aim of discernment is not information or knowledge but action!”²⁸

Problems Need Solutions

Due to the link between our health and its codependent need for development, we’ve got to take conscious steps in keeping our health and development at the forefront. In doing so, we begin to navigate around two questions that often go unanswered:

1. How is this helping me grow as a pastor?
2. Will this have made a dramatic impact in the life of my ministry in six months?
10 years? 30 years?

²⁵ This is to say that a lot of what we perceive as motivation is intrinsic, rather than extrinsic. This means that we learn, and act, primarily from internal motivators, rather than through coaching and assistance from the outside world. Ross, “A Conceptual Model for Understanding the Process of Self-Leadership Development and Action-Steps to Promote Personal Leadership Development,” 311.

²⁶ Passions could be defined as something that is “joy infusing.” What do we enjoy? What do we look forward to every chance we get?

²⁷ Robert L. Moore and Douglas Gillette, *King, Warrior, Magician, Lover: Rediscovering the Archetypes of the Mature Masculine* (San Francisco, CA: Harper San Francisco, 1990), 154-155.

²⁸ Ben Campbell Johnson, *Hearing God’s Call: Ways of Discernment for Laity and Clergy* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 2002), 101.

This is a simple, but critical, thinking strategy, and conscious reminder, that our personal development goes beyond obtaining education just for the sake of adding degrees, or climbing the organizational ladder, but speaks to the longevity of our commitment to ministry that helps filter the types of things that aide in our effectiveness as a leader.²⁹ Pastors, as leaders of the organization, or better yet, organism, are obligated with maintaining, nurturing to cultivation, or setting the momentum of the organization,³⁰ but the precursory steps to that are in controlling the effectiveness of our own ministry growth and personal lives. How is this done? Unfortunately, there is no real primer on how we get motivated to get serious about our personal development. The number one underlying factor that contributes to the success of our personal development is taking the responsibility of our own growth and maturation³¹ as “a motivated individual demonstrates initiative through his or her actions.”³² Development never happens accidentally.³³

In summary:

- There’s a deficiency between personal development and pastoral health
- There’s a discrepancy between what we do and who we are³⁴
- We need a plan of action to help balance both the deficiency and the discrepancy

²⁹ De Pree, *Leadership is an Art*, 19.

³⁰ Ibid., 14.

³¹ Ross, “A Conceptual Model for Understanding the Process of Self-Leadership Development and Action-Steps to Promote Personal Leadership Development,” 302, 310.

³² Ibid., 311.

³³ Bill Hybels, *Courageous Leadership* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002), 122.

³⁴ Often this discrepancy is the easily correctable belief that who we are, and what we do, are somehow different.

SECTION 2: OTHER PROPOSED SOLUTIONS

Introduction

There is an impressive amount of current information on how pastors can develop healthy lives and ministries, a few of which oppose each other, as some of the proposed plans suggest unhealthy practices of living for the sake of healthier, and often, bigger, or more impactful, churches or ministries. However, to move forward the individual would do well to move backward, and do so by reviewing their respective, existing structures, and giving them a new and healthy framework. One potential way we can begin to make development decisions that consider our health is to think about development as a new form of technology. “New technology creates greater opportunities for specialization, which increases cooperation, which leads to more capability, which generates new technology and starts the whole process over again.”³⁵ This is a potential metaphor for how pastors ought to look at their personal development efforts. By using the term, “new technology,” we’re creating helpful language for new systems. Committing to personal development can open the door to new opportunities, which can expand our capacity for relationships, growing our effectiveness in networking and reaching other people, which can directly or indirectly open up a door for new acquired skills, further facilitating the process so that development becomes a cycle, occurring again, and again, and again. Development cannot remain a theoretical possibility, as there is no such thing as a good

³⁵ Peter H. Diamandis and Steven Kotler, *Abundance: The Future Is Better than You Think* (New York: Free Press, 2012), 78.

theory that sounds good and looks good but doesn't work,³⁶ or does not produce substantial evidence to make an educated decision on, but defining and carrying out the reality of development rests on the shoulders of the pastor,³⁷ as no one can force you into a pattern of development. We're working with the notion that an impressive amount of information can't just stay information, it's got to be kneaded into the history of pastoral health and let rise into something new. We'll cover two, popular, threats to pastoral health and their potential solutions:

- Pastoral Health as Pop Psychology
- Pastoral Health as Executive Authority

Healthy Development as Pop Psychology

The unfortunate dilemma of discussing pop psychology within Christian circles is the imagery it elicits: Joel Osteen, Joyce Meyer, Norman Vincent Peale, Moralistic Therapeutic Deism, positive thinking, "sending good vibes," or a myriad of other seemingly Biblically contradicting items. Those images, however, don't do the subject justice. The Bible has much to say on the subjects of behavior modification,³⁸ becoming happier people, and how we become holistically transformed individuals. Paul's statement in 1 Corinthians 2:16 on having, "the mind of Christ," is sufficient enough

³⁶ I find this to be true of a large number of books that sit on my shelf at home, they're primarily theoretical. They're written by professors, consultants, or has-beens, they are not written by practitioners who are in the trenches. A. Duane Litfin. "The Nature of the Pastoral Role: The Leader as Completer." *Bibliotheca Sacra* 139, no. 553 (1982), 58, accessed January 20, 2016. *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials*, EBSCOhost.

³⁷ De Pree, *Leadership is an Art*, 11.

³⁸ There is a good number of Christians who are skeptical on the subject of behavior modification. This is to be expected, but the gospel, the message of Jesus, and the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit will ultimately result in the changed behaviors of the individual. We don't do behavior modification before we've been transformed by the gospel.

argument for changing ourselves, both by the supernatural power of the Holy Spirit, and through changing our behaviors, which all belongs under the umbrella of the theological topic of sanctification. While pop psychology does elicit thoughts of moralistic therapeutic deism, it is within the responsibility of the reader, and practitioner, to not let non-Christian resources unduly influence their formation. This is an unfortunate possibility within the subject. Perhaps the most detrimental aspect of any form of “pop” knowledge is the tendency of reductionism, or taking sciences, or complex subjects, and boiling them down to portable statements or practices. The portability of knowledge is essential for retention, but runs the risk of losing depth.

The Adventure of Happiness—Dr. David McDonald

*The Adventure of Happiness*³⁹ is a reservoir of 20+ years of pastoring, coaching, and teaching experience that uses metaphors to help us grow in happiness. “Happiness is not something you achieve once and for all. Happiness... must be exercised. If you neglect your happiness, unhappiness will absorb you... We are happy because of what we do and because of who we are becoming.”⁴⁰ Happiness is an essential part of our personal development and a vital piece of our overall health, and Dr. McDonald’s exhaustive work serves as an excellent tool to help promote the personal aspects of joy infusion in our lives, how we find meaning in our work or vocations, and the necessity of other people

³⁹ Pop Psychology appears to be a far less threatening term in Christian circles than “self-help.”

⁴⁰ This is best categorized as a theological subject and would serve as a sufficient addition to the topic of sanctification. Sanctification is how we cultivate the character of Christ in us, both through the work of the Spirit, and by our choices. If we want to grow in likeness with Him, we have to cooperate. This makes much of what pop psychology has to say as a completely safe and healthy part of our Jesus-centered lives. Of course, pop psychology is not to be the focal point of our growth, just a supplement. David McDonald, *The Adventure of Happiness* (Jackson, MI: Fossores, 2017), 5-Who You Are.

and the relationships we have with them. What this work brings to the table is, specifically, tangible solutions for real, measurable, growth. Many personal growth works, or programs, are theoretically-based, playing on the “what-if’s,” if we were to follow a specific plan, or if it does espouse on pragmatism, it’s a singular theory that is put into practice. *The Adventure of Happiness* uses “hacks” or tried and true methods of personal growth, things that have been put into practice for over two decades, it is “a book about what, specifically, you can do to be happy.”⁴¹ There are three basic movement shifts at play throughout the book:

- Passivity to activity – Moving from lethargy to action
- Defending to iterating – Moving from aggressive defense to a posture of growth and challenge
- Talking to doing – This is a movement towards being an “experience junkie,” or gaining the credibility from being a doer rather than a talking head.⁴²

The author is clear on the particular biases present in the book, a bias towards physical activity, discipline, and playfulness. This is a book for those who want to change their whole self and have fun doing so,⁴³ all while in a context shaped by orthodox Christian beliefs.

The book is broken up into two major sections, “Who You Are,” and, “Where You Live,” and each section is composed of all sorts of metaphors that help give the reader a storyline that hopefully plays out in their own story and ultimately their own

⁴¹ McDonald, *The Adventure of Happiness*, 12-Where You Live.

⁴² Ibid., 6-Where You Live.

⁴³ Ibid., 8-Where You Live.

growth. The “Where You Live,” section focuses on work and the work that we’re called to do; who it is that we interact with; how we learn to enjoy the things in front of us; and the joys of sex and rest. This portion of the book covers a lot on the subject of change.

...change for the sake of change. Why? So, you stay malleable. The world will change and you must change with it or risk being thrown out of sync. Things that don’t change become boring and staid and dated and dying. So, change things up. Even if the change serves no other purpose than fluidity, in this fast-paced culture, fluidity is enough to justify endless iteration, experimentation, and functionality.⁴⁴

The other half of the book, “Who You are,” focuses on the extremes of learning to manage our inner states; the relational dynamics we face; how speech or your approach to speech affects your life; and the importance of an active lifestyle. How this portion of the book talks about the mastery, or rather the discipline, of self, widens the discussion of how one cooperates to increase their capacity for personal development and their overall health.

We’ve got to learn that we are not what we think. Our thoughts have to be managed. They have to be trained. They have to be controlled. Too many people assume that what’s in our minds is just who we are, and that the chief task of adulthood is to finally embrace our identity. Nonsense! We need to redeem who we are; and, far more important than who we are is whose we are. You and I belong to God, and God has never relinquished either the claim on our lives or the promise of lives that far surpass those we’re living now. God wants us to flourish in abundance and well being, and in order for us to do that -- in order for us to be exceedingly happy -- we need to master our thoughts.⁴⁵

McDonald’s work is helpful because it allows metaphor to be the driving force behind behavioral changes, giving the user a new way of looking at themselves before implementing changes.

⁴⁴ McDonald, *The Adventure of Happiness*, 57-Where You Live.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 19-Who You Are.

Potential Solution to Pop Psychology

While happiness is an essential part of Christian ministry, as well as life in general, we need not lose the reality of hardship, and trial, things that are inevitable in life. A potential solution to the realm of pop psychology would be a biblical understanding of trial. I've briefly outlined a biblical understanding of trial below:

- What is a trial?
 - An occurrence allowed by God that is meant to change my character or conduct
 - Hebrews 12:5-7
 - An occasion to grow in discipline as a follower of Jesus.
 - Genesis 22:1-2
 - A trial is an opportunity to produce spiritual fruit.
- What's the truth in my trial?
 - This trial is an opportunity for growth and discipline.
- What are the trials in my life right now?
- What have I learned about God in these trials so far?

Pastoral Health as Executive Authority

Executive Authority is a perceived level of authority, one in which the pastor holds all of the control within the organization, either by general expectation or by intentional design. This isn't good shepherding, or good pastoral work, it's business-minded mid-level management used in place of shepherding work. Here are some phrases used within the realm of Executive Authority as Pastoral Health:

“The same people who are eager to move you in will be the first to eagerly move you out.”

“Never bear your soul to anyone in ministry.”

“You should never have a close friend that goes to your church. You can’t trust them.”

“Aren’t you always on call?”

“If someone needs you at 3:00 a.m., you need to be there at 3:00 a.m.”

“We expect you as the new pastor to even fly home from vacation in the event of a death in the community. We want our pastor to not only pastor the church, but also the community.”⁴⁶

Again, I do not agree with this particular approach because I do not believe it to be Biblical, as we are to model the ministry of Jesus, and He’s called a “friend” (John 15:15), thus creating the greatest relational example for all pastors to follow. Certainly, there were strong friendships with Jesus and His disciples as well as with Paul and His fellow evangelists and elders. Aside from the disparaging inequality created between laity and preacher, it is ultimately the pursuit of more that is one of the most detrimental attitudes to Christian leaders,⁴⁷ many Christian pastors writing books on similar subjects continue to affirm this.⁴⁸ There are two main problems of pastors using Executive

⁴⁶ Unfortunately, these are all real things that have either been said to me, or that I’ve heard said to others.

⁴⁷ This is unfortunately perpetuated by many pastors, theologians, and writers. Here is an example in a popular publication on preaching, “He [the pastor] has times of absence from his normal work, he has vacations, but because of the nature and character of his calling he is never free from his work.” David Martyn Jones and Kevin DeYoung. *Preaching and Preachers*. 40th Anniversary ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), 178.

⁴⁸ “For pastors and ministry leaders, it’s especially difficult; since so much of our work is invisible and intangible, we can be tempted to into overdrive in more noticeable tasks in order to prove that we are

Authority to their advantage: vocational burnout and loneliness. Vocational burnout implies unhealthy work-related boundaries, and loneliness implies a relational vacuum with no accountability. The “Executive Authority” portion of the paper will be used as grounds for argumentation in the thesis portion of the paper.

A Soul Under Siege—C. Welton Gaddy

A Soul Under Siege is a pastor’s story on how to survive depression and burnout within ministry, it’s a pragmatic guide that deals with real problems and temptations within ministry. C. Welton Gaddy, using his impressive resume as the backdrop, gives powerful details on how to not fail at ministry, especially the kind of failure that is caused by burnout. That isn’t to say that burnout is a form of failure or that it leads to failure, but that failure is a feeling many clergy have when they don’t meet the expectations placed, theirs or someone else’s, in ministry. There’s an unfortunate standard in ministry that is not often discussed: perfection. The standard of perfection often comes in the form of words, but it also comes in the form of drive,⁴⁹ the more we do, the more we produce, the more successful we are. I fail to see that standard anywhere in the New Testament, and this is something that Gaddy alludes to. “As long as the church is doing well institutionally -- good attendance, attractive programs, adequate offerings, new members

busy and strong.” David P. Murray, *Reset: Living a Grace-Paced Life in a Burnout Culture*. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017), Kindle Edition, location 298.

⁴⁹ I will say that drive appears to be antithetical to the subject of “ambition.” Ambition is a Christian concept, where our work, and the value of our work, is rooted in the gospel, and is covered by God’s grace. Drive, on the other hand, seems to be more out of our sheer self-will. In drive, we remove the supernatural work of the Holy Spirit. In ambition, we lean into the hopeful message of the gospel where Jesus is working to restore all things.

to report – there is no need to address the hell that ministerial staff members are experiencing personally.”⁵⁰

Gaddy was on the fast track to be a rising star within many Baptist circles. He was writing, editing, traveling, speaking, preaching, teaching, and interviewing, more than his schedule allowed. His continual pursuit of more would later almost result in the eventual near demise of his marriage as well as any and every prospect for ministry, as his diagnosed clinical depression worsened with each and every obligation and responsibility. This is a powerful illustration of the previously mentioned, “vocational burnout,” a detrimental outcome of a lack of work-related boundaries. There’s a difficulty in distinguishing between what is enough and what is too much while doing holy work, as many pastors feel a moral and spiritual obligation to do so because it’s, “the Lord’s work,” or because, “they don’t want people to go to hell,” but C. Welton Gaddy nails it on the head: “Drivenness can look just like holiness, even when the two are totally unrelated.”⁵¹ Busyness is the antithesis of ambition. It is good to be ambitious, to want to accomplish a lot for the kingdom of God, but busyness as a way to accomplish ambition is not helpful as busyness implies multiple motivations.⁵² The multiple motivations in ministry can be:

- Words of affirmation from parishioners
- Celebrity status or notoriety within a certain community of faith
- Fear of failure, or fear of perceived failure

⁵⁰ C. Welton Gaddy, *A Soul Under Siege: Surviving Clergy Depression* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1991), 29.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 49.

⁵² Perhaps the single greatest motivator for the pastor is to see the glory of God at work.

“Multiple motivations undergird almost all of people’s actions.”⁵³ When we are busy, we’re paying credence to a multiplicity of gods, so you could say that in effect busyness = idolatry.

C. Welton Gaddy encourages pastors to take some precautionary steps to avoid the executive authority trap of “more is a good thing:”

- Minister’s need a minister—Get help before you need help,⁵⁴ and grow friendships to alleviate the likelihood of a relational vacuum
- Honest confession is helpful—Be honest about your present reality and what you’re capable of⁵⁵
- Remind yourself that your job is always interim—This increases humility in reminding us of our dispensability⁵⁶

These tips are helpful to pastors to create boundaries within ministry and to not fall into the trap of pursuing perfection because perfection is not attainable. A desired outcome by Gaddy is that pastors would learn to operate under grace, that God is capable of accomplishing a lot with our little. An important reality for us to consider would be for us to come to the realization that God doesn’t actually need us, specifically us, to accomplish His work, but the sheer fact of Him using us is an act of grace.⁵⁷

⁵³ Gaddy, *A Soul Under Siege: Surviving Clergy Depression*, 49.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 56.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 67.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 68.

⁵⁷ Haddon Robinson believes that good ethical practice, which can even mean taking a nap, is foundational to healthy preaching, which is a vital piece to healthy ministry. This would be a good example of what it is to work in and under grace. In previous pages, he encourages sleeping as we wait on a word from the Lord (73). Haddon W. Robinson, *The Art and Craft of Biblical Preaching: A Comprehensive Resource for Today’s Communicators* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005), 108.

Clergy Burnout—Fred Lehr

Fred Lehr, a Lutheran pastor, points out the unfortunate truths attached to Executive Authority, even providing clarity in the book title: *Clergy Burnout: Recovering from the 70-hour work week and other self-defeating practices*. Lehr continues the theme of, “more-is-good,” and attempts to debunk many pastoral practices and provide clarity for why holistic⁵⁸ avenues to personal development and self care are essential for healthy, sustained living:

In too many ways we have trashed the temples we call our bodies. If we smoke, we have filled our passageways with deadly fumes. If we overeat, our poor nutritional habits have littered our blood vessels and tissues with the refuse of such carelessness. If we’re sedentary, our lack of proper exercise has burdened our bodies with excessive poundage, age, detracting from the beauty of God’s creation and causing great strain on our hearts. The list of sources for the “trash” can go on. Emotionally and spiritually we have not done our best either. Jesus announced that he “came that they may have life, and have it abundantly” (John 10:10b). We can’t have that abundant life unless we take better care of ourselves—body, mind, and spirit—totally, not fragmentally.⁵⁹

We all know someone in need of greater care, and can even read the final line of the above quote and can pinpoint our own areas of abused, or neglected, health. Lehr uses the platform of Executive Authority to establish oneself as a missional pacesetter, pointing others to a lifestyle of health, rather than a preventative outliner of how to stay healthy. The author understands the codependent role of clergy burnout, that there are multiple avenues of depletion working at once: personal life, vocational demands, congregational structure and expectations. Lehr’s solutions for coping with these issues

⁵⁸ One writer has this to say about ministry health, “We are truly a whole organism, and if any part of us -- body or spirit -- languishes, the whole is affected.” John A. Sanford, *Ministry Burnout* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992), 24.

⁵⁹ Fred Lehr. *Clergy Burnout: Recovering from the 70-hour Work Week and Other Defeating Practices* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 2006), Kindle Edition, location 1380-1385.

are primarily problem-focused,⁶⁰ reminding the clergy that the responsibility of how to handle the massive impact of ministry on our lives is primarily up to us. “How can we clergy own our part in this disease? How can we make the breakthrough?... No one else in the congregation bears the same burden of enabling.”⁶¹

“It is the way we treat ourselves, the boundaries we set for ourselves, the personal care and attention we give ourselves, that matter.”⁶² Dr. Lehr outlines the following positive, problem-focused coping strategies for long-term health in ministry, as well as what congregations can do to help mitigate stressful seasons for the clergy:

- Offering a gym membership as an employment perk—this will promote physical well-being⁶³
- Adequate allowance for continuing education—the pastor has to be away to fill their bucket back up⁶⁴
- Spiritual Direction—A paid service for counseling and accountability⁶⁵

⁶⁰ Problem-focused coping strategies, or PFC strategies, will be focused on in greater detail as the paper progresses. Deborah S. Carr, *Worried Sick: How Stress Hurts Us and How to Bounce Back* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2014), 74-75.

⁶¹ Lehr, *Clergy Burnout*, location 158-159, 186.

⁶² *Ibid.*, location 640-641.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, location 434-435.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, location 933.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, location 940.

- Encourage extra-congregational relationships⁶⁶—Promoting friendships outside of the church⁶⁷
- Set measurable annual goals—Measurable is the keyword for goal setting as pastors need tangible metrics to measure growth⁶⁸
- Adequate compensation—I defer to the following quote from the reading material:

A sufficient wage and benefits package is difficult to obtain and maintain in a codependent system that rewards church professionals for being martyrs, victims, heroes, and all the rest. It is nearly impossible to advocate for one's own compensation when such attitudes prevail in the congregation, as it will create tension and disruption... If a congregation really cares about its staff, then, at a minimum, cost-of-living increases are a part of doing business. If they cannot afford such raises, then the congregation needs to question its viability or its dedication (usually the latter). And more often than not, the problem is not organizational. The problem is spiritual. The congregation as a whole does not adequately comprehend the commitment and dedication it takes to be the household of God. This is a sure sign of a need to prioritize spiritual growth.⁶⁹

Fred Lehr points the reader towards the notion that the “Executive Authority” platform can be damning to the whole self, reaffirming our earlier suspicions of the need for overall health, and that the end goal isn't just pastoral health, but better health overall. The following are areas of overall health mentioned by Fred Lehr:

⁶⁶ This is affirmed by countless writers on pastoral health, “We need relationships in which we can just be ourselves, where others will relate to us just as human beings, and the professional aspect is not part of the relationship.” Sanford, *Ministry Burnout*, 41-42.

⁶⁷ This is perhaps my least favorite suggestion from Lehr. It assumes that we can't have good friendships with people within our congregation. Instead, the pastor should be encouraged to maintain their personal identity while performing vocational demands, making it easier to have friendships without strings attached. Lehr, *Clergy Burnout*, location 971.

⁶⁸ Ibid., location 1008.

⁶⁹ Ibid., location 1048.

- Relationships/friendships⁷⁰
- Work demands
- Physical activity
- Mental health
- Spiritual accountability
- Adequate compensation

Potential Solution to Executive Authority

There are many ways one might be able to change the format to combat Executive Authority, from changing models of governance to forming accountability guidelines within leadership circles, there are many possibilities for growth and change. I briefly outline potential guidelines for forming accountability within leadership circles:

- Identify Who is a Person of Peace
 - Not everyone needs the authority of accountability, a simpler guideline to follow is:
 - Who isn't amazed by you?
 - Who do you trust?
- Clarify the Expectations
 - What are they keeping you accountable to and for?
 - When should they do this? Pre, post, or during?
- Grant the Authority

⁷⁰ From a different author in the same field of study, further bolstering our need for relationships in ministry. "First, we need ordinary human relationships because they nourish the soul." Sanford, *Ministry Burnout*, 45.

- Allow them to confront you about areas of accountability
- Thank them for their accountability and earnestly seek action

Conclusions on Other Proposed Solutions

Each of these solutions are adequate, but none of these solutions are meant to keep us from pain and suffering in ministry. In fact, none of these solutions, or any other solution placed here within, is meant to keep us from suffering. If anything, these are solutions on how to suffer better. Suffering and pain is an implied, and expected, reality of following Jesus (2 Tim 3:12, 1 Pet 2:21, Mark 13:13, Phil 1:29, 1 Jn 3:13). The hope is not to keep on suffering, but rather to turn our suffering into pastoral thriving. Leonard Sweet thinks our “bleeding,” in a metaphorical sense, or our pains and sufferings as a follower of Jesus, is a good thing, even making mention that, “if it bleeds, it leads,”⁷¹ and that is actually good for the body, as in the body of Christ, because it’s what the body is supposed to be doing. It is not just bleeding for the sake of bleeding, but it is the participation in the narrative of Jesus, which is what it means to be a Christian. Cornelius Plantinga reminds us of what it is to be a follower, “to be a Christian is to be a follower of Christ, one who follows Christ down into death and back up into life.”⁷²

While we should not glorify our difficult experiences in ministry, they can be used for redemptive purposes. First, a hurting pastor embodies a stark reality of scripture, (see 2 Timothy 3:12) while one can argue the meaning of Paul’s use of persecution, we

⁷¹ Leonard I. Sweet, *Giving Blood: A Fresh Paradigm for Preaching* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2014), 16.

⁷² Cornelius Plantinga, *Beyond Doubt: Faith-Building Devotions on Questions Christians Ask* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2002), Kindle edition, location, 692-694.

follow in the suffering footsteps of Christ (1 Pet. 2:21). Henri Nouwen explains how hurt can be redemptive, “The great illusion of leadership is to think that man can be led out of the desert by someone who has never been there.”⁷³ The minister is responsible for speaking about life’s greatest obstacles, such as birth, death, love, hate, and has to give meaning to the lives of others. Much of ministry happens outside of office hours and church square footage, taking place in living rooms; or in hospitals, maybe where creation makes its first cry or final breath; or prisons, where liberation and freedom are desired.⁷⁴ Nouwen strikes another cord on suffering when he says, “Who can listen to a story of loneliness and despair without taking the risk of experiencing similar pains in his own heart and even losing his precious peace of mind? In short: ‘Who can take away suffering without entering it?’”⁷⁵ Should ministers go and create moments of suffering so they can minister better? No, but when suffering happens, it can be used as a healthy outlet, and it can be used as a healthy outlet when we find solidarity in knowing that Christ suffered too, and that parishioners will find common ground, and hopefully healing, in our shortcomings.

Unfortunately, suffering, or general difficulty in ministry, though we should embrace it, is often misapplied. This is most likely because it’s not a response to suffering as a follower of Jesus, though that is part of it, it’s because it is a response to stressors. One author compares two ways people generally respond to crisis:

- Emotion-Focused Coping Strategies (EFC’s)

⁷³ Henri J. M. Nouwen, *The Wounded Healer: Ministry in Contemporary Society* (New York: Doubleday Religion, 1972), 78.

⁷⁴ Dykstra, *Images of Pastoral Care*, 78-79.

⁷⁵ Nouwen, *The Wounded Healer*, 78.

- Typically, these are people that allow their emotions to get the best of them. They are captivated by their overwhelming feelings and often have a difficult time overcoming them. They “wallow” in their pity, allowing them to assume their emotions as identity, their feelings of inadequacy, for example, push them to say, “I’m a failure, and always will be.” These people view stressors as a negative and respond to them as such.
- Problem-Focused Coping Strategies (PFC’s):
 - Typically, these are people that are unphased by emotional impact. These are the people that kick, fight, and scream their way to the top. In the face of oppression, adversity, or crisis, they’re immediately looking for a game plan out of it. This is what popular writer, Carol Dweck, calls a “growth mindset.”⁷⁶ This group has learned to embrace the funk of ministry, and react positively to stress that is around them. They’ve undergone a perception shift that stress is a good thing.⁷⁷

These previously mentioned solutions are helpful in creating a holistic framework of what it means to do healthy ministry, and take care of ourselves at the same time, but by themselves, they don’t the whole self into play. For example, Executive Authority establishes powerful lines of vocational productivity and authority, but does not account for personal maturation, or building healthy organizational systems. Pop Psychology

⁷⁶ Carol S. Dweck, *Mindset* (London, England: Robinson, 2017).

⁷⁷ Carr, *Worried Sick*, 74-75.

creates a new paradigm, often through metaphor, that accounts for personal and vocational demands, but it lacks the evidence that it works within an organization,⁷⁸ and its inner working parts.

⁷⁸ The focus on “personal, vocational, and systematic” components of ministry will be discussed in greater detail as this paper progresses.

SECTION 3: THESIS

Introduction

Defining Personal Development

Personal development: the process of improving oneself. While nebulous in nature, the definition of, “the process of improving oneself,” will serve as a satisfactory beginning definition of personal development. In its application to pastoral ministry, and leaning towards pastoral health, personal development is the procurement of additional skills necessary to succeed in the demands of ministry ending in a legacy of healthy ministry and a healthy life.

Development can be a frustrating concept because it involves some vagueness. Responding to others, changing deeply held beliefs, overcoming biases, and growing as a person imply changing attitudes. Attitudes are commonly viewed as summary evaluations along a dimension ranging from positive to negative. Attitudes are latent constructs and are not observable in themselves. That is, we infer that people have attitudes by what they say or do. What they actually say or do are the behaviors we observe.⁷⁹

Below is a short, not exhaustive, list of skills that many pastors have to develop for their vocation:

- Time management⁸⁰
- Disciplined personal and familial devotional life

⁷⁹ “Learning, changing, and doing: a model for transformational leadership development in religious and non-profit organizations.” 96.

⁸⁰ Whether it be time management or any other form of manage, it usually spells out follow a set of policies and procedures, spoken or unspoken. D. Andert, A. Platt, and G. Alexakis, “Alternative, Grassroots, and Rogue Leadership: A Case for Alternating Leaders in Organizations,” *Journal of Applied Business Research* 27, no. 2 (2011): 53-61. Retrieved from <http://search.proquest.com.georgefox.idm.oclc.org/docview/858886079?accountid=11085>. 56.

- A personal care strategy that accounts for well-being (sleep, exercise, etc...)
- Management of staff
- Leading organizational change
- Building reproducible teams
- Developing and casting vision
 - With this may come mission, values, philosophies of ministry, and similar statements
- Crisis management and other forms of counseling

There is an important change in perception that has to happen in the life of a leader, or one that is in charge of developing leaders. The current status quo within leadership culture is that they're "experts," specially gifted individuals who empower others to do similar tasks, but in a lesser capacity. The shift in personal development means that we move from expert, to that of coach and consultant, the job of the leader then becomes one who challenges the status quo. A "coach," is one who asks questions, clarifies direction, helps other discover their callings, gifting, and interpreting the culture. A "consultant," is one who challenges others with their own growth, able to discern the difference between what is advice, and what are solution-based development strategies.⁸¹ Personal development implies that we'll use what we've learned to help develop others. This requires a high level of self-awareness in the leader, understanding their emotions, their skills, their capacities, and having the visionary capacity about us to see what needs to be

⁸¹ Israel Galindo, *The Hidden Lives of Congregations: Understanding Congregational Dynamics* (Herndon, VA: Alban Institute, 2004), 197.

done. It's simple to find out where we need to improve. Here are several steps to seeing where we need to develop:

- Identify root gifts by trying out apparent strengths.
- Identify root gifts by considering our interest. What we like to do often reveals gifts.
- Identify root gifts by reviewing past work and volunteer experience.
- Identify root gifts by conferring with those we know and trust. What do others see as our strengths? What have they noticed about us? What do they most admire in us?⁸²
- We can gain a more complete understanding of our interests and traits by taking standardized “tests.” Psychological, personality, and occupational instruments can help.⁸³

Defining Pastoral Health

For the most part, people want to be healthy. Not just in ministry, but just in general, we want to experience, and see progress and completion in our joy, satisfaction, gratification, and affirmation in the work we do, things we enjoy, and relationships we have. Pastoral health is building a system of beliefs and practices that results in interminable life and ministry. However, there are many challenges to achieving this health:

⁸² This isn't a flippant suggestion, but should be practiced with care. Not everyone we confer with will respond honestly.

⁸³ This can also be done through a variety of gifts, or strengths, assessments. I would encourage the use of the Enneagram test, as this assessment discusses where one goes in areas of strength and weakness. Schultze, *Here I Am: Now What on Earth Should I be Doing?* 31-32.

- Personal and family related sickness and disease, including genetically related issues
- Financial distress or financial related stressors
- Economic instability
- Natural disaster
- Parenting
- Marital infidelity
- Various forms of mental illness, diagnosed or undiagnosed (addiction, anxiety, depression, etc...)
- Poor eating and exercise habits
- Job dissatisfaction or other related stressors

Though that is a short list of general health related issues, there are more specific items that clergy are more familiar with:

- Not receiving adequate compensation
- Long working hours with on-call responsibilities
- Familial expectations
- Burnout
- Congregations who applaud neglect of self-care⁸⁴
- Not being properly trained to deal in various aspects of counseling, or in administration or finance

⁸⁴ “After all, congregations love those who just can’t say “no.” Congregations applaud those who never take a day off, who “labor for the Lord” endlessly.” Lehr, *Clergy Burnout*, location 60-61.

- Poor self-image⁸⁵
- Metrics that are difficult to see⁸⁶

While that list is not exhaustive, it is indicative of the types of pastoral health concerns that are around and are being experienced by a considerable number of clergy, regardless of denominational affiliation.

While easy to identify areas of poor health, it is difficult to accurately define what is considered healthy for a pastor. There are many forms that health takes in terms of pastoral ministry, and to say that one pastor is generally healthier, or one denomination promotes health more than another, would be an unhelpful claim. Instead, the following can serve as a base of beliefs, and practices, that facilitate overall health:

- Identity based in Christ
- Pastors having a clear calling into their vocation
 - But not allowing that to supersede their identity in Jesus
- A proper work and life balance⁸⁷
- Observing the Sabbath⁸⁸

⁸⁵ “A set of maladaptive behaviors that a person learns to survive in an experience of great emotional pain... These behaviors and their accompanying attitudes are self-defeating and result in diminished capacity.” Lehr, *Clergy Burnout*, location 151-154.

⁸⁶ “The ministering person cannot always tell if his work is having any results... can work for months or years and not be sure she is really accomplishing anything.” Sanford, *Ministry Burnout*, 62.

⁸⁷ “Totally unrealistic agendas for work can be praised as admirable intentions for mission.” C. Welton Gaddy, *A Soul Under Siege: Surviving Clergy Depression* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1991), 39.

⁸⁸ I would suggest two full days of rest. One day to prepare for the Sabbath, and then the actual day of Sabbath. Without the day to prepare, we have what Eugene Peterson calls, a “bastard Sabbath,” or a beginning-less day of rest. Eugene H. Peterson, *The Pastor: A Memoir* (New York: HarperCollins, 2011), 220.

- A clear understanding of criticism and critique⁸⁹
- Taking diet, exercise, and mental health⁹⁰ into consideration
- A personal spiritual life that is met with adequate time in the spiritual disciplines⁹¹
- Resources at hand that can educate others on the red flags of self-neglect
- A mentor⁹²

Unfortunately, an exhaustive list of qualifications for what a healthy minister should look like would be an unhelpful set of claims, but the above are a list of factors that can promote pastoral health.

What's the Intended Outcome?

The anticipated outcome of discussing personal development and pastoral health is that pastors are becoming increasingly healthier, resulting in increased longevity in ministry. This health should come through three particular streams of life and ministry:

- Personal: How to keep you healthier!
- Vocational: How to make sure the demands of Christian ministry are well managed!
- Systematic/Congregational: Thriving in the midst of ministry systems!

Although not exhaustive, they should:

⁸⁹ "Preventing Burnout: Spirit, Soul and Body," *Thriving Pastor*, accessed September 12, 2015. <http://www.thrivingpastor.com/preventing-burnout-spirit-soul-and-body/>.

⁹⁰ Mental health could be as involved as regular psychiatric evaluation, or as simple as annual counseling to help talk through the experiences, traumatic or praiseworthy, in pastoral ministry.

⁹¹ Roy M. Oswald, *Clergy Self-Care: Finding a Balance for Effective Ministry* (Washington, D.C.: Alban Institute, 1991), 123-124.

⁹² "Every minister needs a minister." Gaddy, *A Soul Under Siege: Surviving Clergy Depression*, 56.

- Report higher levels of vocational satisfaction
- Exhibit personal disciplines (exercise, adequate rest, free from dependencies, etc....)
- Assist other pastors, and leaders, in their on-going pursuits of health through personal development efforts
- Effectively manage emotions, and their responses to others and the external world, developing thorough self-awareness

Three Streams of Personal Development for Pastors

Stream 1: Personal

This stream will key on several developments:

- Impotence of Self
- Physical Well-Being
- Emotional Health

Impotence of Self

The initial stream of development for greater pastoral health is the “Personal” stream. This is about you, the minister. In short, how do you make sure you don’t kill you, or leave you tired, restless, and completely exhausted. This is the primary relationship you have with yourself as an image-bearer of God. If you’re going to deal with an aspect of a relationship, then you must first deal with how one entity in the relationship views themselves, and since we should know how God views Himself,⁹³ then

⁹³ This is an assumption that there’s a theological framework in existence surrounding the concept of, “imago dei,” or, “image of God.” The demands of the imago dei are to be formed into that of Christ likeness. We are to grow in holiness, and do the bidding of the Father.

the response is on us. Taking a look deep inside can result in one of two responses: fear or freedom.⁹⁴ The introspection of self should not exact fear, leery of what we're uncovering, rather it should evoke thoughts of freedom because we cannot master our spiritual formation, cannot master self, which leaves us powerless. This, I argue, is a strength of the individual. This allows for a high-level of grace-based living that delights in being a continual learner, and welcomes failure as an opportunity for advancement. This requires a paradigmatic shift in how we view our self and how we see successes and failures. Instead of failure being a damning reality, and success being a fleeting object in which we spend an absurd amount of time on, we see failure as an object to be overcome. The tendency that continual success causes is that we've bought into the trap that we don't need to extend ourselves personally and professionally, providing us with a relatively small framework to operate in, one in which we always win. Why would we? Who likes to lose? Instead of basking in the aura of loss, we carefully articulate where we've missed the mark, and develop a game plan for continued growth. While "grace," or, "divine, unmerited, favor," is essential for how we operate, we can't dismiss the dynamics of active and passive living. Grace is a passive form of living, resting in what God has done and can do. Active living requires that we respond to the grace that God has already given. Active living can mean that we take care of our physical self, as well as our emotional and mental self. One should find that impotence of self, physical well-being, and emotional health are all interconnected.

⁹⁴ I will use the "fear and freedom" dichotomy again when talking about vocation.

Physical Well-Being

Our physical bodies matter.⁹⁵ Scripture speaks briefly on the necessity of taking care of ourselves (1 Cor. 3:16-17, 6:19, 1 Tim. 4:8), but yet there is an inordinate percentage of clergy that are overweight. Many make claims that they do not have time for physical activity, or overeat as a form of coping mechanism for the stress, or other ailment, that they've experienced both in ministry and out of ministry. How much we weigh and what we eat aren't the only factors that play into our physical well-being. Here are some:

- What are your activity levels and level of exercise?
- How do you handle substance use (smoking, drinking, prescription medication)?
- Whether or not you've seen a physician recently
- Whether or not you get 6-8 hours of sleep

These all matter to ministry because when we're in pain, whether that's caused by personal or vocational demands, we don't think clearly,⁹⁶ meaning that cognitive strain caused by physical ailment, or physical neglect, affects performance. Above that, the body is the dwelling place of the Spirit, and when we approach ministry, we not only do so on behalf of our self, but for the congregation's benefit, and we do so by being led by the Holy Spirit. The constant hankering and thirst for food or substance addiction, or the distracting lethargy caused by no physical activity can impede the reception of the Spirit to do the work of the ministry.

⁹⁵ Lehr, *Clergy Burnout*, location 1380-1385.

⁹⁶ Plantinga, *Beyond Doubt*, location 228.

Emotional Health

A pastor of a large church in Little Rock, AR and his wife were just given some terrible news. The baby his wife had been carrying had died from internal complications early in its development. This pastor, and his family, was distraught, depressed, and demotivated. He noticed that his desire for prayer and study had decreased significantly, he could hardly leave his house, and he wasn't sure what to do with all of the thoughts, hopes, and dreams that were swimming around his head. Admittedly, he said that he didn't know what to do, think, or how to get out of this funk. In a recent survey,⁹⁷ 85% of all independent Christian church/Church of Christ ministers noted that they did not receive adequate training on emotional intelligence in Bible College and/or Seminary, leaving the 9% who said "Yes, they did receive adequate training," to be a visible minority among pastors in one of the largest Christian movements in North America. While many pastors are skilled in areas of public communication, history, linguistics, and areas of leadership and management, they agree that they are inadequately prepared to deal with the barrage of emotions they, or others through counseling and discipleship, experience on a daily basis. As such, I believe pastors can learn emotional intelligence, when put into practice, produces healthy pastors who are able to handle the varying pressures of ministry for greater periods of time.⁹⁸ To quickly note, emotional

⁹⁷ I conducted a survey of 100 independent Christian church ministers, pastors of a movement known as the American Restoration Movement, on various issues of pastoral health. 85% said they did not receive adequate training in emotional intelligence, 9% said they did receive adequate training in emotional intelligence, and 6% reported that they did not attend Bible College or seminary.

⁹⁸ Richard A. Hunt, Ralph A Mortensen, Richard L Gorsuch, and H Newton Malony, "Emotional Competence (intelligence) and Vocational Choice among Candidates for the Ordained Ministry," *Journal of Pastoral Care & Counseling (Online)* 67, no. 3 (2013): 1, accessed September 12, 2016, *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials*, EBSCOhost. It is believed that low emotional intelligence skews the skill set of those in ministry.

intelligence is not a fix-all for holistic health, and we should tread carefully as our emotions often deceive us. Instead of putting all of our stock into our emotional quotient, it just a piece, though vital, in building healthier ministry practices and lives.

Given the chasm between the percentages above, we should see the already apparent, and undeniable, disconnect between the traditional intelligences (generically summed up as IQ, or intelligence quotient) that are valued in ministry and emotional intelligence. There are various forms of intelligences, some of which pastors tend to be good at, or at least received formal training in: social intelligence, or the ability to act wisely in human relations; existential intelligence, or tackling the deep questions about life; interpersonal intelligence, or individuals who are people smart; but one form of intelligence, emotional intelligence, or, “the ability to perceive emotions, to access and generate emotions so as to assist thought, to understand emotions and emotional meanings, and to reflectively regulation emotions in ways that promote emotional and intellectual growth,”⁹⁹ stands out above the rest. It is easy for us to put an emphasis on IQ, or our intelligence quotient, measuring our intellectual, analytical, logical, and rational abilities;¹⁰⁰ or it is easy for us to make one form of intelligence greater than another, but doing so only detracts from the dependency each intelligence has on the other. Professionals say that focusing on, “other characteristics,” like, “those of emotional intelligence, such as motivation, insight as to what will work in the long run, the skill of garnering emotional support to keep destructive emotions resolved and long-range

⁹⁹ Steven Stein and Howard E. Book, *The EQ Edge: Emotional Intelligence and Your Success* (Mississauga, ON: Jossey-Bass, 2011), 13.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

planning based on deep values recognized through emotional introspection,”¹⁰¹ give us a better idea on how to measure success.

Travis Bradberry, an expert in emotional intelligence, explains that there are, “four emotional intelligence skills that pair up under two primary competencies: personal competence and social competence,”¹⁰² both not to be confused with the previously defined interpersonal intelligence or social intelligence. “Personal competence is made up of your self-awareness and self-management skills, which focus more on you individually than on your interactions with other people,” though emotional intelligence is not individually focused. “Personal competence is your ability to stay aware of your emotions and manage your behavior and tendencies. Social competence is made up of your social awareness and relationship management skills; social competence is your ability to understand other people’s moods, behavior and motives in order to improve the quality of your relationships.”¹⁰³ Emotional intelligence stands out as a relatively important measurement of our intelligence because of its ability to encompass other forms of intelligence. Emotional intelligence is not dependent on rational ability alone but takes the experiences, environments, personality, and physiologically makeup into perspective, making it a more holistic approach to measuring human intelligence and performance. Where emotional intelligence makes its biggest impact in the Christian worldview is through, “affective competence,” or the street smarts on our intelligence, “it

¹⁰¹ David Ryback, *Putting Emotional Intelligence to Work: Successful Leadership Is More than IQ* (Boston, MA: Butterworth-Heinemann, 1998), 58-59.

¹⁰² Travis Bradberry and Jean Greaves, *Emotional Intelligence 2.0* (San Diego, CA: TalentSmart Publishing, 2009), 23-24.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

is important for developing the capacity and skills for being in loving relationships, which is a significant purpose of Christian community.”¹⁰⁴

The Harvard Business Review believes that emotional intelligence is so important to human development that it has proved to be twice as important as other ingredients of excellent job performance,¹⁰⁵ especially as far as how effective leaders are.¹⁰⁶ Most likely because it requires a holistically-driven dynamic that moves beyond many other individualistic competencies and it influences teams. The Harvard Business Review makes it an effort to include at least one essay dedicated to emotional intelligence in each of its publications because emotional intelligence can be taught, and is especially important to high-level executives. Emotional intelligence for business, or organizations, is referred to as executive intelligence.¹⁰⁷ “The ability to monitor one’s own and others’ feelings and emotions, to discriminate among them and to use this information to guide one’s thinking and actions,” is something that one, “can deliberately acquire with practice.”¹⁰⁸ Obtaining emotional health and intelligence requires addressing our weaknesses, self-deficiencies, interpersonal shortcomings, mistakes, and requests for

¹⁰⁴ Sara Shisler Goff, “Developing Affective Competence through Spiritual Practice,” *Journal of Religious Leadership* 13, no. 2 (2014): 34, accessed September 12, 2016, *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials*, EBSCOhost.

¹⁰⁵ *HBR’s 10 Must Reads on Emotional Intelligence* (Boston, MA: Harvard Business, 2015), 3.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 1.

¹⁰⁷ Robert K. Cooper and Ayman Sawaf, *Executive EQ: Emotional Intelligence in Leadership and Organizations* (New York: Berkley Pub. Group, 1998), xi-xv.

¹⁰⁸ Chade-Meng Tan, *Search Inside Yourself: The Unexpected Path to Achieving Success, Happiness (and World Peace)* (New York: HarperOne, 2012), 10.

help.¹⁰⁹ It requires that we form it as a discipline, in the same way that we would gain skill or expertise in any activity or subject, through study and practice.

Emotional intelligence is not only a learned discipline but is radically shaped by our past experiences. Psychologist Martin Seligman says that many aspects of our emotional competency, for example, pessimism,¹¹⁰ are heritable.¹¹¹ It is important to notice the difference between the terms, “genetic,” and “heritability,” and not making the mistake of saying that our emotions are inherited as there is, “no set portion of genetic influence on intelligence,”¹¹² or you can’t definitively use statistics to say that you got your emotions from someone else. You do not gain your emotional palette because it “runs in the family,” but you may carry a propensity towards a certain emotion because a parent may have exhibited a certain emotion more than others.¹¹³ The argument for our heritable emotional state is strengthened when we consider past instances of acceptable behavior. Example, if a father figure is unable to carefully articulate and manage his emotions and instead shows fits of rage by throwing items, then a child is more likely to develop this same behavior because it was an approved form of emotional output by the father. The necessity of learned emotional intelligence is that, “emotional skillfulness

¹⁰⁹ Patrick Lencioni, *The Five Dysfunctions of a Team: A Leadership Fable* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2002), 196.

¹¹⁰ In the Appendix, is an exercise for how to build optimism.

¹¹¹ Martin E. P. Seligman, Karen Reivich, Lisa Jaycox, and Jane Gillham, *The Optimistic Child: A Proven Program to Safeguard Children against Depression and Build Lifelong Resilience* (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 2007), 51.

¹¹² David Shenk, *The Genius in All of Us: Why Everything You’ve Been Told about Genetics, Talent, and IQ Is Wrong* (New York: Doubleday, 2010), 79.

¹¹³ Jeanne Segal and Jaelline Jaffe, *The Language of Emotional Intelligence: The Five Essential Tools for Building Powerful and Effective Relationships* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2008), 37-38.

frees us from emotional compulsion,”¹¹⁴ and particularly learning this skillfulness frees us from the accepted compulsions we learned from our experiences. Not only is emotional intelligence learned from past experiences it is actually trainable. “This claim is based on a fairly new branch of science called, neuroplasticity. The idea is that what we think, do, and pay attention to changes the structure and function of our brains.”¹¹⁵

Emotional intelligence is a complex discipline. Many professionals agree on the five necessary domains of emotional intelligence:

- Self-Awareness — Knowing one’s internal states, preferences, resources, and intuitions (In the appendix is an exercise for developing self-awareness)
- Self-regulation — Management of one’s internal states, impulses, and resources
- Motivation — Emotional tendencies that guide or facilitate reaching goals
- Empathy — Awareness of others’ feelings, needs, and concerns
- Social skills — Adeptness at inducing desirable responses in others¹¹⁶

For brevity’s sake, I will allow those brief descriptions to serve as baseline understandings of some of the most vital pieces of emotional intelligence. If I were to reconstruct my own model of what emotional intelligence is made up of, I would say there are three primary categories, or a three-fold approach to emotional intelligence:

- Physiological
- Environmental
- Cognitive

¹¹⁴ Tan, *Search Inside Yourself*, 18.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 18.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 11.

Emotions have their own physiological cues. When we get angry our blood pressure rises,¹¹⁷ when we get nervous we might sweat, or other physiological responses might be shallow breathing, feeling sick to our stomachs, or difficulty paying attention.¹¹⁸ Another great example of how emotional intelligence has a deeply physiological level is that when stressors in the human body are left unattended they can produce a bad hormone called cortisone, which throttles the immune system. Daniel Goleman writes more on the body's physiological responses to stress, or low emotional intelligence:

- With anger blood flows to the hands, making it easier to grasp a weapon or strike at a foe; heart rate increases, and a rush of hormones such as adrenaline generates a pulse of energy strong enough for vigorous action.
- With fear blood goes to the large skeletal muscles, such as in the legs, making it easier to flee – making the face blanch as blood is shunted away from it. At the same time, the body freezes, if only for a moment, perhaps, allowing time to gauge whether hiding might be a better reaction. Circuits in the brain's emotional centers trigger a flood of hormones that put the body on general alert making it edgy and ready for action, and attention fixates on the threat at hand, the better to evaluate what response to make.
- Love, tender feelings, and sexual satisfaction entail parasympathetic arousal—the physiological opposite of the “fight-or-flight” mobilization shared by fear and anger. The parasympathetic pattern, dubbed the “relaxation response,” is a bodywide set of reactions that generates a general state of calm and contentment, facilitating cooperation.¹¹⁹

What all this information does is show us that, “we cannot develop emotional intelligence unless we operate at the level of physiology.”¹²⁰

Thus far there has already been a comprehensive evaluation on how our environment plays a role in the development of our emotional intelligence. Neil Nedley,

¹¹⁷ Michael Cornwall, *Go Suck a Lemon: Strategies for Improving Your Emotional Intelligence* (Shelbyville, KY: Michael Cornwall, 2010), 168.

¹¹⁸ Tan, *Search Inside Yourself*, 23, 116.

¹¹⁹ Daniel Goleman, *Emotional Intelligence* (New York: Bantam Books, 2005), 7.

¹²⁰ Tan, *Search Inside Yourself*, 23.

M.D. says that there are a variety of environmental factors that we should keep into perspective, “developmental hits, or things we don’t deal with from growing up like being raised by parents with addiction or abuse; types of different trauma, such as rape, or murder; emotional wounds, like manipulative behavior from someone you trusted.”¹²¹

It is absolutely imperative that the following be mentioned: emotions, by themselves, are deceptive. We can’t make decisions based primarily off of how we feel. There are two “minds” that people possess: the rational mind, and the emotional mind. There’s a propensity in individuals that they think they have to either sway one way or another, thinking out of our logical mind, or reacting out of our emotional impulses. Now that isn’t to say that the two is not knit together in harmony, it’s to affirm that each are semi-independent faculties, but are still interconnected as far as brain circuitry is concerned.¹²² To clarify, it is our thoughts that influence our emotions, which is better explained in the cognitive behavior therapy term, “effective thinking,”¹²³ that our thoughts dramatically influence the way that we feel. For cognitively influenced emotional intelligence the domain of emotional awareness is especially important, because calling attention to the underlying thoughts behind our emotions is essential for adopting new thoughts and behaviors to retrain our minds, making full use of brain sciences like neuroplasticity, which is to say that we can grow the capacity of our brains. In terms of identity development, there is an inseparable nature of our identity as one who is called by God and in the field of emotional health, but we get caught up in the midst of

¹²¹ Neil Nedley, MD, “Improving Emotional Intelligence Through Life’s Difficulties and Disasters,” Lecture, EQ Summit 2016, California, Weimar, December 1, 2016. Dr. Neil Nedley used this lecture as an opening keynote to the conference.

¹²² Goleman, *Emotional Intelligence*, 8-9.

¹²³ This is in no way a treatment of psychology or CBT practices.

the link between ministry and life, that the things we do get tangled up, or not tangled up enough, in who we are, or who we are called to be. Often the two get jumbled up together but, “emotional intelligence implies greater decision-making capacity,”¹²⁴ helping bridge between the gap of ministry, which is about what we do¹²⁵ in response to our identity, which is about who we are. Maintaining the nuances of identity, or practicing self-regulation, will prove to be paramount for those who have answered the call to vocational ministry. An example of self-regulation would be refusing to be called, “pastor,” as a pastor is not who you are. You’re you. You shepherd others in many different settings, whether that be on Sunday morning, at the grocery store, or lifting heavy weights at the gym, your identity is not swayed by when and where the action of shepherding happens. This is exactly why ministers should not receive special perks, like preferential parking spots, as it is a false treatment of their identity. It would be the responsibility of the developing clergy to recognize that fallacy and act accordingly.

It should be made clear that implementing emotional intelligence is not a quick-fix solution to getting a leg up on life and productivity, but it is a lifelong discipline that one must submit to. Like any discipline, the capacity for that discipline does not increase unless it is practiced. Below is a list of several solutions for implementing emotional intelligence but this is not an exhaustive list. Many of the following plans of implementation will be included in the Appendix.

We’ve already made the case for being wary of emotions, but there’s a similar gut-type of feeling that we get when our capacity to make decisions is challenged. Many

¹²⁴ Ryback, *Putting Our Emotional Intelligence to Work*, 6.

¹²⁵ Robert Steven Kaplan, *What You Really Need to Lead: The Power of Thinking and Acting like an Owner* (Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Publishing, 2015), 21.

people operate out of their logical mind and others operate out of their emotional mind, but there's a third possibility called, "intuition."¹²⁶ Because of your brain's limited capacity to recall everything at any given moment, though you are able to retain everything you have learned, we often get this sense of déjà vu, that we've seen this happen, or remember a particular circumstance, because our subconscious mind stores past information and experiences. In the event of a bad thought, or negative intuition, it may be our subconscious mind's attempt at aversion, or refusing to bring up the bad news because of potential damage, or in the event of a good thought, or positive intuition, we may receive that gut feeling that this is the right thing. We can learn to act on our intuition, and to separate that from emotion.

Below are two helpful solutions that mix emotional and physical well-being:

- SPEAR
 - Our bodies react to our emotional state at the physiological level and so to combat the effects of a low or high emotional intelligence we need to institute a physiological regimen to help produce good hormones as low emotional intelligence can produce bad hormones. This is located in the Appendix.
- Self-Dialogue¹²⁷
 - We can use an identity shaping self-dialogue to separate emotions from identity. Instead of using terms like, "I am always angry," which makes our emotional state have no end, we can change the

¹²⁶ Ryback, *Putting Emotional Intelligence to Work*, 202.

¹²⁷ This is physical in the way that it requires a role-playing interaction.

self-conversation in such a way that allows us to approach our emotional state from a third person perspective. Think about your role in this practice as that of an investigative journalist, separating fact from feeling.¹²⁸ For example:

Before: “I’ve just been touchy my whole life, that’s just who I am.”

After: “Brandon was upset because of what his sister said. Brandon has difficulty hearing criticism regarding his exercise habits because of being teased as a child about his weight.”

Stream 2: Vocational

This stream will key on a singular topic:

- Vocation¹²⁹ & its Interconnectedness

If you’re going to deal with an aspect of a relationship, then you must first deal with how one entity in the relationship views themselves and how they view their responsibilities. We’ve already focused on the development of self and building a healthy personal stream, now the duty lies in developing our responsibilities. To do so is to look at the idea of “vocation.” Barbara Brown Taylor, a professor and author, defines vocation as being “a God person in the world, and that makes me the same as those among whom I serve.”¹³⁰ This quote provides us with a simple and helpful place to start: vocation is about what you do, and is closely tied with who you are. Vocation, occupation, calling,

¹²⁸ “Improving Emotional Intelligence Through Life’s Difficulties and Disasters.”

¹²⁹ A brief conversation had begun earlier in this dissertation when highlighting the ministry problem. Some of this material may appear repeated, and will be helpful for further clarification.

¹³⁰ Barbara Brown Taylor, *The Preaching Life* (Cambridge, MA: Cowley Publications, 1993), 30.

gifting, and any other necessary term all seem to be synonymous in how we take about their function within the person. There is no separation from who you are to what you do. “The word itself means a call or summons, so that having a vocation means more than having a job. It means answering a specific; it means doing what one is meant to do. In religious language, it means participating in the work of God...”¹³¹ The idea of vocation evokes one of two things in people: fear or freedom. The fear of vocation comes from a sense that we will become mastered by our jobs.¹³² The promise of freedom stems from the pleasure of knowing we can improve ourselves with a given task or responsibility.¹³³ With freedom being a helpful motivator in our vocation, we can now enter into the realm of how we function best within that freedom. Very simply: doing work we’re not skilled to do, or called to do, is difficult. Unfortunately, that doesn’t mean that we can skip that work, especially in the church, but we can use it as an opportunity to equip others for that work. A primary leader in the local church can function best in the role that God has called them to,¹³⁴ which plays off of the idea of vocation. There are many things that inform and complete our callings, such as our unique religious journey’s, working with our, “embedded beliefs, values, and practices,” some of which originate from our childhood.¹³⁵ These experiences inform prescribed functions, for example: a past issue of

¹³¹ Ibid., 28.

¹³² Matthew B. Crawford, *Shop Class as Soulcraft: An Inquiry into the Value of Work* (New York: Penguin Press, 2009), 57.

¹³³ Ibid., 51.

¹³⁴ Stan Toler. *Stan Toler’s Practical Guide to Ministry Transition* (Oklahoma City, OK: DustJacket Press, 2015), 51.

¹³⁵ Carrie Doehring, *The Practice of Pastoral Care: A Postmodern Approach* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2015), xxvii.

abuse may make counseling a difficult and daunting responsibility, fully knowing that “each person has a comfort zone with pain: what they can bear and tolerate.”¹³⁶ Pain is not the only informational piece of callings, but it certainly helps us in understanding our primary influencers in our vocations. Pete Scazzero, a writer on church health and discipleship, says that our neglect of our family of origins has caused a massive gap in our discipleship journey, and he suggests using a genogram, where one maps the family of origin, and includes various elements of each family member.¹³⁷ I’ve heard it said that many go into pastoral ministry because of a failure, or inadequacy, in their extended families: an absent father, a broken home, etc... Making an inventory of formational experiences, like the genogram, that contribute, respectively, to our strengths and weaknesses in ministry, can help us experience a greater freedom in the things God has called us to that give us joy, and help us to distinguish what is joy stealing and adds more stress to the pastoral life. This practice helps to add clarity to what system of the congregation we’re in need of, either to use or to develop.

Speaking strictly from a familial perspective, “as stressors mount in the family, there will be reactions and breakdowns with internal family relationships as well as for the individuals.”¹³⁸ In a recent survey I performed, 39% of the 208 cross-denominational clergy noted that their spouse either heavily disagreed, disagreed, or were neutral on the

¹³⁶ Peter L. Steinke, *How Your Church Family Works: Understanding Congregations as Emotional Systems* (Herndon, VA: Alban Institute, 2006), 65.

¹³⁷ “Succession and New Beginnings,” *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality*, September 27, 2013, accessed January 8, 2018, <https://www.emotionallyhealthy.org/succession-and-new-beginnings/>.

¹³⁸ John B. Morse, “Pastoral Self-Care: Maintaining a Balance to Serve Others: A Narrative Inquiry into the Experience of Church-Based Clergy.” (PhD diss., Colorado State University, 2011), 19.

this statement, “My spouse is satisfied with my family/ministry balance.”¹³⁹ In a family with children, a clergy spouse could be doing the work of a single parent, creating tension in the household caused by additional household management responsibilities with divorce being the increasing outcome of that poor marital adjustment within couples who are engaged in ministry.¹⁴⁰ Families help complete the circle on how ordained ministers are the embodiment of the faith, particularly in marriage, when spouses complete the covenantal framework of God and Jesus, and Christ and the church, and children are the response of that relationship in love. The management of the household requires a holistic approach to how we are to involve ourselves. That means that how we are emotionally, mentally, spiritually, psychologically, physically, and financially¹⁴¹ matters to our family. How well we manage our family, spouse and children, speaks highly of our qualifications for ministry, (1 Tim. 3) as well as dramatically impacting what sufferings, emotions and attitudes we bring into the study of the text, and into the work of the ministry. Vocation, who we are, and what we do, is tied to our personal well-being, our family systems, and to the actual work we are compensated for. These are the areas in which we “work out” our faith.¹⁴²

¹³⁹ I based this question off of this claim, “48 percent of pastors think being in ministry is hazardous to family well-being.” H. B. London and Neil B. Wiseman, *Pastors at Greater Risk*, Rev. ed. (Ventura, CA: Gospel Light, 2003), 28.

¹⁴⁰ Janelle Warner and John D Carter, “Loneliness, Marital Adjustment and Burnout in Pastoral and Lay Persons,” *Journal of Psychology & Theology* 12, no. 2 (1984): 125-131, accessed December 11, 2015, *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials*, EBSCOhost.

¹⁴¹ Wayne Cordeiro references the things that cause dissension and depression marriage, potentially ending in divorce. Wayne Cordeiro, *Leading on Empty: Refilling Your Tank and Renewing Your Passion* (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House, 2009), 54.

¹⁴² Schultze, *Here I Am*, 15.

Allowing ourselves adequate wiggle room for growth is essential in developing our vocation, and understanding our call. One writer assumes that we'll make anywhere from two, to three, major career changes,¹⁴³ which isn't to say that we are flighty in our pursuits, but it is to say that we're responding to the Holy Spirit, as those who are made in the image of God. A particular encouragement in ministry, especially as it pertains to growth, is to not become risk averse which implies, "we will not take risks with people or situations because we fear things will go wrong. We might be indecisive, because we fear making the wrong choice."¹⁴⁴ Establishing a healthy track of personal development or greater personal and pastoral health will prove to be risky, offensive to some, but is essential for survival. Here are some suggested practices to grow in vocational demands and their possible negative counterparts:

- Solitude retreat for prayer and contemplation, for the purpose of recovery
→ "Pastor so-and-so takes too many vacations."
- Coaching networks to learn new skills, intentional growth and development → "They're just always trying to do the next big thing. What happened to our old church?"
- Mandatory no-contact days, implementing Sabbath rest → "This church needs the pastor present at all times. What happens if someone needs a pastor?"
- Seasons of discernment (what's the next step) → "They've been awfully aloof lately. Do you think they're job hunting?"

¹⁴³ Ibid., 17.

¹⁴⁴ Tim Chester and Steve Timmis, *Everyday Church: Gospel Communications on Mission* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 79.

Another item of vocational consideration is the need for ongoing assessment, “How am I doing?” Or, “Where am I deficient and need to grow?” Again, our dichotomy of fear and freedom come back into play. “Christian leaders shy away from assessment of any sort... this reluctance springs from two roots: their own insecurities and doubts about the effectiveness (or spirituality) of the methods themselves.”¹⁴⁵ Another writer, instead of using the terms fear and freedom, uses, “fear and courage,”¹⁴⁶ citing the space between playing it safe and taking a risk.¹⁴⁷ We shouldn’t view our assessment of vocational prowess as something that implies risk, though. The only time we should fear assessment is when we are under the suspicion that we’ve somehow been absorbed by our job, and have forgot the order of creation: that first we are created in the image of God. Assessment allows us to maintain identity in a field of work where the lines often go blurred.

Here’s a quick how-to guide on assessing vocational health:

- Have I preached the gospel to myself daily?¹⁴⁸
- Have I identified where God is at work and then joined Him there?
- What is currently hindering my growth in the work place and what steps do I have control over?

¹⁴⁵ Creps, *Off-Road Disciplines*, location 1075-1076.

¹⁴⁶ Steve Carter, *This Invitational Life: Risking Yourself to Align with Gods Heartbeat for Humanity* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 2016), 32.

¹⁴⁷ Creps, *Off-Road Disciplines*, location 1075-1076.

¹⁴⁸ This almost seems like it doesn’t need to be put in here, but the reminder of what Jesus has done through His atoning death, and what He inaugurates through His victory as King, dramatically matters how we function in terms of life and vocation. We need to constantly remind ourselves to submit to His Lordship, every day.

- Have I identified my strengths and weaknesses and pursue those regularly?¹⁴⁹
- Are my areas of responsibility increasing in their desired metrics?¹⁵⁰

Stream 3: Systematic/Congregational

A large portion of the primary work of the pastor is dealing with the congregation, so the health of the pastor is tied to the people, and their systems in varying levels. A more defined, and equipped system of care towards the congregation will strengthen the relationship.

The initial point in defining the relationship between congregational care and pastoral health is helping to define the roles of each segment of the relationship. A relationship consists of two, or more, working parts that work together to achieve a common goal. The common goal of the congregational care and pastoral health relationship is two-fold: achieving high levels of pastoral health and performing the required job duties of shepherding a congregation. For this portion of the relationship we'll work to establish the role and function of the pastor in light of congregational care.

A ministry leader can use a well-known model of determining their gifting in ministry. Ephesians 4:11 can be a helpful tool in helping decipher that. Ephesians 4:11 uses five primary areas of equipping for ministry:

¹⁴⁹ It's important for leaders to act within their strengths, and still live in the tension of doing what they have to do, even though they may not be good at it. The general rule of thumb: do what only you can do. While this is ideal at best, we have to continue to hone our crafts, while also caring for our deficiencies, especially if our weaknesses cannot be delegated or abdicated.

¹⁵⁰ Ministry is difficult to measure. People, facilities, budgets, and the likes are helpful, but they don't often translate as success. For example, a church may be growing in all of those things, but may be spiritually anemic. Potential areas of measurement might be growing in staff relationships, multiplication of ministries, increased second-time visitors, or more people engaging in compassion-related ministries.

- Apostle – Best defined as one with an entrepreneurial spirit, able to start new works
- Prophet – Best defined as one who can boldly proclaim truth where truth is desperately needed
- Evangelist – A working definition of an evangelist is one who is able to call others into a relationship with Jesus
- Shepherd – A Shepherd, or Pastor, is one who is specifically geared towards the overall well-being, or nurturing, of the flock, or congregation
- Teacher – This is an individual who can expound on scripture with clarity, making it accessible to all people

This isn't an exhaustive list of what pastoral gifting or responsibility is, but serves as an introductory evaluation of what God has called us to do. For example, I have learned that I am best suited as an Apostle-Prophet-Evangelist with strong Shepherding-Teaching tendencies, knowing I need the input of many shepherding people who aren't afraid to call me out where I've missed the flock or care of others. There are many things of my past that help inform my gifts, and I want to make sure that I am equipping other people to assist in areas in which I am not particularly gifted with. Sameness is the anti-thesis of a healthy model of ministry because there is a natural pull and tendency towards assimilation in groups of people, often pushing people to exchange the integrity of their gifts for harmony.¹⁵¹ Unity does not imply, or demand, uniformity. This notion should be repealed whenever possible, or whenever necessary. The working metaphor for systems

¹⁵¹ Steinke, *How Your Church Family Works*, 63.

health is the body and a body, to play out the metaphor, isn't a whole lot of good with six feet. The below quote shows the necessity of embracing diversity:

Like a healthy body, a healthy relationship system does not over focus its anxiety on one spot or look for one simple solution. Rather it calls for a larger and more directed response. Hence if we sprain our left ankle, we shift our weight to our right leg and limp. If we develop a tender spot on our palm through pressure or friction, we lighten our grip or use our other hand... Potentially, however, we have a pool of resources, a many-splendored repertoire of responses and a wealth of recuperative powers. We need not be merely instinctive in dealing with pain. "We are not committed or bound by our genes," Lewis Thomas, former president of the Sloan Kettering Center in New York City, notes, "to stick to one activity forever..."¹⁵²

The pastor should view themselves in an authentic way, and in an attempt to avoid the loss of meaning associated with buzzwords like "authentic," take it to it mean this: be who God called you to be, no one else.¹⁵³ For some this will spark the confusion of selfishness but a proper understanding of self, which includes our gifts, skills, and the things we want to spend time on is the furthest thing from being selfish or self-centered, it is instead using our talents to influence the church.¹⁵⁴ Pastors should be ambitious in three things:

- Whose They Are – Where their identity comes from
- What They Engage In – What are they presently doing
- What Are My Motivators – Exercising their greatest passions, which should align with God's, in ministry

¹⁵² Ibid., 68.

¹⁵³ Israel Galindo, *The Hidden Lives of Congregations: Understanding Congregational Dynamics* (Herndon, VA: Alban Institute, 2004), 163.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., 163-165.

This increases our capacities for healthy ministry, because as our competency grows, our effectiveness also increases. An important counterpart to how the pastor views themselves, is how the pastor thinks the congregation views them.

It is essentially impossible to gain an accurate perspective on how we think the congregation views us. It has to go through a thousand lenses. Did I just preach a dog of a sermon? What part of the U.S. is the church located in? What is the average age of the congregation? How did they feel about their last pastor? And so many other variables. It is difficult to nail down just how the pastor thinks the congregation views them. How the pastor thinks the congregation views them falls into one of three categories:

- They are with you
- They are against you
- They aren't sure yet

These do appear to be basic categories, but they depict the kinds of situations a pastor may be positioned in and the feelings they elicit. The “not sure yet” feel is a normal category for any congregation to feel about their pastor, and an even more normal category for the pastor to consider when wondering how their parishioners feel about them. The pastor may not have been there long enough to have enough relational capital established, so people may still be skeptical of his or her motives. If a pastor believes the congregation feels this way about them, a good course of action would be to not make many organizational changes and begin pastoring through relationships.¹⁵⁵ Relational capital is imperative if long-term change is going to happen within their respective ministries. A suggested practice in this reality would be to change something small in the

¹⁵⁵ Thomas C. Oden, *Pastoral Theology: Essentials of Ministry* (San Francisco, CA: Harper & Row, 1983), 190.

church without much consideration of others and judge the response. For example, you could change the format of the bulletin, or if you're in a setting that requires robes, try a Sunday without a robe.

The “Against you” portion of how the pastor thinks the congregation views them is that there is no way possible in knowing whether or not, for sure, that the congregation thinks spitefully of you. Most of the sense we get about this is that the congregation is skeptical of our involvement, and another almost equal portion of this is that we lie to ourselves about this.¹⁵⁶ If, for some reason, they are spiteful of you, anticipate a long period of relationship building (relational capital) to help pastor those in your flock back to relational health. This is also a signal that a pastor selection committee did not go through the appropriate steps of pastoral transition, or they were not trained properly in this, likely because there were some unhealthy relational dynamics in existence before the transition (solo pastors, too long of tenure, personality-driven worship, isolated decision making from a senior leader, etc...). If push comes to shove, just remember that not all leadership roles are life sentences.¹⁵⁷

The “With you” portion of how the pastor thinks the congregation views them is good news. One example of why a pastor might be thinking about how the congregation views them is because of a new calling. Pastors should celebrate healthy pastoral transitions where churches are prepared for their new leaders. Transitional periods have a much higher rate of success if the congregation meets or exceeds the following percentages in how they view themselves:

¹⁵⁶ McDonald, *The Adventure of Happiness*, 19-You Are What You Love.

¹⁵⁷ Molly Dale Smith, *Transitional Ministry: A Time of Opportunity* (New York: Church Pub., 2009), Kindle Edition, location 478-479.

- Vitality in morale, 71% agreement
- Quality fellowship, 85% agreement
- Embraces change, 69% agreement
- Manages conflict, 70% agreement
- Engaged decision making, 70% agreement
- Faith impact, 79% agreement
- Engaged spiritual discipline practices, 60%
- Financial generosity, 2.2% of income¹⁵⁸
 - The benchmark for this is if an average household income given exceeds 2%, though some studies show at or below 3%
- High-performing staff, 80% agreement¹⁵⁹

These statistics warrant the following actions and responsibilities of parishioners:

- Celebrating a new season in the church
- Looking for opportunities to engage with others and in ministry
- Trust and optimism in decision making
- Increased engagement with basic Spiritual disciplines (Bible reading, study, prayer, etc.)
- Financial generosity that depicts sacrifice

While this isn't an exhaustive list of reasons why the congregation would be in favor of you, or their responsibilities, it is a prompter for consideration.

¹⁵⁸ Galindo, *The Hidden Lives of Congregations*, 16.

¹⁵⁹ Carolyn Weese and J. Russell Crabtree, *The Elephant in the Boardroom: Speaking the Unspoken about Pastoral Transitions* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2004), 45-46. All of the main bullet points come from this resource unless otherwise footnoted.

Instead of focusing on how the pastor views the congregation, our focus is instead, how the pastor should view the congregation: as a relationship system. The church is a living entity that is made up of individual people, made in the image of God, who have unique gifts to contribute holistically¹⁶⁰ to the health and life of the church. This complex relationship system is never a means by which the pastor achieves something, as the church is not something to be accomplished or mastered, the church instead is representative of the following:

- A people set apart¹⁶¹
- A movement¹⁶²
- Depending on who it consists of and their relational depth, it is a high-touch gathering or a high-organization system
 - High-touch = intimate, familial, relationally based groups that have looser systems
 - High-organization = highly organized, goal oriented, relationally distant from leadership, strict systems with defined leaders
- Defined by confessional theology, congregational worship, and religious education
- Politics are based on servanthood and community, rather than power and status¹⁶³

¹⁶⁰ Gary R. Collins, *The Biblical Basis of Christian Counseling for People Helpers* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2001), 198.

¹⁶¹ This follows the line of theological thought of “sanctification,” or, “holiness.”

¹⁶² J. R. Woodward, *The Church as Movement: Starting and Sustaining Missional-Incarnational Communities* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2016).

¹⁶³ Galindo, *The Hidden Lives of Congregations*, 21-25.

Aside from the tendency to want to nail down the congregation to their desired wants, the pastor needs to deal “with the reality that a congregation is an organism despite our best efforts to unwittingly organize the life out of a living thing.”¹⁶⁴

A working definition of congregational care is: the structure for how the congregation is cared for. Congregational care is an essential piece of healthy, maturing gatherings of believers as its life depends partially on the congregational care system. A system is needed, and this is due to the fact that vocation, the thing God calls us to, is tied to all that we do, this includes the duties of caretaking, the pastor caring for the congregation, and the congregation learning to care for itself.¹⁶⁵ Every church needs to move to the latter model in order to help create an atmosphere of pastoral health. This is an often-neglected form of personal development, which is putting together the right teams to decrease the level of responsibility.

The local church is the bride of Christ, but any bride left untended to is negligible relationship, not the type of bride-groom relationship that was intended in the New Testament. The congregation views itself as something to be cared for and nurtured, which certainly explains the complaint of many, “we aren’t being fed here.” With that being said, the congregation isn’t a hodge podge of individuals,¹⁶⁶ but it is a body, a community, or joint partnership, that helps identity and address when God speaks and it is those who are charged with repairing a broken world,¹⁶⁷ who the Apostle Paul says are

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., 20.

¹⁶⁵ Schultze, *Here I Am*, 17.

¹⁶⁶ Os Guinness, *The Call: Finding and Fulfilling the Central Purpose of Your Life* (Nashville, TN: W Pub. Group, 2003), 93, 97.

¹⁶⁷ Schultze, *Here I Am*, 71-72.

“entrusted with the ministry of reconciliation” (2 Cor. 5:11-21). This group exercises accountability, friendship, vulnerability, mutual service,¹⁶⁸ education, among other things, and because it is a community, it is not dependent upon any one individual, but is cared for by the collective.¹⁶⁹ To clarify, the care is the thing that is shared, the group who selects those who care should be narrow in size to streamline the decision making process, using pastorally minded people to act on behalf of the congregations best interest.¹⁷⁰

Below are some crucial items for congregations to consider for systems thinking:

- Maintaining flexibility in decision making is essential as no one person or group knows the future.
- Allow for disagreement as deeply held convictions, or traditions, should be challenged. This keeps the group outside of maintenance mode and always searching for the best methods.¹⁷¹
- In appointing leaders, ask the following questions:
 - Who is the best qualified to lead this?
 - Who has the greatest training?
 - Who has the most time?¹⁷²

¹⁶⁸ *The Biblical Basis of Christian Counseling for People Helpers*, 204.

¹⁶⁹ *Everyday Church*, 69.

¹⁷⁰ Larry W. Osborne. *Sticky Leaders: The Secret to Lasting Change and Innovation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2016), 146.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 147, 171.

¹⁷² Larry W. Osborne. *Sticky Teams: Keeping Your Leadership Team and Staff on the Same Page* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010), 89.

- Leaders within the congregational system should regularly assess the organization, as this points out organizational deficiencies and helps develop methods that will aid in mission effectiveness.¹⁷³
 - A SWOT analysis would be helpful (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats)

A term that could be synonymous with pastor is “curator,” or the person who organizes the worship gathering. Implied in the organization, much like a museum curator and their care of their artifacts, is the care for those attending the gathering.¹⁷⁴ Though it is the job of the pastor to help care for the faith community, it is a community project, not a solo effort. The previously mentioned model of equipping in Ephesians 4:11 shows that it is not just the function of leadership, but Christ gives this as a gift to the believing community. The congregation should not look to the pastor-teacher as the primary caregiver, but should expect this individual to be charged with the preparation of the people for the works of service.¹⁷⁵ In situations where Transitional Ministry is about to occur, or is happening, those charged with the brunt of the selection work should consult outside resources or organizations, like some of the resources listed in the Appendix, so they may begin the process of equipping others in an attempt to prepare a healthy place of ministry. Here are some health-related questions for pastors that congregations should be asking:

¹⁷³ Earl G. Creps. *Off-Road Disciplines: Spiritual Adventures of Missional Leaders* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2006. Kindle Edition) location 1075-1076.

¹⁷⁴ Schultze, *Here I Am: Now What on Earth Should I be Doing?*, 49.

¹⁷⁵ Chester and Timmis, *Everyday Church*, 69.

- How will you ensure health beyond yourself? Are you planning beyond your own tenure, or the tenure of the pastor?
- What is your preferred style of decision making? Group based or individual based?¹⁷⁶

The commitment to personal development should include a commitment to helping others develop. “Knowledge,” and creating that capacity in others, “must go beyond the mastery of facts, creating a foundation for both wisdom and ministry practice.”¹⁷⁷ Instilling knowledge, and showing others the ropes could be as simple as taking the time to establish mentor/mentee relationships. Mentoring can make a significant impact in the overall effects of personal development as mentoring can be defined as a, “committed, long-term relationship in which a more seasoned person supports the development of a more junior person.”¹⁷⁸ It’s the power of using the experience of others to our benefit.¹⁷⁹ Mentoring also helps us confront deficiencies in our own health. In considering why many pastors lack competence, is “training others” in our lists of things to do?¹⁸⁰ Education and educating others¹⁸¹ is a fundamental move in

¹⁷⁶ William B. Vanderbloemen, *Next: Pastoral Succession that Work* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2014), Kindle Edition, location 1326, 3313.

¹⁷⁷ “Leadership Development: Churches Don’t Have to Go it Alone Part II,” 41.

¹⁷⁸ Sheri-Lynne Leskiw and Parbudyal Singh, “Leadership Development: Learning from Best Practices,” *Leadership & Organization Development Journal* 28, no. 5 (2007): 444-464, <http://search.proquest.com.georgefox.idm.oclc.org/docview/226921487?accountid=11085>. 455.

¹⁷⁹ Part of learning is learning to follow preset behavior. Andert, Platt, and Alexakis, “Alternative, Grassroots, and Rogue Leadership,” 54.

¹⁸⁰ Clayton M. Christensen, *The Innovator’s Dilemma: The Revolutionary Book That Will Change the Way You Do Business* (Boston, MA: Harvard Business Publishing, 1997), 118.

¹⁸¹ “Best practices in leadership development include developing and implementing an entire learning system comprising of formal training, as well as action-learning activities, that provide the opportunity to apply and improve the application of the new learning... The learning system therefore provides developmental opportunities, developmental relationships and developmental feedback systems.”

making sure that future generations will be well equipped¹⁸² for the tasks and demands of ministry. Gary Thomas says, “In countries around the world, the Christian church is advancing itself with education aimed at training the Christian mind.”¹⁸³ Internalizing a plan for personal development is the beginning steps of putting that plan into action. Many leaders in business say that, “Leaders are responsible for future leadership. They need to identify, develop, and nurture other future leaders.”¹⁸⁴ An example list of duties, which includes development of others, for a senior leader in a local church would be:

- Vision – Leading the church in a God-given direction, often, this is the person that has been appointed the leader of the congregation, who possesses the greatest level of training and the time necessary to lead the organization
- Teaching – Communicating Biblical truth is essential, and even more impactful, if done in the context of relationships, often this person who has the most time and training to dedicate towards communication
- Leadership Development – Multiplying your leadership base; this is the primary group that the senior leader shepherds, outside of boards and staff

Leskiw and Singh, “Leadership Development: Learning from Best Practices.” 453. The local church should implement a system that accounts for the above.

¹⁸² “Until others are ‘equipped’ to fulfill the needed leadership functions, however, a pastor must be willing to step into the breach to fulfill the needed leadership behaviors himself, as a stopgap means of completing what is lacking in the group. But he must view such measures as temporary, lasting only until he can equip others to exercise their gifts.” Litfin, “The Nature of the Pastoral Role: The Leader as Completer,” 63. Developing other leaders is essential to ease the load of the pastor, aiding in pastoral health as it relieves stress.

¹⁸³ Gary Thomas, *Sacred Pathways: Discover Your Soul’s Path to God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2000), 11.

¹⁸⁴ De Pree, *Leadership is an Art*, 14.

What about History?

There is potential concern, when discussing the nature of pastoral health, of its necessity. One must honestly answer the question: were other productive people for the Kingdom, healthy? We can certainly make the case that there have been some healthy initiators of global Christian movements, and we can certainly make the case that there has been a fair share of not-so-healthy individuals. This begs the question: can God use unhealthy people? Or, does the lack of pastoral health thwart the effectiveness of ministry? The answer to both of those is no. We can look at several characters throughout history and cite God's power at work, despite people not being healthy.

The first examples I would create is the lives and ministries of: John Wesley, Charles Spurgeon, or even Martin Luther. From the onset, we know very well that they did not lead healthy lives. John Wesley was a world-famous itinerant preacher and writer with many failed relationships. Charles Spurgeon dismissed his bouts of depression and was famously quoted for working incredibly long hours with little to no sleep. Martin Luther battled epilepsy¹⁸⁵ and much conflict with his wife. If we're going to make a case for these individuals being effective in ministry, we have to tackle the issue of why they're effective. Certainly, God is beyond any human ability, and often works in spite of human efforts and strength (1 Cor. 1:27), and does so for His own glory.

Why then should pastors be healthy? It would be inappropriate for us to assume that God has blessed us the same way He did many other leaders in the past, or that we have the same drive or capacity. The opportunity we have received to do ministry is a

¹⁸⁵ H. Feldman, "Martin Luther's Seizure Disorder," *Sudhoffs Arch.* 1, no. 73 (1989): 26-44, accessed March 7, 2018, PubMed.

gift, and our gift is an opportunity to glorify God, and it serves as a witness to others the way that we steward it. A way in which we steward our gift well is how we take care of ourselves, preparing the avenue for long-term effective forms of ministry and Christian living. When we care for ourselves, we are preparing for a long life of ministry, and Spirit-led fruitfulness. This isn't to say that if we take care of ourselves then we'll suddenly be fruitful, but it is to say that we've intentionally designed a way to live in which God gets the greatest investment out of His messengers. I would advocate that we follow more closely the life of Jesus rather than the life of Spurgeon, Luther, Wesley, or even the Apostle Paul. Jesus creates a greater example in His quest for solitude, napping on a boat, disciplined spiritual life, enjoyment in quality food and drink, reminder of the Sabbath, and maximizing His ministry for God's sake (Jn 17:4). Though history gives us great precedence for holy ambition, we can still be equally ambitious and productive, both in our work and self-care.

Conclusion

Healing the world. That is the magnitude of the mission of the church, to steward its resources, leverage its impact, and raise up others for the greatest expedition in the existence of the world. With that huge mission should come an even greater expectation on its leadership. Often, the expectation of said leadership gets misplaced and only increases the likelihood for burnout or greater ministry ineffectiveness, tending to busy schedules, not advocating for personal development, but the expectation of clergy is that they would be healthy to lead the church in its healthy pursuit of the Kingdom of God. Particular attention to their personal development that aides in their overall health will in effect contribute to healthy churches who meet the need(s) of the Kingdom.

This dissertation provides the framework for developing a personal development strategy that is tailored towards self-health. It encompasses the personal life of the clergy, which affects the vocational duties of the clergy, who is constantly in contact with the congregation and its ever-changing systems. The pastor and their effectiveness is tied to their view of self, nurturing of their bodies, and ability to articulate deficiencies within the organizational element of the church. Wrap these all into one and you're on your way to building healthier pastors for interminable ministries, for the sake of the Kingdom, and for the healing of the world.

SECTION 4: ARTIFACT DESCRIPTION

The previous contents developed a case for healthier ministry and the need to develop a strategy to get there. The proposed artifact is a helpful book written for pastors titled, *Sad Pastor*. The goal of *Sad Pastor* is to create a narrative for pastors in which they find their own avenues for self-care, providing them with the implication necessary, or putting them within the story, to help develop a personal development strategy. To accomplish this, this book requires the following:

- An easily accessible book, highlighting real ministry problems and the internal issues the minister faces
- Within each chapter, and throughout the book, the main character meets different secondary characters who provide helpful tips, tricks, and tools to get healthy in life and ministry
- It will not serve as a fix-all solution for the problem of self-care neglect in life and ministry
- Highlight the nuances of pastoral ministry and the human life, advocating for a lifelong pursuit of personal development as it pertains to self-health

The book proposal will be pitched to traditional publishers within the American Restoration Movement, and then to various non-denominationally affiliated publishing companies. If those attempts are not met with interest, I will turn towards self-publishing methods and promote the book through pastor networks, and via social media. I intend to work with a local illustrator to provide cartoons at each chapter that work through the main character's experience of applying care.

SECTION 5: BOOK PROPOSAL

Query Letter

Agency Address

Greetings:

I am writing to ask you to consider publishing *Sad Pastor: An Imaginative Story of Healing for Clergy*. *Sad Pastor* is a fictional book written to help pastors look at their lives and ministry through the lens of hope. This book humorously battles the complexities of being a pastor in North America today, providing many practical solutions to everyday problems. The book is about 30,000 words. Included is a cover letter, book proposal, as well as the first four chapters of the book. I'm looking forward to hearing back from you regarding your interest in *Said Pastor: An Imaginative Story of Healing for Clergy*.

Sincerely,

Brandon J. Morrow

Cover Letter

(Date)
Brandon J. Morrow
706 Jackson Ave
Spirit Lake, IA 51360
(620) 960-3122
brandon.morrow01@gmail.com

Greetings!

My name is Brandon J. Morrow and I'm a pastor of a large, missional, Reformed church in Northwest Iowa. I am one of the youngest Doctor of Ministry graduates from an evangelical seminary, studying under Dr. Leonard Sweet, and was a contributor in a compilation effort dedicated towards lectionary reading and preaching, called, "The Story Lectionary." I believe my ministry, educational, and writing experiences to be of value to the local church, and to pastors everywhere. I'm currently writing a fiction book called *Sad Pastor: An Imaginative Story of Healing for Clergy*.

Sad Pastor chronicles the ministry frustrations of Bill, an overweight, underpaid, chronically anxious clergyman who is on the fence about social drinking, the holiness of HBO, and is desperately trying to get the deacon board to include family dental for staff benefit's in next year's budget. He's married, cynical, and can't quite figure out why other pastor's get cool TV ministries and drive big, fancy cars. He's ready to forsake the station wagon and wooden pulpit for a life of fame, and happiness, if only he could just figure it out. This book will provide real solutions for real ministry problems that will hopefully result in greater ministry effectiveness and tenure.

I'm looking forward to working with you, and together, we can take others down the path of Bill's life, and into a ministry of fruitfulness. Thank you for taking the time to consider my proposal. I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Sincerely,

Brandon J. Morrow

Book Proposal

Title: *Sad Pastor: An Imaginative Story of Healing for Clergy*

Author: Brandon J. Morrow
 706 Jackson Ave
 Spirit Lake, IA 51360
 (620) 960-3122
 brandon.morrow01@gmail.com
 www.bybrandonmorrow.org
 Twitter: @PreacherMorrow

Hook: Bill's job as a pastor is always changing. He goes through a unique set of pressures: his wife thinks he works too much; he's either home or he's not, there's no predicting what it'll be week to week; he's got aging parents who live hours away; and he's always booked with counseling appointments even though he feels awful at counseling and ill-equipped. In addition to all of that, Bill doubts his preaching abilities, wonders whether social drinking or watching HBO is holy, finds it difficult to maintain a healthy workout schedule, and wishes the church board would approve his salary increase so the kids could get into braces.

Purpose:

- Accurately name ministry problems
- Provide real solutions to real ministry problems
- Create a culture of pastoral health that results in longer pastorates

Promotion and Marketing:

- Website (bybrandonmorrow.org)
- Independent Christian Church Facebook Group (2500+ Members)
- Reformed Church in America Clergy Network (500+ Members)
- Twitter (400+ Followers_
- Conferences

Competition:

- *Reset*, David Murray, Crossway Publishing, 2017. This book talks about what it is to live under grace and battle burnout in ministry.
- *Dangerous Calling*, Paul David Tripp, Crossway Publishing, 2012. This book is a diagnostic tool in finding, and helping cure, spiritual un-health in ministry.

- *Leading on Empty*, Wayne Cordeiro, Bethany House Publishers, 2010. This book is about recovery from burnout and establishing values of health.

Uniqueness: *Sad Pastor* is unique in the way that it presents healthy ministry: through story. Most books available use application heavy stories of personal experience, but *Sad Pastor* seeks to bring the reader alive to the world of implication, putting them in the place of the main character, and allowing them to cope with his reality given the magnitude of self-care and self-health. The uniqueness lies in the fact that there isn't a book like it on the market. This book offers solutions given by secondary characters where the main character has the responsibility of trying to work it all out in the context of his life and ministry.

Endorsements:

I have had contact with, or have personal connection with, the following about a potential endorsement, or could inquire of them about a potential endorsement:

- Leonard Sweet
- Robert Dykstra
- Gordon MacDonald
- David McDonald
- Joe Skillen
- Mike Cope
- Jeff Walling
- Steve Carter

Intended Readers:

Primary Audience

- Pastors
- Seminary Students

Secondary Audience

- Lay Leaders
- Christian Living

Manuscript: The manuscript is one-third complete (20,000 words), and a full manuscript could be completed within three months upon request.

Author Bio: Brandon J. Morrow is the Pastor of Preaching, Vision, & Leadership Development at Good News Community Church, a missional, Reformed congregation in Okoboji, Iowa. He's a graduate of Sterling College, Rawlings School of Divinity, has

completed graduate studies with Lincoln Christian University, and has a Doctor of Ministry from Portland Seminary under the direction of Dr. Leonard Sweet. He enjoys reading a good book, long-sleeve shirts, and is currently perfecting the fine art of conversation, and beard growing. Brandon is a contributor to the *Story Lectionary*, a resource for lectionary reading and preaching, and blogs regularly at www.bybrandonmorrow.org, where he seeks to equip pastors for healthier ministry, an important subject to Brandon after recognizing his own need for healthier ministry and life. He's been the pastor of large and small churches, and has spoken to various group sizes in the Midwest, American South, and the Pacific Northwest. You can find Brandon online through his blog, or through Twitter (@brandonjmorrow).

Publishing Credits: *Story Lectionary*, George Fox University, 2017.
8 Best Practices for Pastoral Financial Health, Christian Standard Magazine, 2017.

Future Projects: I am currently working to develop resources for large missional churches in the areas of missional implementation, transition, and leadership.

SECTION 6: POSTSCRIPT

My initial interest in researching pastoral health and personal development stems from my personality: I have a naturally inquisitive desire on just about everything. Following a season of depression in ministry, where I was looking to do anything other than ministry, I was plagued by the question of why. I'm thankful to have many friends and confidante's in ministry who given me a picture of what lively, joyful, and healthy ministry can look like. Those who exude joy in ministry, I've found, also exhibit it in their personal lives. They take seriously their levels of joy, the care of their families, and look for the exciting things that the Lord would have for them. I desired that, and it ultimately lead me to do work with Dr. Leonard Sweet and Dr. David McDonald. Both of which, in my opinion, provide a window into the possibilities for the fullness of life and ministry.

Even though my interest was in finding out how we get to be healthier pastors and people, it was Dr. David McDonald who would coach that out of me. I was under the impression that it had something to do with the life of the pastor that affected their sermon preparation. Through some loving coaching, and a painful first semester of research and reading, I realized that Dr. McDonald was correct and decided to stir my research to where I am now. I decided early on to use my time and research to develop a Track 02 Dissertation and Artifact so that it could be used as a resource to help other pastors in similar situations.

If given the opportunity to do it over, I would take what I had learned and use it over a longer period of time, say, several years, and knead it into a church-wide discipleship program, that in the natural leadership development of the church, we're

focusing on health for a lifetime for everyone who is being equipped by the church. I'm looking forward to the opportunity of implementing this work into the everyday discipleship strategy of the local church.

APPENDIX – BOOK SAMPLE

Sad Pastor: An Imaginative Story of Healing for Clergy

By Brandon J. Morrow

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Chapter 12: Clergy Epitaph

Closing: Encouragement for Weary Ministers

About This Book

This book is one of those weird collections of everything that goes on in the human mind, even the things we aren't proud discussing with others. It's like if the show *Seinfeld*, and the movie, *The Lake House*, had a baby. Part reality. Part cynical jest. Part comedy. Part alternate universe. All of those things have to come into existence if pastors hope to make it in ministry. We have to envision what is possible, what could never happen, learn how to laugh at ourselves, and deal with the painful realities we're called into. This is why I wrote *Sad Pastor*, it's a hopeful piece that exists in attempts of never having to be sad in ministry again, a compendium of helpful tips, tricks, and how-to's for pastoral survival.

Within these pages you'll experience the life of Bill, the main character, who takes us on a journey through his life and ministry experiences, highlighting the different people he meets, or resources he finds to help him develop a healthier life and ministry. Each chapter was designed with the pastor in mind, highlighting real issues, and practical applications for overcoming them. Chapter 1: Dreams of Grandeur introduces us into the call of Bill's life of ministry and how we struggle with expectation vs. reality. Chapter 2: Better Off Alone deals with the up's and down's of incorporating our family and ministry together. Chapter 3: Parsonage Committees talks about the difficult experiences of ministry, or what it means to deal with the old and dilapidated. Chapter 4: The Dreaded Potluck highlights a growing epidemic, "Paunchy Preacher Disorder," or overweight ministers, and how to survive meals-on-meals. Chapter 5: Dave Ramsey Doesn't Go Here lists real financial pressures in ministry, and what to do if you weren't trained in money.

Chapter 6: Unsanctified Television & Social Drinking gives us reason to become the fullest version of ourselves, and how not to give a rip what anyone else thinks, and how to be holy at the same time. Chapter 7: Buy My Book and Received the Gift of Tongues will confront the reader with the evils of comparison, like why you'll never be Joel Osteen, and why that's okay. Chapter 8: Chaplaincy, Counseling, And Other Things You're Unqualified to Do deals with the things we don't want to do, like to do, or have no business doing in ministry. Chapter 9: Bored Meetings gives us a powerful picture of what it takes to conquer your least favorite meetings. Chapter 10: 24/8: Another Day to Pastor Again picks at the problem of busy schedules and what we have to do to make time for rest and leisure. Chapter 11: Resignation Letter confronts us with the reality of sometimes a ministry isn't the best fit for anyone, and how to leave respectfully. Chapter 12: Clergy Epitaph gives the reader a hopeful picture for what needs to be accomplished before a preacher's death, literally or figuratively. The Closing chapter ends with some encouragements for weary pastors everywhere.

Chapter 1: Dreams of Grandeur

Tall. Dark. Handsome. Your standard-issue televangelist look, Bill was all the rage at his evangelical seminary. He was popular, served on the weekends at the largest youth ministry in town, and had the prime possession every other guy on campus wanted: the youngest daughter of First Baptist Downtown. He was picked to be the preacher of the famous, *Last Chapel*, the final chapel before graduation, where the best preaching student was picked to deliver a custom message, one where other students delivered

testimony, performed special music, and many prayers of blessing were shared over friends, news of relocation was spread around with all the young families with children, and heartfelt thanks were given to the faculty favorites. The standing ovation, and the altar response, many thought, would be the defining moment for Bill and his ministry: he was destined for something big.

Something had drastically changed. That wasn't the reality that he knew now. The toned frame of a 24-year-old had turned in its form-fitting turtlenecks for XXL, loosely tucked in, Goodwill hand-me-down's. The soft, wavy, suave look of a world-renowned televangelist had long since been gone, with the hair on top of his head jumping from the balcony to the mezzanine of his lower back. 100 people in average attendance? That was barely enough of a critical mass to meet his salary, pay Nancy to answer the phones, and invest in new carpet in the nursery, the nursery for 3 children. The standing ovations turned into sharp criticisms:

“You need to land the plane before noon, Preacher.”

“I heard a guy on the radio use that Greek word in a totally different way. Are you sure you learned Greek in seminary?”

Seminary? What's that?

Bill had remembered the day when he had never heard of a seminary school before. *What was it? That feels like eons ago. What did they do there at the seminary school? What would I wear? Oh, Lord. What did I wear? How much did it cost? Could I be Baptist or Episcopalian? Too. Many. Options.* Whatever it was, wherever it was going to be, and how much ever it cost, Bill had believed he had a call from God to serve the local church. A call to pastor the masses, to lead so many people to Jesus, to see the sick

healed, the dead raised, and maybe, if the Lord was gracious enough, he might get a slot on TBN. *Am I doing something wrong? Lots of sick people, people near death, and a family in our church with the last name Mass. This isn't what I wanted.* Bill was frustrated because like those expectation vs. reality memes on the internet, his reality wasn't panning out to what he expected.

Bill knew well enough that the Lord doesn't guarantee health, wealth, or happiness, and that if the Lord was still gracious enough, his suffering might be miniscule at best, but Bill was tired of the grind, the day-to-day back-and-forth of the clergy monotony. Bill was sad. He wanted to see marriages restored, be referred to as Reverend in the grocery store, get preferential parking at the church, and for people to call his wife the "first lady." Sharon, Bill's wife, was a nice lady. Godly. Disciplined. Fierce at times, but Bill knew that she wasn't fully satisfied either. When they met they had dreamed of mission work in Latvia, translating languages for unreached people groups, and giving their lives over to the poor. What did they have to offer now? Baseball games. Parent-teacher conferences. Segregated, male and female, Bible studies. They rarely prayed together, didn't share many of the same theological convictions, and put on their happy faces when they pulled into the church parking lot. *Lord, I need a break... Can you take me back in time and I'll do it right his time?*

The Lord didn't answer Bill, and to be honest, He hadn't for quite some time. Bill was wallowing. Dreaming. Scheming. Feasting on the spiritual prizes of other churches and pastors. Longing for his old body, his soft hair, and passion for sports. Bill had become your stereotypical Sunday morning recliner quarterback, celebrating spiritual MVP's in Jesus's name. That's what he wanted, but that's not what he did when he got

home on Sunday afternoon. He sat in his chair, and pretended like everything went exactly as he had planned.

“Dad! Dad! Come here! Come here! OH. MY. GOODNESS. MOM! DAD!”

That was Rachel, Bill’s 17-year-old whiz kid. She was smart, ambitious, brace-faced, and the spitting image of Sharon at 17. After a long week of school, activities, church, and every other obligatory white, suburbia venture, the kids were finally resting into their weekend, and doing last minute homework. Rachel hadn’t even seen the wax-crested college letter with her name all over it. Judging by her reaction, Bill knew what this meant: more money to be spent. He flipped down the wooden lever of the chair and briskly walked, socks sliding on the linoleum, into the kitchen.

“I GOT IN!” Her shrill cry was almost unbearable, like a ringwraith scream from *Lord of the Rings*.

“Which one?” Sharon tried to play dumb, but she knew which one.

“I’m a Yellow Jacket, baby,” Rachel said as she punched her 15-year-old brother, Seth, in the chest while celebrating. *Why do you always beat up on Seth? You’re just going to college, not winning the lottery.*

“Hey now,” Bill tried to be a disciplinarian but didn’t want to spoil the moment. Sharon smiled at the youthfulness of her growing kids.

“That’s so great, honey. Your mom and I are really looking forward to see you blos-,” the words couldn’t even escape Bill’s mouth as he saw a brief glimpse of their tuition costs, laying sheepishly in the welcome packet. *Dear-Lord-Baby-Jesus, is that a crisp \$51,000.00 bill I’m looking at? If I drank, I’d do it right now!* Bill appeared to get

lost in time and space and pictured that he would forever be indebted to this private university.

“Thank you, Daddy!” Rachel jumped on her father and squeezed. Bill secretly hoped this was an assassination attempt, but no luck. She let go.

Sharon went back to cleaning. Seth went back to doing whatever Seth does, and Bill scruffed their dog, Murphy, a wiry mutt, on the top of the head and went to lay back down in the recliner. *Excuse me whilst I melt away and become one with the chair.* This was not what he had planned. Not. At. All.

You can really only lay in a recliner for so long. After a while your body begins to assume the shape of a Pringle, all bent out of shape. Bill didn’t have any problem with unusual shapes, but the unusual shape of his body wasn’t the type for forming into Pringle-shapes. *Welp, 7:30PM. No meetings. Nothing good on TV. I guess I’ll “look” productive.*

“Shar,” as he affectionately, and lazily called his wife, “going to the study to get a jump on this week’s message! I’ll be in the garage!”

Bill slumped his way out of the living room, down the hall, and through the garage door. In the far left-hand corner stood a desk, a computer screen, and on the floor, a space heater that threatened to catch fire at any moment. He turned the dial of the heater and pressed the power button to the computer. There was something comforting about the startup sound his computer made, it’s like he knew what to expect, what was coming next, and he knew every mouse maneuver and keystroke to get exactly where he needed to be: YouTube. Everyone knew this was a good excuse to kill time, but Bill was adamant about calling it, “cultural research.” *It’s so freaking cold in here. I wish I had an*

office. And a fireplace. I wish I was disciplined enough to sit, one leg over the other, with a Greek text in my hand, excited for what next week brings. There was a brief moment when Bill dreamed of a soft, leather chair, with an Irish Wolfhound laying at his feet while he smoked a pipe and read the latest, ground breaking, scholarly work. Even better, Bill pictured it in front of a log-fed fireplace.

After about an hour and a half of watching the latest viral videos, projecting his frustrations with deacons onto kids fighting one another in the streets, and braving the latest video message by that buff pastor somewhere in the Carolina's, Bill was saddened and a little fed up. *Bill, you're lazy. Your message sucked. Offering sucked. Your kids aren't interested in you. You're poor, you could make more money in other places. Might want to find a job at the grocery store, soon.* He did what he normally did in times of internal panic, he hopped up and grabbed his Bible out of his backpack. *Time to start studying.* He launched open his favorite Bible software, trying to get excited again about whatever it was that he was preaching on. Bill perused the digital stacks for everything referencing the "word made flesh," he was mentally determined to give the most awakening, eye-opening, exposition of the incarnation anyone had ever done before. Like most things Bill did, it wasn't done with much effort and it didn't last long. Bill, in being a busy dad with split obligations, had become a professional quitter in his spare time.

Why bother, though? Bill didn't actually know Greek, despite his wanna-be intellectual aspirations of devouring the Greek text, and he was a rough shod preacher at best, despite his glory days. *You blossomed early, Bill.* He just merely cheated his way through that class, scathed by in Hebrew, and was slothful in almost every single one of his Master of Divinity courses. *Maybe if we had the money, I could take some extra*

courses on the side. I feel like my church would thrive if I did that. There was no extra money, and there was no logical explanation as to why the church would thrive if he could read Greek or Hebrew better. Bill felt at his wit's end. Back to the internet he went, but this time not to videos, but to the wisdom of the search engine. *He typed: "Christian self-help for pastors".* He knew that it might be worth a shot, after all, couldn't you find anything on the internet? *Oh boy, this felt stupid. What am I even doing?* Bill laughed a little out loud even though no one was around to witness his embarrassment.

Sharon came in to remind him what time it was, "It's 11:30. I'm going to bed."
11:30?! How long have I been in here? 4 hours? Did the kids already go to bed? How much YouTube did I even watch? Did I fall asleep and not know it?

"Okay, honey! I'll be in, in a little bit." He barely got the words out as Sharon shut the garage door. *Bill, why can't you be content with anything that you have? You get compliments every week on your messages. There's a couple of new families coming to the church. Rachel got into college. And if you hurry, you can try and talk Sharon into some intimacy.* Bill couldn't remember the last time the marriage bed was utilized outside of pity. *Oh to be youthful, again. Snap out of it, Bill! You love your life, and your wife. You love your church. You just need to come to terms with this slow season of ministry.* Bill looked to the computer screen and saw the first major search headings on "Christian self-help," and there they were, all laid out in beautiful fashion, every single problem he was facing:

- **Finding joy in your work**

That's great, I'm not digging my job at all. Bill wasn't really hoping for articles about his own job, he was hoping that maybe a job site would have come up.

- **How to make your family a thing of first priority**

I'm dying for more one-on-one time with my kids.

- **Be the best version of yourself**

This sounds a little wonky, but I do need to find my strengths.

- **Loving your spouse as Jesus loved the church**

Aha! The ticket for Sharon!

His eyelids were starting to get heavy, but this was like drinking 72 cups of caffeine-infused ambition. He had lied, he wasn't going to bed anytime soon, this was rocket fuel to his self-help jet engine. Bill believed there was hope, even if it was for a brief second, as a result of some late-night, hair-brained, last-ditch effort, he still had hope. He wasn't entirely confident he knew what to do, or that the internet could be even remotely helpful, but wanted to be the best husband, father, and pastor that he could be, and he was willing to try anything to see if it would work. After all, the Lord had successfully used people who were far worse than Bill.

Click. Bill read the title out loud again, "Finding joy in your work." *Oh no. This isn't what I thought it would be.* Bill was now the victim of the dreaded click-bait, he hadn't stumbled onto some sort of pop psychology network, it was even worse: tattoo brandishing, MMA shirt wearing, choke-slam baptism, misogynistic Neo-Calvinism. This was a website written by 20 year olds with egos and a "literal" Bible translation. *You're all ugly, and I bet your mother dresses you funny. Why won't it let me go back?* It appeared as if Bill was stuck on this page, either this was a trap of the devil, or the age of technology had let him down again with terribly slow internet speeds. He let out a small whine of frustration.

The article continued... “Finding joy in your work... how the gospel changes everything.” *Good Lord, another “gospel-centered” resource?!* The article read, “The gospel is our day-to-day reminder of what it means to serve the Lord.” There was a funny, almost fuzzy, conviction sort-of feeling that was coming about Bill. Had he really forgot what the gospel was all about? Yes, it’s the message of Jesus saving you, and it’s also about Jesus as King of your life. Had he really become so accustomed to this message that he was able to label what the gospel is without being changed by it? *Bill, you’re a loser, and you don’t love Jesus. Look at you, it’s obvious. The gospel? Come on!* Bill was intrigued by the article. *Bring it on, you rock-listenin’, ripped-jean lovin’, hippie millennials.*

The first thing the article suggested was to dwell again on the passages of scripture that are “gospel-centered,” and he knew all of these by heart. If there was one thing that Bill hadn’t grow lazy in, it was recalling all of those scriptures from Bible memorization as a kid. *1 Corinthians 15:3-4? Yup, Paul kills it again. Acts 2? Peter preaches the first sermon at Pentecost, tons of lives changed. Ephesians 2:4-5? Yeah, yeah. God has such a great love for us, it’s about His grace, but He was rich in... mercy?* Bill hadn’t heard, or preached a sermon, about mercy in a long time. What did it mean for God to show His mercy to Bill? It seems like it had been almost 20 years since Bill last thought about the mercy of God. These wanna-be theologians were onto something, Bill needed more gospel in his life. *Okay, what’s next?*

“Practice self-dialogue...” *This is dumb. I am not going to talk to myself out loud. Also, why did they jump there so quickly?* “The Greek word,” *There these kids are, all into their Greek...* “Katacheo, means to instruct with your mouth. The gospel can’t just

be preached to others, it must be preached to yourself.” *I wonder who wrote this? St.*

Upid? “Below is a helpful practice phrase for preaching the gospel to yourself:

I am a loved child of God, bought, undeservedly, at a great price through Christ. I do not define myself by what the world says, by what the flesh says, but by what Christ did, said, and how He calls us to live in victory within His Kingdom. I am not who I used to be, and in Jesus I am not yet who He will make me into. I surrender to the ways of the Spirit, not the urges of the flesh.”

Why is that so long? Does a prayer, or sermon to yourself, need to be so long? Bill was desperate, and decided, in the comfort of his own garage, nearing midnight, to give it a go. *Bill, you are loved, a true child of God, who received a gift that you could never repay. Jesus loves you, just the way you are. Every imperfection accepted, taken by Christ on the cross, is a sign of God’s mercy...* Bill could hardly get through this self-dialogue exercise without tearing up. He was also hot and almost sweaty; his Sunday morning anxiety had set in from his monologue of some mumbo-jumbo on the internet. There it was again: God’s mercy. Had he really forgotten what it meant to be given the pardon of all pardons, narrowly escaping a death and doom he really deserved? Bill felt like that went surprisingly well, despite breaking the rules and not practicing it out loud, just in his head. *Spiky-haired neo-Calvinists: 1. Bill: 0.* Secretly, Bill knew that preaching it out loud to himself would have far greater results. This was progress, something which Bill hadn’t seen for a long, long time. Bill bookmarked the other three articles, shut down the computer, turned off the heater, and snuck back into the house. That night, as Bill lay in bed until the wee hours of the morning, he couldn’t get something out of his mind: *God, you showed your mercy to me?* Bill probably didn’t lay there as long as he thought he did, but something felt different. Even though life sucked at times and often consumed most of his mental capacity, Bill didn’t go to sleep thinking about the checking account,

about the youthful version of Sharon, or about whether or not Seth was maturing into a man... No, Bill's mind was on the things of God, and it felt right, for the first time, in a long time. Life wasn't at all what he wanted it to be, but there was a possibility of something better.

Chapter 2: Better Off Alone

Bill hadn't even rolled out of bed before the nagging started.

"Please get out of bed. I'm over here single momming it!" *Doesn't she know how hard I work? I deserve this. I make more money, I lead others towa--*. Bill caught himself creating an argument with Sharon, first thing in the morning. She was right and he knew it. He had let himself fall into a lazy slump, morning after morning. He was staying up until all hours of the night, and sleeping late until the morning, often too busy being in the shower to see the kids off to school. He knew he didn't sleep well, his body had accumulated all of the calories he had managed to escape in his youth, like loan sharks after money, and they were adding themselves to his already laughable figure. Because of this, Bill had probably developed some form of mild sleep apnea, his snoring often an item of contention with Sharon, or anyone who had ever slept in the same room with Bill, or even in a 10-mile radius. He had always blamed it on allergies, and had a new excuse for every kind of pollen or dust out there, using Murphy, the family dog as the reason for Sharon's sleep deprivation. *Bill. Just get out of bed.* That five-minute mental rabbit trail had turned into half an hour many times before. Bill got out of bed and flumped his way through the bedroom towards their small master bathroom. *Whoa! You look like hell! Did*

you get punched in the eye or are those just bags under there? You look like you are half-man, half-raccoon. It wasn't much to look at, and Bill had tried to tell himself that he had come to terms with that. He stared at himself in the mirror, tilted his face upward, turned his head a little, attempting to catch a better side if there was one. He raised his shoulders and flexed his shoulder muscles in hopes of reminding himself of better days. His flexing had caused a lower back spasm, and he gasped for breath and flopped around for a second until the pain subsided. *Who could love you? You look like a sweaty mobster on a bad television sitcom, and you've got a bad back. Bill, you're an old man.* Bill's mind wandered to his experience the night before, the tearful moment where he contemplated God's mercy. *Bill, preach the gospel to yourself.* Bill was still a little uneasy about this whole self-dialogue process, but it did something to him that he hadn't felt in a while.

"Bill, you are loved, a true child of God, who received a gift that you could never repay. Jesus loves you, just the way you are. Every imperfection accepted, taken by Christ on the cross, is a sign of God's mercy..." There was that mercy part again, coming to plague him in the early morning hours. He was right too, especially about the talking out loud part. It was worse. Way worse.

"Honey, who are you talking to?" It was Sharon, she must have heard his heartfelt gospel preaching and had become endeared to the message of Jesus.

"No one. Why?" He hollered back. "What did you hear?"

"Nothing. It sounded like you were having a stroke! Just checking!"

He decided to distract himself by brushing his teeth. *You know what would be a good idea, Bill? If you told Sharon how loved she was.* Bill had another experience that was unfamiliar. Had he just received a nudge from the Holy Spirit? Or was this just his

morning halitosis forming a committee to take control of his body and mind? He decided he'd think on it. It would require lots of contemplation. It must have been years and years since he had heard from the Lord, and if it had happened in the recent past, he couldn't recall what it was or what it was about. It was nothing like his campfire experience with testimonies, acoustic guitars, and a sexual purity ceremony – the moment when he had come to Jesus and first heard his call into ministry. *Uh oh, you're crunched on time, man! Five-minute shower starting now!*

Bill went through his typical rushed morning routine and got into his day-off, Monday morning attire: grey sweat pants, and a white long-sleeve University of Southern California alumni t-shirt, one that he had no recollection of its origins. He slid his feet into his house shoes and headed downstairs. *What's that I smell? The nectar of the gods!* Sharon had probably been up for the last 2 or 3 hours, brewing coffee, getting the day ready, praying, reading her Bible, and had been exercising every Monday morning for the last nine years. The round kitchen table, a big red candle in the center, and stacked four or five high was junk mail and various bills was the first thing Bill saw, only to be reminded of the future dread he faced with Rachel's tuition. Sharon was sitting at the bar drinking coffee and thumbing through a magazine and was pretending to be listening to their son, Seth, who was leaning up against the counter slurping cereal from a soup spoon.

"Seth, you need to hurry up and get ready for school," Sharon hadn't even missed a beat, didn't even have to look up from her reading material.

"School is balls." *Balls? What a dumb thing to say.*

"Language! Also, I don't think your school has anything to do with male anatomy," Bill said. No one had even noticed Bill enter the room and his early morning

arrival seemed somewhat shocking to those who were downstairs. “Rachel! Get down here! Where’s Rachel?”

“Dad, it’s Monday! Wake up!” Bill had forgotten that every Monday, Rachel would leave the house to be at school by 6:00AM for Honor Choir practice. It appeared that he was very out of touch with this family and their schedules.

“Honey, since you’re up, could you take Seth to school?”

“You know... If I had a car, I could just drive myself. Hint. Hint.” Seth winked at his dad and slurped a couple of more times.

“Oh look, Shar. We have ourselves quite the spokesman. I’ll tell you what, Seth... You get a job and I’ll let you buy the car.”

“That’s a terrible deal.” Seth choked a little on his milk, making a deathly noise. “What’s in it for me?” Sharon just laughed at Seth’s humor. He hadn’t heard Sharon laugh like that in what felt like months.

“Hurry up and get ready so we can leave!” Bill’s mind trailed as he looked around for the keys, “I need to stop by the store. Do I need to pick up anything else?”

Seth and Bill hopped in the car and attempted to make the best use of their time together. Bill attempted to talk about music but didn’t know who *Machine Gun Kelly* was, and probably wouldn’t have been interested in a vile-sounding white rapper. He attempted to talk school and quickly found out that Seth’s math class was way above his pay grade. He attempted to talk about some form of spirituality, only to find out that Seth had a desire to go to a bigger youth group in the area. *I bet they preach better, too.* Bill had felt like his son had more interest in his phone than he did in spending time with his dad. *That outrageously priced phone bill. I don’t know that I love anything enough to let*

it soak up hundreds of dollars in fees. He remembered what a 10-year-old Seth was like. Vibrant. Hilarious. Daring. Had such a passion for the Lord and others. *Does this have anything to do with me, or is he just a teenager? I miss my boy.* Bill tried not to tear up at his waning relationship when he dropped Seth off at school. They shared a cool fist bump and Seth walked towards the building.

The trip from the school to the grocery store was an eternity long, or at least it felt that way. Bill turned on the radio.

“Your mercy Lord, reaches from the heavens...” *Mercy?! Again?! I don’t know how much more of this gospel self-dialogue I can stand. I could use more of that mercy in the form of more time with Seth. And Rachel. And Sharon. And \$100,000.00.*

Bill was reminded of the nudge he felt from the Lord to share with Sharon this same mercy. As soon as he pulled into the parking lot of the grocery store he began to text his wife.

“Hey, I just wanted to let you know that you’re so loved by God, and so loved by me. I’m thankful for what the Lord is doing in you and through you.” *Don’t press send.* *This is the sappiest thing since maple trees. This sounds like a bad, Christian, boy band.* Bill waited for a response back. It appeared that she had read it. *Oh well... I’ll go in the store.*

Blip. Sharon texted back. Bill stood in the entryway of the grocery store, he was always in the way.

“I hope that text was meant for me. I really needed to hear that today. Luv u. – walking in step with the Spirit.” *She really needed to hear it, too? Don’t joke around with my faith here, lady. We all know you’ve been fabulously favored, I’m the one dying over*

here. And why on God's green earth do you have that cheesy, little tag line? "Walk in step with the Spirit?" What does that even mean? Bill didn't mean to be, but he was irritated by Sharon's reply.

"See you soon." Bill slipped the phone back into his pocket and perused the many aisles of the store, evading the pharmacy that was tucked away at the very back of the store. *Hyper-tension medication? You are old.* Bill, still kind of thinking about Seth, thought for a second what his teenage son would say. *Old as balls. Why did I think that? Who are you? Seth?* As Bill was on his way to the pharmacy counter he noticed a spry thirty-something in running shoes, silver leggings, and darker grey shorts standing near the large canisters of protein powder.

"Trying to pack on some muscle eh, Ted?"

"Pastor Bill! Scared me for a second."

"I often feel the same way. What are you up to?" Bill knew exactly what he was doing. Ted was a newer congregant. He had an underwear model physique, was married to a supermodel stunt double, and had children who were destined to be Olympic gold medalists. Ted had struck gold in a software start up and had used his independently acquired wealth as an opportunity to practice a passion: physical training. Ted was one of those guys that immediately disgusted you because of how perfect he seemed.

"Picking up some more protein powder for the week," he had even flexed a little bit and growled, "trying to get swole!" *Swole? Hope it's not contagious.* Ted had a small box in his hands with a cartoon character getting pelted in the face with what appeared to be a whip cream pie.

"What's that you got in your hands?"

“Oh! Every Monday we do game night with the kids. This is a little game where you try not to get a pie in the face. Our boys are going to love it!”

“Yeah, that does sound like a lot of fun.” Bill couldn’t imagine whip cream in your eye being fun. “Why do you do game nights every week?”

“Good question! Ya know, the kids are so busy. Sports, music, everything else. We just got tired of not ever having any time. We cancel all of our activities on Monday night and order some pizza for the kids while we snack on something good, and just kind of hang out for a while and play some games. It’s been a nice breather.” *Doh. Bill, you dunce. Why didn’t you think of that? Ha. An evening free? You’re a real comedian.* “You know what? We’ve been meaning to have you guys over for dinner. Is there a time when you guys are free? We’d love to get to know you better.” *This is a trap. I’ve heard this line before.* Bill had imagined every other invitation to meet he’d ever received. It was always a platform for their own agenda, something they wanted in the church.

“That’s so generous of you. I’m sure we could find an open slot. When were you thinking?”

“Let me double check with my wife and I’ll shoot you a message. I got to get going and get after it. I’ll be in touch, Pastor Bill.”

“Looking forward to it, Ted.”

Bill looked around, hoping the pie game would be nearby. *Maybe I’ll just pick this up and we’ll give it a shot during dinner tonight.* There it was across the aisle on an end cap. \$19.99? *Just to have fun? I don’t think so.* Bill picked up his hypertension medication and shook the little bag, letting the pills rattle inside the bottle. He was certain

that \$20 games were the reason for high blood pressure in the first place. Bill headed back home so that he could do some more work in the frigid garage.

He must have forgot to close something on the computer, as Bill sat down in the garage to do some “resting,” a practice that he had never actually practiced because he wasn’t quite sure what it meant, he noticed that the computer hadn’t actually turned off. A small dialogue box had said that a program was running in the background. His browser window was still open. He decided to go back and double check last night’s search extravaganza. *Vuep. Vuum. Conquer the rebel bookmarks for the sake of the Republic.* Bill pretended his cursor was a Jedi lightsaber and he was accomplishing tasks, and saving the world, through the skillful clicking. At least in Bill’s imagination, productivity could exist.

“How to make your family a thing of first priority,” that was the title of the article he had saved. *Would you look there? Duped, again!* Bill didn’t feel as if he was having much luck with these internet searches as it appeared that he had stumbled onto the project of a homeschooling, fundamentalist cult, where everyone wore denim skirts and spoke in Old English. *Back, back, back. Hurry! What is wrong with this stupid mouse?* Bill shook the mouse violently, trying to rid himself of the filth of this cultish weirdness. *Really? Really, internet? You’re not going to go back? Russian hackers, I’m sure.* The article continued, “The family should be the center of the Christian life. In the garden...” *I’m going to puke.* “Adam and Eve were given the direct response from God to go forth and multiply, and part of their divine command was to work and keep all that God had given. The first Adam gave us an example of what it means to create family values. Below is a list of our family values,” *I hope my heater catches on fire and takes me and*

this computer with it. “Our values are: We eat dinner every night together and give thanks to what the Lord has done. We pray together as a family every morning and give our days unto the Lord. Weekly, we gather together to enjoy stories by the fireplace and to play our homemade instruments.” *This sounds like Little House on the Prairie, cult edition. Homemade instruments? More like dueling banjos and The Hills Have Eyes.* Bill had pictured himself with a neatly trimmed neck beard playing a banjo made from frying pan.

Blip. That was the sound of an e-mail. This was just the click distraction that Bill needed, time to check e-mails. By the looks of it, Ted must have not been very busy as he had already e-mailed.

Pastor B! We’re really looking forward to having your family over for dinner. It looks like the schedule is pretty full. The wife and I were thinking, why don’t you all just join us for dessert and games tonight? That is, if it works with your schedule for tonight. I’m sure you’re busy. If you can, don’t worry about bringing any food, just bring yourself, and we’ll all play during dessert. Don’t worry about the game, we can learn along the way. Also, you might have known that I have a little more freedom with work and I’m looking to establish a client portfolio for future clients for personal training. I would love to train you for free. I think it’d be a great chance for us to get to know each other. Either way, let me know. Thanks. T.

Personal training? What kind of insult is that? I’m a prime physical specimen, the Adonis Effect in full form, a perfect body double for Brad Pitt. Bill, not one to hear always from the Lord, had a sneaking suspicion that this was another instance in which the Holy Spirit would gain more points on him. *I just saw him earlier, read a weird article about quality family time, and now an e-mail about awkward family time with someone I don’t know?*

This looked to be another instance in which the Lord was miraculously at work. Bill thought for a moment. *Is this what it looks like to walk in step with the Spirit? To be led? Whatever it is, I don’t like it.* The rest of Bill’s day didn’t seem too abnormal. He watched a short documentary on the *Battle of Stalingrad*, ate leftover chicken salad sandwiches

with Sharon, attempted to subdue the demons of Excel sheet finances, and reminded Reggie, one of the deacons at the church, that the extra-large check from Sunday's offering was an endowment for scholarships for students who would be graduating soon and heading off to college, even though the church didn't have but five teens in the youth group, two of those being his kids. Bill had opted for work rather than rest.

Six o'clock rolled around pretty quickly, and he still hadn't had any chance for rest. Seth had gotten a ride back home from school with a friend. Rachel, through an act of God, didn't have any activities planned. And Bill had zero requests for meetings, which appeared suspicious at first but was very liberating to say the least. Tonight, tacos were on the menu, which means it would be a great opportunity to try out some of his newly acquired cult propaganda: dinner time thankfulness.

As dinner time rolled arrived, and there were hands flying across the table for beans, tortillas, chicken, beef, and all of the other great toppings, Bill assumed it would be a good time to transition from the normal, "how was your day," or, "how'd that test go," type of conversations. Bill wasn't known for his immaculate planning, so he figured he would spring it on them. Hopefully they'd take it well. They didn't.

"This is fun, isn't it?" Everyone looked at Bill like he was talking to an invisible person.

"It's dinner. It's good, but I don't know what you mean by fun," Seth said through a mouthful of taco. It appeared as if Adult Seth was in full tilt, exercising every degree of snarkiness one could muster.

"Well, I've been thinking..."

“Hold on, everyone! Dad’s been thinking!” Seth’s attempt at humor got everyone at the table laughing. Rachel snorted in response, which caused the laughter to continue. Bill was the only one not laughing.

“Seth,” Bill, trying his best to be corrective in the moment, “What if we all went around the table and said something we were thankful for?” An uncomfortable silence followed. And then it continued. *Why couldn’t they think of anything? Did I say something wrong? Am I wearing pants? Why else would they be looking at me like this? Say anything! Say you’re thankful for tacos.*

“Are you serious? Not one person can think of something they’re thankful for? Sharon?” She just shrugged. Bill could feel his face starting to get red from anger and embarrassment. “Sharon, how about that text I sent to you today?” His voice started to rise, and the dog left the room, almost as if it could sense what was about to happen. “Rachel, how about the fact that you get to go to college, which someone else will pay for. Are you not thankful for the college admission?” His tone turned condescending, and he stood up, looming his 6’4” frame over the table. Bill was getting ready to turn on his dad voice.

“Bill, that’s enough.” Sharon did her best to control what rarely came out, but what seemed to be happening with much more frequency.

“Sharon,” Bill did the terrifying, don’t-you-dare-interrupt-me glance that he was known for, “I didn’t hear you say you were thankful for something. Oh, by the way, we’re going to Ted’s house from church for dessert tonight. Be ready at 8!” Bill took his plate, dropped it into the sink, and whether or not it broke he didn’t care, he was furious.

He marched his way through the house and into the garage, slamming the door, leaving the whole house in an uncomfortable state.

What's wrong with me? What's wrong with them? Not one single person can think of anything to be thankful for. I shouldn't have blown up. I don't know why I keep doing that. I feel like a terrible dad. I can't believe I spoke to Sharon like that. Why did I say those things? I'm just like my father. I just wanted us to have a good, family time. Bill stewed in the garage until it was time to go. He walked into the house, slipped on his shoes, and the whole family paraded out the front door, into the car, and down the road without a single word. The whole way there, Bill couldn't help but think about the resentment he had built up about his family. He had wondered if the Apostle Paul was onto something. *I think Paul was right when he said it was better that we should be single.* Bill, for the next two or three miles, imagined a life without a family. *I bet I would have been a traveling evangelist, or a seminary professor, or a renowned speaker on Pauline Ethics, or maybe just a simpleton shepherding a rural church.* Whatever it was, Bill's imaginary life seemed more agreeable than any present reality. *I would get speaking requests, and get to pick and choose what major conference I wanted to be at. I would actually have the time to work out, and look like the person I want to be. I bet I would be debt free, have the opportunity to give more money to what I wanted to support. Or even better, I would be able to travel and serve in places all over the world, no strings attached. No obligations. Nothing impeding my schedule. Just me and the Lord.* Bill knew this type of thought was wrong, but it helped subside the pain. *Maybe I'd be romantically tied to a tall blonde and we'd own a French bulldog.* Bill's mind had begun

to wander about the imaginary woman who was not his wife. *Stop that, that's crossing the line.*

Bill's family knew the routine. Go in, smile, and act like you just won a million dollars, or had a prescription drug addiction. Ted's home was inviting. Modern. Expensive. A loft with a marble ledge that overlooked their living room, which looked out onto a local lake. It almost felt too perfect. They had arranged nine different types of cheesecake for dessert, all from a local restaurant that Bill had never eaten in, largely because of the cost. Rachel and Seth played with Ted and Sarah's younger children, Sharon listened to Sarah with motherly intentions, and Bill pretended to know something about software development as they all sat down on euro-futon inspired couches, unrealistic seating for normal human beings, eating cheesecake.

"Alright! Let's play a game!" Sarah, the supermodel look-alike, pulled the familiar pie game box from out of thin air, and in doing so she saved everyone's lack of conversation. "Has anyone played this game? It looks so fun!" Sarah gave out the instructions for the game and divided the families up into separate teams. Bill's family sat in an uncomfortably close proximity to each other, trying to pretend that they played games on a regular basis.

Ted looked Bill in the eye, smiled, and said joyfully, "Bill, you'll see what I meant earlier. It'll open everybody up." Ted was right. The pie game was the life of the party. It was an inroad to a wonderful moment. At one point in the night, Sharon gave Bill one of these deep-eyed, I'm-still-in-love-with-you looks, as they laughed about the pile of whip cream that was sitting between her eyes. Jokes were made, stories were told, and there were high fives and laughter shared by all. Bill saw Seth turn from an awkward

teenager with an attitude, into an intelligent and witty young man. He saw Rachel use her intellectual talents to outsmart everyone playing, clearly using God's gifts to her advantage. Sharon had been more affectionate publically than she had been in years, she rested her hand on Bill's thigh, leaned into him in laughter, and looked at him in whip cream inspired humiliation with affirming eyes. This is what Bill had neglected to do during dinner that night, he tried to have deep and meaningful conversation, based on an assumption of thankfulness, with kids he hadn't spent quality time with since they were in elementary school, and with a wife he hadn't befriended in years. This is what quality time looked like. Bill imagined that he was outside one of the windows looking in, hoping to somehow capture this and store it in his memory forever.

The ride home was delightful. Bill considered it to be one of their top five family experiences. They all laughed and recalled the previous experience. Bill understood this to be his redemption, his opportunity to have fixed his blow up earlier. *Bill, you're not your anger. God even gives you his mercy in this moment.* Bill pulled over the car.

"Dad, what are we doing?"

"What do you say we go for some ice cream? I think we've still got some time left to kill." Bill's idea was met with various "yeah's" from the backseat, and Sharon gave him one of those, "who are you, and what did you do with my husband," kind of looks. Ice cream was the cherry on top, he was able to sit across a table with Seth, with Sharon and Rachel at another table, and share small dreams, answer odd questions about science fiction inventions, and laughed through the occasional brain freeze. *Bill, you're winning right now. Lord, thank you for your grace. Thank you for a chance, second or third, it doesn't matter, at getting something right.* The drive home and the rest of the

evening was beyond peaceful, a type of aura that Bill couldn't recall. Bill also couldn't recall a more restful night since before they had kids. He wasn't sure if they could afford that little ice cream escapade, but it wasn't anything he was going to worry about in the moment.

Chapter 3: Parsonage Committees

You're a beloved son. A capable husband. A redeemed father. An empowered servant. This whole self-dialogue was getting better. Still, at 5:23 A.M., it didn't seem very practical, but practice made perfect. *What a day for a cliché.* Seven minutes until the alarm went off. *I hate that. Why can't you just sleep until the alarm?* It was Tuesday, Bill had a standing 6:00 A.M. breakfast with his church elders, and knew he could make it just in time for the first coffee pour if he got up by 5:30 A.M., or actually out of bed by 5:45, out of the shower by 5:50, and out of the door at 5:53 A.M. to get to the diner in time. No sense in going back to sleep, Bill got going early, and he liked it that way despite rarely ever waking up in time.

Bill set the coffee maker to 6:05 A.M., perfect timing for Sharon's wake up just 10-minutes after that, and wrote her a sweet note, "Thanks for loving me, even when I don't deserve it. B." This was the most prepared he had been in the morning, in quite a long time. Shower. Dressed. Bible reading done on his cell phone app. Coffee prepped. Note made. Bill hadn't felt this confident, this sure of his identity, and this productive in many moons. Tuesday was shaping up to be the best day of all days.

“We probably ought to talk about the pulpit,” said Terry Albright, one of the elders, an accomplished man in his 60’s, not a whole lot of Bible knowledge, but lots of opinions on what he thought the Bible had to say, “or I guess the lack of one.” It didn’t seem like Bill’s good Tuesday was off to a very good start. He had anticipated this and had grown weary of the Elder’s lack of eldership. He figured in his head that most of the elders couldn’t meet the Biblical qualifications.

“I guess you’ll have to explain a little more, Terry.” Bill knew where this was going. He had elected to move the pulpit, without asking, and opt for a freer mode of communication, not trapped by a wooden monstrosity. *Why the hell would you bring this up, first? We haven’t even got our food yet, let alone prayed.*

“Well... I’ve had a couple of families contact me, who I promised I wouldn’t name, names, but they’re a little concerned about our lack of the pulpit. They’re concerned that we’re not taking the Bible serious anymore.” This was Terry’s usual tactic. He was going to bring up families who hadn’t actually talked to him and use it as the basis for something he didn’t like. Everyone at the meeting knew it, but no one had the heart to say anything about it.

“Did we stop using the Bible?” That was Richard Carlisle, also known as Dickie, a hardnosed man in his early 50’s who had quite a testimony, and because of it he was radical about making disciples. Bill guessed that half of the baptisms in the last decade had to do with Dickie’s bar ministry, which he made no apologies for. None of them had stuck around, but they’d had their start at the church.

“Of course not, Rich. That is if William,” Bill hated hearing his first name, “ever starts using something other than the Authorized Version.” There was a stint of laughter

at the table, but everyone knew the contentious issues on the translation of the Bible used at the church, and they knew that Terry was manipulative and used his status as a charter member as something to be tossed around as leverage.

Bill felt a surge of courage, “I have no interest in these conversations. I don’t recall any pulpits or KJV’s in the New Testament. In fact, I think Jesus sat when he taught. Do you want me to start sitting?” Bill had started to use his dad voice. You could cut the air with a knife. *That was a terrible argument, Bill.* What just happened? The other elders at the table were split: Dickie agreed with the nonsense; Terry could feel the anger boiling inside of him, how dare anyone challenge the traditions of the church; and Vern, a quiet man, 10 years Terry’s senior, hadn’t had a chance to speak.

“Father,” Vern had felt his own prompting from the Spirit, a rare occurrence for him to be bold in the moment, the other men at the table immediately perked up to Vern’s infrequent speech as it was an indication that it was time to listen, “clothe us in your mercy and grace, wrap us in your unfailing love, and unite us as brothers. Let us labor together, in the tasks of the gospel, for your namesake. Guide us towards wholeness. Amen.” Vern’s prayer came at the right time, and it reminded Bill of a peculiar story he once heard.

He had a sage of a professor in seminary, an older man who taught Pastoral Theology, Bill had guessed him to be at least 105 years old, probably helped build the pyramids, and had pastored for almost 60 years. He was asked to teach the class by the seminary President but had never actually been to seminary, his street cred alone testified to his effectiveness in the local church. “Never live in a parsonage.” That was what his professor, Carl Frentz, used to say when they were talking about change dynamics in the

local church. “Parsonage” was code language for everything that was blue-haired and didn’t belong in the church, and it was also generally good advice for making sure you owned property for retirement purposes. *Traditionalism is the dead faith of the living, tradition is the living faith of the dead, or maybe it was the other way around.* Bill had remembered that phrase like it was yesterday, and could remember the context in which it was used. Pastor Frentz, as they called him, was famous for a one-day lecture on “Change Agents: Bringing the church up to date,” where he talked about methods for challenging the status quo, and implementing evangelistic practices. It seemed like an out-of-date, overly-simplistic memory, but he had loved the man and counted him as one of his mentors. Bill had remembered several of the bullet points:

- Prayer is always a priority – This seemed simple enough to Bill, keeping Biblical prayer an item of first importance.
- Relationship is the new religion – This was as offensive as it was ambiguous, a beginning conversation for changing the evangelistic paradigm: beginning with relationships. Bill had remembered the confusion it caused, how his classmates couldn’t grasp friendships, partly because it didn’t align with their God-given pastoral authority.
- Common vernacular – Communication should always be in the language of the people, and that meant language references, Bible translations, and the introduction of pop culture. Bill had remembered this being a debatable issue with many of the more conservative students.

“Thanks, Vern.” It was almost as if the dust had settled. “Terry, one of my major passions,” Bill said this even though he wasn’t sure if he actually had any passions or not,

“is making sure the gospel gets communicated, and I’ll be the first to say that we’re not doing a great job on this. Aside from Ted and Sarah, we’ve not reached younger families.” Bill knew the gospel wasn’t about reaching younger families, but Terry didn’t know this. Terry had a slight obsession with control, keeping the old money intact, and was leery of church growth methods. *I bet Terry was a deacon in his previous life.*

“So, what exactly are you proposing, Bill?” Terry’s voice seemed a little too condescending.

“I’m saying we need to change our approach and philosophy. The pulpit is going to stay gone, and I’m ready to move away from the King James.” Bill winced as if he was about to be struck. He hadn’t planned for this. He didn’t have this down on his elder agenda, and he sure didn’t know where it was coming from. It felt like that whole self-dialogue practice was getting a hold of him, and everyone at the table was confused as to where this was coming from. This was probably another indicator of Bill’s lack of planning. Vern spoke up in the nick of time.

“Tell us where you’re coming from, Bill,” he said softly.

“Yes, tell us.” Terry sounded a little impatient.

Bill acted on his feet, the quickest he knew how to do, which wasn’t very quick, “Jesus was always changing the expectations of the day. When the teachers of the law became legalistic, Jesus turned into an ethereal philosopher, telling confusing stories about deeper life. He spoke from the side of the mountain to remind them of their Exodus history, He met face-to-face with questionable people and didn’t defend His actions, and He accepted the title of King, in a new Kingdom, in the midst of a hostile political

domain. He had no tolerance for the ‘way things have always been,’ and did His Father’s bidding to the point of death.”

“What does that have to do with the pulpit or the King James Version?”

“Everything! I want to change our ministry approach to reach younger people, and I want to preach the Bible in the language of the people. The pulpit isn’t the sign of authority, the Bible is. I don’t want to take the Bible away, I want to engage with the Word! And let’s be honest, none of us are reading anything in the same tone that the King James was written. No one talks like that, thinks like that, and every other book out there is published in the way that people think and speak. It’s time for us to make some small changes.”

“Small changes? What about all of the people who have memorized scripture in the King James?” Terry’s face had started to get red, and he hadn’t even got his eggs yet. *Terry, your opinion doesn’t define me, or my ministry.* Bill said this to make himself feel better, even though he wanted to take Terry out to the parking lot and go to fisticuffs.

“You’re right, Terry. It’s going to be a stretch, and we can start slowly. I’d love to teach a small class on the differences in translation, and remind our church that these other translations are equally strong, and probably better for our church. I’d love to send you all an e-mail with some links to help get this conversation started.” There were agreeable nods, even Terry, though hesitant, seemed to agree. Bill wasn’t quite sure what was happening. He didn’t have any links. He didn’t have any books. Or resources. Or messages he had heard on this, and he sure didn’t know any other pastors in their small fellowship that had dared the same thing. *Was it really that simple? Did I just tell the elders a poorly-constructed piece of the Biblical narrative and they went along with it?*

Did I just make the biggest cultural defense of my ministry and no one batted an eyelash?

Bill remembered the old Charlie Sheen hashtag that had surfaced a couple of years ago, and figured he'd use it on Seth later that night. *#winning*

The rest of the breakfast went swimmingly. The men ate their breakfast, pondered over Ephesians 1, and awkwardly fumbled their way through a thankfulness exercise that Bill had remembered from that unfortunate family on the internet. Each man had held out their hands and counted 10 blessings, one on each finger, as something to be thankful for. They ended in prayer and agreed on Ephesians 2 for the next week, and Vern had caught Bill on the way out.

“Bill, I’ve waited a long time to see you perform like that. Keep responding to the Holy Spirit. I’ve been praying for you to hear the Spirit’s voice.” Vern was walking away before Bill could get anything out, and it’s not like it mattered, he didn’t know if he could have said anything at all. Bill didn’t stop at his car, he just kept walking down the sidewalk of their small downtown. *This is the Fridayest of all Tuesday’s. This very well might be the best Tuesday ever. The most productive Tuesday ever.* Bill glanced at his watch. *All before 8 o’clock in the morning.* Bill didn’t know it, but sometimes things have the appearance of going well.

There was already an e-mail waiting for Bill when he got to his office at the church. *Bring it on e-mails, it’s me, your master.* Bill’s victory over his e-mails were short lived. It was an e-mail from Terry, with the subject heading titled, “Translation Committee.” *You’ve got to be kidding me. How on earth could he send me an e-mail in 20 minutes?*

“Pastor, thank you for spending time with the elders this morning.” *With the elders? What are you on about, Terry? I am an elder!* “I’ve called several people from the congregation about your interest in changing from the King James and they’ve agreed to sit on a small committee to help us in that discernment process.” Below that Terry listed all of the people on the committee. *Every. Single. One. Of. Them. Use. The. King. James. Where does this joker get off thinking he can form committees for the sake of forming committees?* Bill tried his hardest to practice restraint. The easy route, Bill figured, was to e-mail Terry exactly what he thought. Instead, Bill went back to the search engine. “How to organize your elder board.” The internet was a dud. Books that Bill didn’t have time to read, weird references to Bible passages that didn’t have to do with duplicitous men, and all sorts of dreamy examples that had nothing to do with Bill’s ministry. *Who around these parts has elders?* Bill knew he shouldn’t have asked that question. There was a megachurch by the interstate, something-something community church, the type of church that pretended to not be Baptist, but they were actually Baptist, shamed other churches for not preaching from the Bible but you couldn’t find a scriptural reference used on a Sunday outside the reading of the Christmas story once a year. They had elders. They also had a pastor who looked like Tom Brady’s evil step-brother: handsome, and eloquent. His name was Michael Sloan. *Heretical vampire.* That’s what Bill had to think about the topical preacher who never aged. *Please, Lord. I don’t want to talk to that guy. I’d rather eat a handful of rusty nails.* Bill grabbed his keys and headed towards the parking lot, it looks like he’d have to take a trip to the Bible Big Box, to see what the church off of the interstate could teach him.

It was almost as if you could hear loud speakers chanting, “mega, mega, mega, church” as you got closer to their campus. It was beautiful. Stone. Open beams in the foyer. A marble waterfall near the escalator to the balcony. They had partially reclining theater-style seats. *I wish we had those.* They were starkly contrasted to the mauve-colored cushions on the blonde oak pews at Bill’s church. *Lord, I know you still love our church, thanks for showing your mercy on us. Why people still come to our church, I’ll never know. Thank you.* Bill decided he would park near the entrance, in front of the sign specifically marked, “Week Day Visitors.” Bill was winded by the time he had made the half-mile trek to the doors. *Hopefully they don’t send me to the food pantry by mistake.* To Bill’s wonder, who, of all people, was standing in the lobby? Michael Sloan. It had appeared that Michael had seen Bill walk in and was just finishing his conversation with one of the building workers. Why he was talking to a building worker when he had a staff of 80 people, Bill didn’t know.

“Brother Bill! It’s so good to see you!” *You could tie your tie in those teeth.*

“Michael, Michael, Motorcycle!” Bill shoved his hand into Michael’s. *Why did you just say that? You’re an idiot. Dear God.* Michael laughed at the awkward greeting. He felt awkward too, not just at the greeting, but at the potential of the interaction. Bill didn’t know it, and Michael wouldn’t admit to it, but Michael Sloan was envious of Bill’s ministry, wishing he had less responsibility, wishing to be known less, and wishing for something different. Bill didn’t know it, but there’s a universal comparison trap between pastors, each secretly wanting the other’s life.

“What can we do for you today? How’s Sharon? How’s ministry?” *Sharon? How did he know my wife’s name? Stop it, Michael. You’re making me like you and I don’t want to like you.*

“Oh, she’s doing just fine! And ministry is, you know, going. That’s actually why I came by today. I was hoping to swing by for a couple of minutes to ask you some questions about eldership.” Michael looked quickly at his fancy, smartwatch, flipping through screen with his finger. *I want one of those.*

“Yeah, it looks like I’ve got 20 or 30 minutes. Let’s head up to the office.” *Up to the office?* Bill had half expected a teleportation device to materialize out of thin air and take them up to the third heavens. It was very likely that Michael had a much larger budget and salary, so he could probably afford a teleportation device. Bill’s expectation wasn’t far off. They walked through the main office and into an office marked, “Executive Assistant.”

“Morning, Marge! This is Bill! Him and I are just going up to the study for a few minutes.”

“It’s a pleasure to meet you, Bill. Michael, I’ll hold your calls.” Marge didn’t look anything like the name suggested. She must have been 25, of some Scandinavian descent, and smelled like peaches and Labrador puppies. Together they walked across the office and opened a door on one end of Marge’s office. When the door opened, a light turned on and illuminated a black spiral staircase. In Bill’s estimation, the spiral staircase was just as cool as a teleportation device.

“Come on up, Bill.” *Where are we going? Who are you? Bruce Wayne?* It was very obvious that Bill was out of shape for the megachurch pastor life, he couldn’t even climb up the spiral staircase to the office.

“Take a seat!” Michael motioned to an antique reading chair, something that Don Draper from *Mad Men* would have had in his office. *Am I supposed to watch Mad Men?* The chair sat in front of a roaring fireplace, which was opposite an entire wall, floor to ceiling, covered with books. There was no desk anywhere to be found. Only small tables and genuine leather cushions. Exquisite paintings covered the wall, except for one tapestry, which appeared to be some form of ancient Greek manuscript. Michael must have caught Bill staring at it. “That’s a fake piece there. It’s supposed to be all of the recovered Dead Sea Scroll writings compiled into one document. I only keep it there because it looks fancy. No one actually knows what it is.” Michael laughed. Bill couldn’t even speak, let alone catch the humor in Michael’s voice. Michael sat down and said it again, “Take a seat, Bill. What is it that I can do for you today?”

“Let me just jump right to the chase. I’ve got some questions on eldership.” Michael leaned forward as if he was genuinely interested in what Bill had to say.

“Alright, well, I can’t guarantee I can give you any answers, but I’ll sure try and see what I can do. Tell me what’s been going on.” Michael laughed and it made him that much more endearing. *I bet Sharon would love you to bits and pieces. How old are you anyway? You’re probably old enough to be my child.*

“First of all, ministry is ministry,” Bill said jokingly, trying to find the right words to say to someone he hardly even knew, “it’s just that we’re bickering about the stupidest things. We can’t get anything going because we’re so concerned about what everybody

wants and what everybody thinks. Right now, we're having some dumb conversations on whether or not we need a pulpit on the stage."

"A pulpit? That's what you all are focusing your time on?"

"Yeah, I told you it was stupid." Bill paused for a second. "It's we want to do a lot of things, but we keep having the same old conversations, and nobody wants to change. It feels like I'm stuck, like I've been in the same spot I've been in the last 10 years."

Michael leaned back in his chair and stared directly into Bill's eyes. "Bill, I think I know exactly what your problem is."

Bill was starting to get excited, and also a little irritated at how easy he thought it was, "Okay! What's that?"

"You don't have a vision for your church. You're letting other men, probably men that are unqualified, dictate the direction of the church. Now, you can't do it by yourself, but the last thing you need is another person to do it in a vacuum. Especially someone who doesn't have the time, training, or the anointing to make that decision." Michael could tell that Bill was about to be offended.

"Vision? Of course, our church has vision. We're glorifying God and making disciples." It was as if Michael had anticipated that response and practically cut him off.

"Yeah, yeah. Look. That's the vision of every church." Michael had noticed that Bill had become slightly disappointed in his attack. "Look," Michael said, trying to change the tone, "our churches are different. They have to be different. God has called us to different neighborhoods, with different needs, and he's equipped us in different ways. Your church is going to be primed to reach first-generation professionals, the kind of

people who pretend to be simpletons, but we all know they make more money than they need to. That's who you're primed to reach, not who you're reaching. You're not going to change your church into a modern worship venue overnight, and so you're in a unique spot to give people a more traditional setting for worship. You're probably going to attract your contemporaries, and younger families who are looking for the type of church they grew up in, most likely in a rural environment, simply because your smaller church resembles a small, country church. You have to be able to utilize your senior saints for intergenerational impact!

"Bill, you're the people's pastor! You should be marrying, burying, and baptizing generations of people. You've got an incredible heart for evangelism and the relational capital to teach it to others. Your church should be flourishing." Bill was in a state of disbelief. *What is happening right now?* Bill was more upset than he'd ever been in his whole life. It's like someone just came and ripped the rug right out from beneath him.

"Bill, here's what the problem is. I have a bigger vision for your church than you do, and because you don't have a vision, or much of one, your elders are trying to run away with a vision they have no business running away with, if you catch my drift. You've got to lead them, Bill." There was an uncomfortable silence that followed while Bill considered this onslaught of information. *Do I really not have a vision? Am I the wrong guy leading this church?* Bill was getting the feeling that this was panning out to be the lowest day of ministry, the saddest day in the life of a pastor.

"Alright, here's what's going to happen. When we finish up here, you'll let Marge know that we're going to do weekly coaching meetings, and she'll follow up with you on dates when we're going to meet, and I'm going to coach the best possible church out of

you.” There wasn’t much else conversation that was going to happen. Bill tried to mumble out a thank you, but he was dumbfounded. Michael prayed with him and he descended the spiral staircase, and did one of those out of body motions, where he made appointments, had small conversation, and walked out of the building and into his car in an almost unconscious, catatonic kind of state. *Blip. Blip. Blip. Blip. Blip.* The endless number of e-mail confirmations for meetings with Michael rang in through his e-mail. *Well, I still don’t even like you.*

Bill didn’t even attempt to go back to the office. He drove all of the way home in a numb state. *We might as well ask Michael to absorb the church. You’re a complete failure, dude. I wonder if there are any good books, or videos, on how to construct a vision for the church. It’s time to put your resume out there at the grocery store, that’s the only thing you’re fit to do. Maybe Michael’s church could absorb mine.* Bill felt bad for having the same thought about the big church eating the small one, and pulled into the driveway, turned the engine off, and sat there for the next 2.5 hours, feeling the most defeated he had ever felt. There wasn’t the Fridayest of all Tuesday’s he had expected. Bill was reminded of what the sad truth of ministry was, it was just that: sad.

Chapter 4: The Dreaded Potluck

Bill hadn’t eaten dinner, hadn’t talked with his family, but just went right up and went to bed, and lay there in a pool of his own self-pity until the morning of the next day. It was a Wednesday and he didn’t have anything planned until the evening for the church’s mid-week services. He didn’t have anything prepared for the men’s Bible study,

and frankly, he didn't care. His early morning slump into the bathroom was met with even more unfortunate news: it was getting harder, and harder, to turn around in their small master bathroom. He was always tired, always sweating profusely, and could often catch a whiff of his own body scent, which generated something other than a pleasant musk. *When it rains, it pours. You're fat. A big, fat, fatty. You could get a new job being the Goodyear Blimp. The Holy Spirit resides in your inner-tube fortress. Bill "Dunlap," your belly's done-lapped over your belt. Crummy church. Less than appealing physical appearance. Apparently, he had no, "vision," and to top it all off, he had nothing prepared for the Mondayest of all Wednesday's. Maybe you should get a credit card and flee to Canada. What do Canadians even eat? Is it time to declare bankruptcy? Can something terrible just happen to me so people will start a donation account and feel sorry for me? Can I get a terrible disease, lose 85 pounds, and then miraculously recover?* Bill felt as if he should do the thing furthest from trying to better his already miserable life: check his e-mails.

IRS phishing scam. Marge, Michael's personal assistant, three times in a row. A personal e-mail from Michael. An e-mail from Ted. An e-mail he wouldn't open from Terry about the translation committee, and an advertisement e-mail from one of those Christian-based home décor stores. Now to start from the top of the list. Delete. The e-mails from Marge were calendar invitations to three coaching calls, except they weren't weekly. The megachurch star wanted to meet the next day, and then twice the next week, his assistant citing that he would be in Jerusalem for three weeks leading a familiarization trip for other pastors. *I. Don't. Want. To. Meet. With. You. Michael.* Bill knew that his personal weakness meant that he couldn't say anything mean in response to Michael's

assistant, instead he accepted all three calendar invitations. *Maybe he'll forget and have to cancel our appointment? Please, please, please Lord. I'll do anything.* The personal e-mail from Michael was much more interesting than Bill had anticipated:

Brother Bill – I'm really excited for what the Lord is going to do through you. I'm confident that the best is yet to come for you, your family, and your church. Before we meet on Thursday (Marge should have followed up with you), I want you to be a student of your culture. Who are your neighbors in the community? Drive through your neighborhood and visibly look for needs that need to be met. I want you to stop at popular intersections and pray for God's blessing in your community. Most important of all, Bill, I want you to think, what's the BIGGEST thing the Lord can do in and through your community? Notice I didn't ask for the biggest thing you thought could happen, but the biggest thing the Lord could do. Write it down. I'm looking forward to discussing it tomorrow. With love, Rev. Dr. Michael R. Sloan.

There isn't anything in the world that makes me want to do this. I know for a fact that I don't want you telling me how to run my church. Who do you think you are? Well. I can't do anything right, maybe Michael can. The email from Ted was a tad more inspiring:

Pastor B! Loved having you all over for games the other night! The boys loved your kids! Did you ever put any thought into helping me develop my personal training portfolio? Here are some details to help you make that decision: 5:30 AM sessions, Monday, Wednesday, Friday, and I'll make sure you get a free membership at Action 10 Fitness for being with me. I can even toss in some free passes for Sharon and the kids, if you want. Let me know. Thanks, T.

Bill let out a deep groan, kind of like if your soul was being drank from a Dementor in *Harry Potter*. He wondered to himself, how could today be so unusually awful, if yesterday started out so good? Bill's inability to disappoint others meant that his response to Ted was going to be a positive one. His e-mail read:

Ted, I'd love to help you. I just want to let you know that I'm going to be a little out of shape. Or a lot out of shape, you can decide that. Can we start this Friday? Thanks, PB.

Bill looked down at his balloon-like stomach, jiggled it with one of his hands, and let out a small, deprecating, "Ho, ho, ho!" Bill's cynical response to his own weight was the

only thing he could do to stand the situation. *Why wait till Monday to be miserable?* Bill felt slothful and not in his best spirits, and he remembered his remaining bookmarks to read and decided to dive in. *Well, it's not like I'm going to be doing anything worthwhile today.* Bill thought it best that he find a teacher for the Wednesday night class. He e-mailed Vern and asked him to cover the men's Bible study.

There were probably better methods of Bill treating his recent depressive bout, but when you're down, you're down. He scrolled through the bookmarks, absent any lightsaber sounds, and scrolled onto: **Be the best version of yourself.** *You know what would be great now? Click bait and my demonically possessed mouse, and also a group of prepubescent Russian hackers to stall all internet speeds to send me into my eternal doom. Bill, you're such a diva.* Click. The page opened, it was a nice layout, a professionally developed website, a ministry for pastors and ministry pastors that specialized in forms of counseling and self-care. On the bottom of the page was the author portion of the article: some guy with a peppered, black and white, well-kept beard, who also happened to have a PhD. He was the founder of the organization and was skilled in coaching ministry professionals for 30 years. *Great. More experts. It would be humorous to even attempt to back the page up, now.* The article started out perfectly, "You've probably heard that pride is the worst of all sins. In my 30+ years of ministry experience, I don't think that's the truth. Pride isn't the worst of all sins, it's just the most ignorant of all sins. We actually think we can be God? The worst sin is slothfulness, it's when we refuse to be the best possible version of ourselves in Jesus." Bill sat on this portion of the article for some time. Out of nowhere, a song began to play in his head. *I am flawed but I am cleaning up so well, I am seeing in me now, the things you swore you*

saw yourself... Hope dangles on a string, like slow-spinning redemption, winding in, winding out, the shine of which has caught my eye. Where is this song coming from? This doesn't sound like a song I would listen to on the radio. Maybe it's a song that Seth likes? Bill was immediately reminded of his need to preach the gospel to himself. This wasn't the best possible version of himself in Jesus, this was him stuck in his flesh, and wallowing in his sadness. *Bill, you're not defined by your confusion, or your crisis. Christ's death was, and is, sufficient for you. Even though you can't see the shine of Jesus, doesn't mean that it's not there. Jesus is faithful even in the winding out times of our lives.* Bill's mini-sermon helped for the time.

The article continued, and proved to be dramatically helpful. Within the article, it talked about the basis and need for holy ambition, what it meant to focus on your identity as one who is in Christ, that our work is ordained for the Kingdom by God's sovereignty, and that Bill's heart needed to align with the heart of God's. At the end of the article was a small rubric for how to gauge one's excellency and proficiency in ministry. It was called a, "competence of work rubric," highlighting areas in which we gauge our own self-performance.

What is your *competence of work*? (Scale of 1-10, 1 = No Idea What I'm Doing, 10 = Smooth Sailing)

1. I am aware of my job/ministry expectations.

2. I can clearly articulate my role within the organization.

3. I am given clear oversight and direction from those over me.

4. I am given parameters for my duties, knowing what I can and can't do.

5. I am given creative freedom to explore new areas within my ministry.

6. I exercise innovation within my area of work/ministry.

7. I receive constructive feedback and criticism for my work.

Competence of Work Score (Total divided by 7)

= _____

Bill decided it would be best if he would just adhere to the little quiz. *This one is an 8, 3, 3, 10, 1, 1, 0. A composite score of 3.9?* The article didn't allow Bill to wallow in any more self-pity, it helped identify other areas of his ministry that would help hone his low score.

How do you view people? Are they? (Pick One)

- Objects to manipulate
- Who I collaborate with
- Here to serve me

What are your top 3 defining moments in life?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Finding Your Sweet Spot

- What are your passions? _____
- What are you the best at? _____
- What motivates you? _____

Bill continued to play along. *I'm not into manipulating people, and I try my best to collaborate with them, and I would rather build a culture of mutual service, so the second one. My top three defining moments in life? Our first summer here, we had 13 baptisms, all in the same weekend, and that gave me a window into what the Lord could do here. I remember when Seth and Rachel made Jesus the Lord of their life, several years after moving here. Hearing Vern's comment from the other day was another great thing.* Bill's ministry wasn't a failure. Writing out those details on small sticky-note slips in the cool garage was more life giving than one could imagine. Bill continued. *What is my sweet spot? My feet are ticklish.* Bill laughed at his own joke, a sign that he was cheering up. My

passion is evangelism, I'm particularly good at building relationships and shepherding others, and my main motivation is seeing people coming to Jesus. Again, Bill's ministry wasn't a failure, and there wasn't any reason for him to wallow in his self-pity, but there was every reason for Bill to be excited about what God was doing and could do in ministry. There was no need for slothfulness in Bill's ministry, or life, he could become more in Jesus, and Bill was certain that others would be used by God to help. It took Bill some time to notice it, but at the bottom of the page was a space where suggested articles are featured, and one in particular stood out to him: "Overcoming Paunchy Preacher Disorder." *Really? Just when I start to feel good about myself? Now I have to read articles about fat pastors?* Click.

The article would go on to describe the overwhelming percentage of overweight ministers, and the number of them that led sedentary lives, used food as a coping mechanism, or are battling some form of mental illness and do not have appropriate outlets for their personal needs. The article was convicting in that Bill's slothfulness was in large part due to the fact that he was overweight, "obese," on a BMI scale. *Maybe I've had my fair share of church potlucks. Ministry is such a social endeavor, always eating, and that's the only time people who work, have to meet.* Bill could catch himself making justifications for his gluttony. *Jesus dined, a lot. Jesus says eat my body and drink my blood. Bill, you're just fat, and kind of lazy, and you're not very disciplined. Looks like you're going to need that gym membership with Ted. Hope you don't die.* There were days that Bill felt good, and then there were days that Bill felt as if he wanted to die, and he certainly didn't want anyone assisting with the actual death part of it. Bill decided that it

would be best to go to bed. Today had been emotionally, physically, and spiritually exhausting.

Bill didn't wake up until about 10AM. Sharon must have not slept in the bedroom, her side of the bed wasn't even touched, the same exact positioning of the sheets than when he laid down. The house was quiet. It appeared as if no one was home. Bill had remembered that he had about an hour to go and he'd have to get on the phone with Michael for their first call and he hadn't done his homework. *What am I supposed to do? Drive around the church? Dream of the biggest thing the Lord could do? This is dumb. The Lord can do whatever he wants, whenever he wants.* This was maybe the most honorable thing about Bill and his life, that he would do anything you asked him to, to a fault. Bill got showered, dressed, and headed out of the door towards the church.

When Bill arrived at the church, he noticed it was an unusually nice day outside. The church was mashed in the middle of a residential neighborhood. A bad idea had entered Bill's mind. *Maybe I should walk around the neighborhood instead. What? What am I thinking? Why would I walk? Is my car broken down? Well... I could get a jump on Ted and his terrible fitness plan.* Bill took off walking down the sidewalk and something had occurred to him: he had never walked up and down these streets. He had never stopped and listened to the place that God had called him to. He had never been a student to his neighborhood, figuring out what they needed, or what their desires were. A moment of guilt hit him directly in the gut. Bill imagined he was a Benedictine monk on a silent retreat, waiting, hoping, longing to hear from God, listening to the needs of the community.

Bill had always known that the church was tucked away in an older neighborhood, but it had never occurred to him how old the neighborhood actually was. Many of the houses looked in poor condition, losing shingles, paint peeling, or had yards that needed mowing. He sensed that this community had lots of small children, the bicycles and plastic tricycles in the yards being the dead giveaway. What had the church ever done for children? They've never had a children's ministry, partly because they've never had any kids, aside from Bill's own children, and so there was never a need to do a Vacation Bible School or any kind of outreach program. Bill had walked a couple of blocks, turning here and there, pretending the Lord was directing his path when he came across an overgrown fence. He had never walked, driven, or come anywhere close to this before. He got closer to the fence and saw a huge concrete slab beyond the fence. Bill reached up and pulled back brush to reveal a run-down basketball court, and beyond the court, was a swing-set, in non-working condition. There was no way anyone could get back there, there was no way that any child had used that little park area in a long time. Bill was starting to develop some sweat on his upper lip and decided to make his way back to the church.

He arrived back at his car in the nick of time. 11AM, just in time to hop on the call with Michael. *Ring. Ring. Ring.*

"Good morning, Bill!"

"Mornin', Mike. How are you?"

"Doing really well, it's been a productive morning so far. So, tell me, what have you learned? What do you love about where God has placed you? What are you burning for? What's the biggest possible thing the Lord can do? Sorry if it seems like I'm a little hurried, it looks like I'm not going to be able to make the full, 30-minute call, we've had a

couple of call-in's today in the office and I have to toss my schedule around." *What?*

Michael has actual work he has to do?

Bill had, had a few minutes to think on the subject, "I see a fledgling, low-income neighborhood that needs the gospel. I see a neighborhood full of children that aren't being reached. I'll be honest, I feel kind of embarrassed that I didn't even know there was a park near the church. The more and more I think about it," Bill felt like he was lying through his teeth, he hadn't really thought about it at all, "it's that we have to reach these kids. I think the Lord can call every single one of these children into our church, and as a result, we're going to reach their families."

Michael whooped and hollered on the other end, "Yes! That's so exciting! Okay, Bill, here's the catch. None of this happens overnight, and none of it happens mysteriously. What are you going to do? Have you put together an outreach team? Have you hosted any events in the neighborhood? Have you raised any money for a full-time children's staff person? Do these people have accessibility to your church? Can you run a shuttle service?" Bill's mind exploded. He had never thought of any of that. There was silence on Bill's end.

"Bill, no worries, no worries! I want to coach out of you all that God has placed in you. You're a great pastor with a great mission field, and now that you see the Kingdom needs, it's time to develop a strategy to get there. Here's what I want you to do. Write out goals, and 10-15 action steps to accomplish them. You'll need several 30-day goals, 3-month goals, 6-month goals, 1-year goals, 5-year goals, and 20-year goals. Each of these should have 2-5 goals, which steps, that include everything, and every person you'll need to accomplish them. After that, you gotta get on the horn and make it happen. Lead them.

Train them. Tell them about the neighborhood. Pack them up in your car and shown them that park, make them see that there's a need to be dealt with." Bill was feverishly writing down all of the things that Michael was telling him. It almost seemed like an overload of information.

"I'm so sorry, Bill. Because of today's schedule, I've got to cut out of our call in about 5 minutes. What do you need from me?"

Bill blurted it out, not even thinking about it, "Do you ever get a weekend off from preaching?"

"I sure do. I have this weekend off. We're always trying to develop new communicators." A spark went off when Bill heard it.

"Would you be interested in guest preaching for me this weekend?" Michael didn't even hesitate in his response.

"You bet I would! Send me an e-mail with the following: preferred translation, suggested length of sermon, what I should wear, and if there's a particular topic or passage you want me to cover. Also, tell me what time you want me and my family there. Let's plan for lunch afterwards."

"Oh man! That is so great. Thank you so much. I really needed a break, a lot has been going on this week. The same goes for you, I'd fill in if you ever needed me to."

"No worries, Bill! Listen, I gotta get. Let's shoot for those calls next week! See ya, Bill!"

"Have a good—." Michael had already hung up, but Bill had felt like a million dollars. He hadn't had a Sunday off in what felt like centuries, he was unusually excited. *I don't know what just happened, but I don't have to preach this week! Who doesn't have to*

preach this week? Whoop, whoop! What doesn't have to preach this week? Whoop, whoop! That's right, it's me! That's right, it's me! I'm the man. Michael's the man. Ah man, Michael's the man.

Bill didn't even bother going into the church. Why? His responsibilities seemed like they were done this week. Bill headed towards home to eat lunch with Sharon.

"Shar, you'll never believe what happened!"

"No, but it sounds like you're going to tell me," Sharon smiled at Bill as he came through the garage door, she was sitting at the bar, Bible open, drinking some iced tea.

"Michael is preaching for me this Sunday."

"Michael who?"

"Michael Sloan!"

"Michael Sloan? What!?"

"Yeah, we started some coaching conversations recently, and today I just up and asked him if he'd guest preach for us."

"Wait, hold on a second. What about these coaching calls, and why is Michael Sloan guest preaching at *our* church? Bill, you never tell me anything. Come on, man, snap out of it, I'm not in your head." Bill suddenly realized that he'd been in a slumber, a hibernation from his problems, and that he hadn't told Sharon anything. Bill laid it all out there, every nitty, gritty, detail of the last several days. Sharon was excited, not as excited as Bill, but she was happier about the fact that Bill was happy. She felt as if she hadn't seen that in a long, long time. The rest of the afternoon was spent with Bill and Sharon watching pretentious gardening shows, lounging on one another, and getting in the small talk that they had missed earlier in the week. Bill didn't know it, but Sharon put his phone

on silent, and today, Bill was all the more better for it. *I think this is the type of reprieve that the Lord wants from us. Peaceful. Life-giving. Unencumbered relaxation.* The rest of the day went surprisingly well for Bill. No phone calls. A delicious dinner. Evening heart to heart with Rachel. To top it all off, there was love-making, the non-pity kind, that made Bill and Sharon feel like newlyweds. This was the Fridayest of all Thursdays.

Chapter 5: Dave Ramsey Doesn't Go Here

The alarm clock came quickly. 5AM. *Why would you get up at 5AM? Is Ted some form of sadist? Is he a serial killer moonlighting as a tech guy? Does he lure stupid people into dark parking lots at 5:30 in the morning and kill them? I hope so, because I am so tired.* Why Bill agreed to meet Ted, he didn't know. Was it the pain? Was it the suffering? Was it the hopeful anticipation of not knowing how to use your legs after doing squats? Bill was really trying to be a man of his word, and so he got up, threw on some shorts, and put on his best Ted repellent: not brushing his teeth. *You're gross, but so brilliant.*

The workout complex was massive, probably even bigger than Michael Sloan's church. It had three levels, an Olympic sized pool, and a rock climbing wall which would lead to your imminent doom if you were to fall while climbing. Bill walked in, obviously never having been there before, eyes full of the morning crusties, and who does he spot? Ted. *Why are you smiling? Yup. I'm dead. Definitely a serial killer.*

"Pastor Bill! I was worried there for a minute, I thought you might ditch out on me!" Ted was way too chipper, way too early.

"I'm here. Let's get after it!"

“No worries! Today we’re just going to sit down and do a health evaluation.”

Praise the Lord!

“Oh, we’re not working out?” Bill did his best at pretending to be disappointed.

“Oh no! We’re going to ease into everything, your body will thank me later for it.

Today we’re going to answer some questions, and I’m going to talk to you about your lifestyle. Ya know, that’s one of those things that tons of people do: they just start working out, but they don’t match the rest of their lives with healthy living.” *Jesus, this is evidence of your gospel, and evidence of your love. I now know what your mercy looks like.*

“Sounds great!” Bill followed Ted over to a table in the lobby.

The next hour was just as grueling as any workout. Ted grilled Bill on every single detail of his life. Have you ever been injured? Any history of illnesses? Have had surgery? When’s the last time you worked out? How active, on a scale of 1-10, is your life right now? How many hours a day, would you say, do you find yourself seated? What’s your daily caffeine intake? Bill wasn’t physically exhausted, he was mentally exhausted, all before 6:30AM.

“Alright, Pastor. I love everything that you told me. We’re going to set a baseline for your health. Here are a couple of things you really need to take into consideration,” and Ted had no problem rattling them off. “You have a job that takes an incredible mental toll on your day, and so you need to combat that with healthy practices. You’re going to need 7-8 hours of sleep every night. Make it a priority to go to bed early and get up early. You need to make sure you’re staying hydrated, so about half of your body weight in ounces of water every day. So for you, that means about,” Ted was doing something that

Bill did not like, looking at his weight on the paper, “150 ounces of water every day.”

Good job, Bill. You’re a cow.

“I might float away, Ted.”

“That’s alright,” Ted laughed, but Bill wasn’t laughing. “We’ll make sure you get a water bottle with a measuring scale on the side to help monitor your water intake. Next thing, you’re going to need to do heavy weight lifting with me, 3 times a week. The reason for this is because when your body maintains muscle mass, it has to burn more calories to do so. You’ll need to follow that up with 2 days a week of stretching and light cardio, like taking a really long walk with Sharon, or the dog. Alright Bill, are you ready for the next lifestyle choice? This one is going to be tough.” *Great, just what I want.*

“Bring it on, Teddy!”

“It’s time to change your diet.” It’s like the whole room was sucked of all the air. Bill happened to like his diet, happened to like his breakfast and lunch meetings, and was a fan of being a foodie for Jesus. “You’re going to need to cut out all of the fried foods, no soda’s, nothing that can exist in a bag on a shelf, and you’re going to keep your diet primarily plant based, so lots of dark greens, and you’re going to be bulking up on all of that lean white meat!” Bill had heard lots of bad news recently, but this might have been the worst. *What about oatmeal cream pies? What about a nice, fizzy, soda? What about cheesecake with a graham cracker crust bottom?* Bill let out a deep sigh.

“I’m going to tell you right now, I don’t like this.”

“That’s okay! You’ll get used to it, and I’ll be here to support you the whole way. Ideally, Bill, I’d like to see you around 240. You’re going to need to lose a little over 60 pounds.” Bill tried to imagine what it was going to be like to be that skinny again. “But,”

here was that dreaded word, “but you’re going to need to be committed. I need you to put up with everything that I’m asking you to do. Trust the process. It’s going to be worth it.”

Bill left the gym and wasn’t quite sure how he felt. If anything, he would have much rather have preached this Sunday than had to hear all that nonsense about changing his diet. *I guess this is okay, at least I didn’t die from working out.* Bill went home, pleasantly surprised at the day’s events thus far.

“I wonder what this would have cost us.” Sharon was carefully examining her new gym key card, almost as if she were looking for fine print on the back of the plastic key tag.

“What are you doing? We didn’t sign away Seth, and thankfully, we didn’t have to pay for it.”

“I know, it’s not like we could have afforded it anyway.” Sharon knew what it was to share the cold hard truth of their financial situation: they had worked pay check-to-pay check for years. Part of this was Sharon’s ambition to be a state at home wife, and the other was the hopefulness of the church growing so that Bill’s salary could grow.

For as long as Bill could remember, finances had always been a point of contention with him and Sharon. It was like dollar signs and decimals were a foreign language to them, like they were a message from aliens that only the smartest people on earth could decode. It also didn’t help that there was always more going out than more going in. It’s not like they were building a massive retirement, their account read \$11,098.17. It wasn’t much, but they always promised to contribute more next year. Their retirement could have been so much larger but they had made sacrifices for the sake of their family. Bill distinctly remembered a conversation when the kids were younger. It was when times

were really tough for them financially and they weren't even scraping by, having to borrow money from Sharon's parents just to stay afloat.

"Sharon, can we talk about the budget?" Bill had remembered exactly how this conversation had started. He had used the "b" word, and it already wasn't going well.

"Yeah? What? Are we broke?" There was immediate hostility from Sharon. She knew exactly where this conversation was going.

"We're not doing well, babe. I think we could probably get by a little better if you would go back to work. I think you could find a pretty good job around here with some good benefits." Bill remembered Sharon's explosive reaction.

"I am not going back to work. That's the bottom-line. We made an agreement when we started a family that I would be their primary caregiver and that you would be the provider. You promised me, Bill." Sharon was so mad that she was almost at the point of tears. To date, it may have been one of the worst blowups in their marriage.

"Then I don't know what we're going to do," Bill remembered that he had screamed back at her, "I'm just going to have to get another job. I'm going to have to leave ministry because you can't even think about going back to work." Their family financials had become such a contested subject that Sharon had actually taken the kids to her parents for the weekend so that she could cool off. Bill was reminiscing on the not-so-good days and decided he'd try an old conversation again. *Please don't kill me, honey.*

"Speaking of money, I was hoping we could look at the numbers again." Sharon gave him a side-eye. She wasn't happy. She wasn't thrilled. She knew what this meant. There was a long, long history to how they handled finances. "Look, I'll tell you what, I'll

talk about money with you if we go and talk to somebody who knows what they're talking about."

"Did you have anyone in mind?" Bill was trying to think of someone credible and the only name he could come up with was Ted, and Bill didn't think they had that kind of relationship yet.

"Yeah, how about we go see Gary after lunch?" *Gary?! Why, Gary? That smug, pompous--*. Bill had stopped himself mid-sentence. Gary was Sharon's brother, a financial analyst who worked remotely for a couple of large corporations. He was single, suave, and incredibly opinionated. Gary was a picture of what Bill often dreamed about for his own life. The last thing he wanted to do is talk about *their* finances with *her* brother. *Bill, I think you have a chance here to love your wife*. Bill wasn't buying into these internal nudges and reminders to love his wife. If it was the Holy Spirit, it needed to stop. If it was hunger pains or insanity, it also needed to stop.

"Okay, I guess we can do that."

Sharon smiled, "Thank you." Bill walked dejectedly to the garage. He wasn't happy.

Gary's office, which also happened to be his home, was ridiculous. Italian leather here. Granite there. \$800.00 fountain pens, nine of them, in a cup on his desk. Here was Bill, still in shorts, which were above his knees, and not at all interested in being there. On Gary's desk was a massive, touchscreen computer, something that NASA would use, which made feel that much more inferior to Gary. *Why did you just bring a printed out excel sheet? It's not even color coated. This is Sharon's fault. If I look stupid, it is her fault*. At the desk with Gary, there was lots of quiet, none of the conversation was had

with Bill. *Maybe he's too good for me.* Next, there was a lot of hmmm'ing, and a lot of sighing, deep breathing, notes on the excel sheet with one of those fancy pens, and then there was some quick screen touching on Gary's high-dollar machine. Gary was successful and he knew it. He had half-rim glasses, slacks that were tailor fit, and he drank Vodka with gold flakes in it. He was pretentious and stuck up. Gary began asking questions and didn't even look over at Bill and Sharon.

"Sharon, do you work these days?"

"No, I do not." There were more notes being made on the excel sheet.

"Bill, what's the address at your church?"

"What do you need that for?"

Gary still didn't look over at Bill, "What's the address to the church?" Bill gave it to him, followed by more screen touching from Gary.

"Alright... Do you guys want the good news or the bad news?" Gary swiveled around and looked at Bill for the first time over his half-rim glasses.

"Well... I guess the bad news first." Sharon didn't exactly have a great relationship with her brother either, but she knew he was intelligent.

"Well. The bad news is that you're broke. The good news is that you can do something about it." Gary laughed. Bill and Sharon didn't see the humor there.

"Okay, what can we do about it?" Bill hated to ask the obvious question.

"Well, for starters Sharon, you can get a job. There's no reason why you're still staying at home. Right now, you all pay \$1,350.00 a month in insurance benefits, which I'm guessing means that the church doesn't have a benefit option for you. There's no reason why you couldn't find a salaried job with benefits. It would save you a ton of

money every month. Money you could use to pay off your,” Gary glanced again at the financial spreadsheet, “credit card bills, mortgage, and to start seriously saving for the future, and if I heard right, Rachel is about to get a pricey education.” *How did he hear about Rachel? He doesn't have social media.*

“Well, we want to put Seth in braces.” Sharon had reminded them of yet another expense that had to be dealt with.

“Okay? Add that down to another thing you could afford, on a monthly installment, if you didn't have to pay for health insurance out of pocket. And Bill,” Gary glanced at his computer screen, “your church is in one of the poorest neighborhoods in the church. I don't mean poor by poverty standards, I mean poor in that your neighborhood, statistically, has one of the highest debt-to-income ratios in the state.” Bill hadn't been a great student to his culture. He didn't know anything about his neighborhood. “I suggest you host some form of financial literacy course at your church. The people who live around the church have a ton of personal debt, and they don't know how to get out of that. It's not just your neighborhood, it's the whole state. Have you heard of Dave Ramsey? Their financial courses are supposed to be helpful.” *Their? Dave Ramsey is a person, you idiot. Okay, and also an organization. Quit being a jerk, Bill.* Sharon and Bill just sat there for a moment, awkwardly staring at Gary.

“Okay. Thanks guys! See you at Thanksgiving.” Gary wheeled back around and was back at work. “Don't forget to pull the door a little bit when you leave, it gets a little sticky this time of the year.” Bill was a little leery of the ride home and what that would entail. He was a little worried of the potential freak out with Sharon, and was worried about his own reaction after just having spent time with his not-so-pleasurable brother-in-

law. The drive home was not at all what he thought would happen. It was Sharon who said the first words.

“I think Gary is right. I think I need to go back to work. To be honest, I get stir crazy every now and then, and most of the kid’s activities are during the evenings.” *What? Did I just hear you right? It took your brother saying that to you for you to get it?*

“Where are you going to work?” Bill was caught off guard so bad that he didn’t actually have anything to say. Sharon didn’t have any idea either.

“I don’t know. I’m sure I could find something. Maybe I’ll talk to Sarah and see if she knows of any openings at Ted’s company. I hear they have great benefits.” Sharon was right. Ted’s company had amazing benefits. Unlimited vacation. Full family benefits. They had gourmet cuisine in their cafeteria, and an actual orange tree in their lobby. *Please, Lord. Let Sharon get a job there.* Bill’s prayer was more for Bill than it was for Sharon. There was only one little problem with this work suggestion: Sharon was older. She was much older than most of the employees at Ted’s company. She’d be like a mom to a bunch of kids, a bunch of kids who were making more money than they needed. *What would she even do? She doesn’t have business skills! She has a ministry degree and a PhD in mommyhood.*

“Yeah, we’ll just need to check with Ted and Sarah.”

“Who is Dave Ramsey? I don’t think a Dave Ramsey goes to our church.” Bill could not help himself from laughing. He laughed until he almost cried. Laughed so hard that he had to actually pull over the car. At this point in the laughter session, Sharon was laughing to, but not because of what she said was funny, but because she hadn’t heard Bill

laugh like that in years. Bill laughed so hard that he made grown-man whiny noises about his side hurting.

“Really? Who is Dave Ramsey? Why is that so funny?”

“Dave Ramsey is a financial professional and has programs for how to get out of debt,” Bill could hardly contain the laughter.

“Oh! I thought Gary was talking about someone who went to our church. I didn’t want to correct him.” That was going to have to be the first step. If they were going to plan to get out of debt, make the best use of their finances, then Bill had to help Sharon find out who this Dave character was. Better yet, if they were going to improve their community, then they were going to have to host a financial class at their church, but what good was a class going to be for others if they had never gone through a financial class themselves. The rest of the day was fun, they laughed, giggled at Sharon’s expense, and were lovey-dovey with each other in the kitchen. For the first time in a long-time, there was a moment of hope for the both of them, and it was as easy as talking to someone they knew about finances.

Later that night, Bill’s fun and excitement was turned to more sadness. He had gone online to look for the nearest financial class, hopefully being hosted in a church. *Out of all places? Out of all of the churches in the county? Out of all of the churches in the state? Out of all of the churches in the world? It’s here?!* The posting for the next financial class was a week away, and it was being hosted at Michael Sloan’s church, and it was being led by Michael and his wife, Elizabeth. *Why is he leading this class? I wouldn’t care so much if it were just at his church, but why is he leading the class? Why does he have to talk? Why does he have to pray publicly? Why does he get to lead it? I bet he*

wipes with Benjamin Franklin's. What does he need to know about wealth and managing money? Why? Why? Why? Bill slammed his laptop lid closed and went into the kitchen to complain about it to Sharon.

"You're not going to believe this."

"I'm not going to believe what?"

"This stupid class is being hosted by Michael and Elizabeth!" Bill threw his hands up in despair. *Doesn't she know how bad I don't like Michael? Doesn't she know how much I want to be him?*

"I don't care. I'm still going and so are you." Sharon popped a carrot in her mouth and walked out of the kitchen. Bill grabbed about ten carrots and ran off to the garage. Ted had forgot to tell Bill about moderation, even if he was eating healthy things.

Lord, I'm so sick and tired of Michael. I get that he's doing me a favor because I've been going through the funk, but I'm getting really sick of him. Everywhere I turn, there he is. Everywhere I look, there he is. Everything I want to do, there he is. I bet he even goes to the gym at the same time. What Bill didn't know is that Michael worked out every day, but he was at the gym at 4AM, not 5:30AM. It was about the middle of this whine-fest/prayer that Bill's eyes wandered back over to the computer screen. There it was, in all of its glory, his folder of bookmarks, waiting to be unveiled. *Lord, I don't think this is a good time for you strutting more of your stuff.* Bill hadn't even noticed that his level of interaction with the Lord had increased, he just needed a sparring partner.

Before Bill decided to be beaten up by bookmarks, he figured he'd send an immediate e-mail to the elders about his idea of hosting a financial class later in the year, that is, after he and Sharon had already gone to one.

Hey men: I had an opportunity to sit down with my brother-in-law today and talked about the fiscal reality of our community. He alerted me to the fact that there's an overwhelming amount of personal debt, per family, where we live. I think it would be in our best interest to host a financial literacy course. I would love to lead it after Sharon and I have had the opportunity to familiarize ourselves with the material. I do know from some research I've done, that the cost per couple, or maybe even individual, is over \$100. I want to make sure that this course is easily accessible to our community, and I want to be able to scholarship at least 10 registrants. I think it will be a stretch for our church financially, but I think it will pay off in the way that we serve our community. Give it some thought and prayer and let me know what you all think. Blessings, B.

Bill hadn't even had the time to practice his lightsaber sounds on the way to the bookmarks before an email had come in. It was Terry. *That pesky elder. Probably e-mailing me to tell me he's formed another committee to talk about this financial class.*

After Bill read the email, he had to scrape his jaw up off the floor, but not in a good way.

Bill – Monica and I will cover all 10 of those packets, personally. I think this is going to be an incredible ministry for our church. If you would consider it, I would love for Monica and myself to teach this course. This is something very dear to us. Looking forward to hearing the details about this. In Him, Terry Albright.

What kind of wizardry is this? What kind of stunt is he about to pull? I can't even believe this. Terry is going to wreck this before it even happens. Bill dialed Terry's phone number immediately.

"Hello. This is Terry."

"Terry, this is Bill."

"Hi, Bill, I –." Bill cut Terry short.

"What on earth do you think you're doing?"

"Pardon me, I'm not sure I understand." Terry was legitimately confused.

"What are you doing? Paying for all of that registration material?"

"Don't you know our story, Bill?" Bill didn't know Terry's story, he had never taken the time to hear Terry's story, and didn't want to look dumb asking now.

“Hold on a second, Terry. I’m getting another call. Let me call you back.” Bill hung up the phone and went inside to ask Sharon if she knew the story.

“Of course, I know the story. Don’t you?” Bill was starting to feel really dumb. Didn’t he know one of his elders?

“I guess I don’t, please tell me.”

“Back in the 80’s, Terry and Monica lost everything. They went belly up, bankrupt, and were pretty much homeless. Had to have their kids stay with Terry’s mom for a couple of months until they could find a place to live. They’ve spent the last 25 or so years building up their wealth and, I’d say, have a pretty good track record with finances.” Bill was in complete shock.

“How have I never heard this before?”

“I don’t know, you don’t listen very well.” Sharon laughed at her husband. Terry wasn’t offering to pay for materials and lead the class because he was trying to take over the church, he was doing so because this was something that was very personal to him, it was something he was prepared to invest in. “Yeah, there’s nobody who knows better about being poor than Terry and Monica.” Bill had started to walk back to the garage in disbelief. *I don’t get this. I definitely don’t know my neighborhood if I don’t know the stories of my elders. Way to be a complete failure. You were about to accuse that man of treason and shoot him on the White House lawn.* Bill was lost in a weird mental state, imagining himself as Thomas Jefferson, shooting Terry Albright on the White House lawn for treason. Normally he wouldn’t have felt bad about this mental picture, but this time he felt guilty for his imaginary demise of someone he knew. Bill was glad that people couldn’t see into the cinematic universe that was his mind.

“Oh Bill,” Sharon was trying to grab his attention.

“Yeah?” Bill turned around.

“I think I got a job already at Ted’s company.” Bill couldn’t even stand to look at her. He had to turn around and walk to the garage because he couldn’t stand to make eye contact with his wife.

“Where are you going? What’s wrong,” she hollered at him. Bill didn’t know what to do with all of that good news. Bill was used to being sad. Bill began to weep. It was a good thing Bill had left Sharon behind because he is not a pretty crier. Bill also never called Terry back, but that was okay, Terry didn’t expect him to.

APPENDIX – FROM DISSERTATION

Building Optimism in Adults

The first step of learning optimism is to understand the ABC link. In the first part of this section are six scenarios presenting several adversities (A) and their consequences (C). Your job is to generate beliefs that would lead to the consequences described. There is no single correct answer. In order to judge whether the belief you come up with is correct, ask yourself whether, if you firmly held this belief, you would feel and act in the way specified in the consequence. The six examples are written for adults.

1. A. You plan a surprise weekend away for your spouse to celebrate their birthday. When you arrive at their office on Friday afternoon to whisk them away, they are annoyed and say they can't possibly go.
 B. You think _____
 C. You feel very embarrassed and your best to avoid them.

2. A. You plan a surprise weekend away for your spouse to celebrate their birthday. When you arrive at their office on Friday afternoon to whisk them away, they are annoyed and say they can't possibly go.
 B. You think _____
 C. You feel disappointed, but decide to treat yourself to a fancy lunch and movie in town.

3. A. Your spouse has been distant and distracted lately.
 B. You think _____
 C. You become increasingly irritable with them and notice yourself picking fights.
4. A. Your spouse has been distant and distracted lately.
 B. You think _____
 C. You become sad and withdrawn.
5. A. You run into your teenage child and their friends at the mall and they pretend not to see you.
 B. You think _____
 C. You laugh to yourself and plan to tease them about it later.
6. A. You run into your teenage child and their friends at the mall and they pretend not to see you.
 B. You think _____
 C. You become furious and storm over to them and their friends, demanding not to be ignored.

Now, let's take a look at these situations and see what types of beliefs would lead to these consequences.

1 and 2. In the first example, a personal, permanent, and pervasive belief such as "I'm always screwing things up. He's got a busy schedule and I act like he should drop everything for me" would lead to embarrassment and withdrawal. If instead you believed that "It was a good idea gone awry" or "He must be having a really tough week at work"

(both temporary, specific, and external), then you might feel disappointed, maybe frustrated, but you would not feel down about yourself.

3 and 4. In the third example, thoughts of trespass set off your anger and irritability: “They have no right to their moods out on me” or “They’re such a child. Whenever something is bothering them, they pout.”

In contrast, if you interpret their distance as a sign that they are losing interest in you, then sadness may be the consequence.

5 and 6. In the fifth example, external, specific and temporary interpretations, such as “Looks like my child is official an adolescent now,” will enable you to keep your sense of humor. If, instead, you view their behavior as a sign of impudence and disrespect, then you will end up feeling angry.¹⁸⁶

¹⁸⁶ *The Optimistic Child*, 144-146.

Self-Awareness Exercise

The following is a Self-Awareness Exercise to be used in tandem with mindfulness based meditation.

Body Scan

Let us begin by sitting comfortably for 2 minutes. Sit in a position that enables you to be both relaxed and alert at the same time, whatever that means to you.

Now, let us breathe naturally and bring very gentle attention to the breath. You can either bring attention to the nostrils, the abdomen, or the entire body of breath, whatever that means to you. Become aware of in breath, out breath, and space in between.

Scan Body*Head*

Now bring attention to the top of your head, ears, and back of your head. Notice sensations, or lack of sensations, for 1 minute.

Face

Now move your attention to your face. Your forehead, eyes, cheeks, nose, lips mouth, and inside your mouth (gums, tongue) for 1 minute.

Neck and Shoulders

Move your attention to your neck, the inside of your throat and your shoulders for 1 minute.

Back

Move your attention to your lower back, mid back, and upper back for 1 minute.

The back carries a lot of our load and stores a lot of our tension. So let us give our backs the kind and loving attention they deserve.

Front

Now move your attention to the chest and stomach for 1 minute. If it is possible for you, try to bring your attention to your internal organs, whatever that means to you.

Entire Body at Once

And now, bring your attention to your entire body all at once for 1 minute.

Scan for Emotion

Did you find any emotion in your body? If there is any, just notice its presence in the body. If not, just notice the absence of emotions, and catch one if it arises in the next 2 minutes.

Positive Emotion

Let us try now to experience a positive emotion in the body. Bring to mind a memory of a happy, joyous event or a time when you were optimal and productive or a time when you felt confident. Experience the feeling of positive emotion. Now, bring your attention to your body. What does that positive emotion feel like in the body? In the face? Neck, chest, back? How are you breathing? Any difference in the level of tension? Let us just experience it for 3 minutes.

Return to Grounding

Let us now return to the present. If you find an emotionally charged thought, just let it go. Bring your attention to either your body or your breath, whichever your

mind finds more stability in. And let's just settle the mind there for 2 minutes.

(Long pause) Thank you for your attention.¹⁸⁷

¹⁸⁷ *Search Inside Yourself*, 91-93.

*SPEAR*¹⁸⁸

Our bodies react to our emotional state at the physiological level and so to combat the effects of a low or high emotional intelligence we need to institute a physiological regimen produce good hormones when low emotional intelligence can produce bad hormones. The following is designed to help develop an exercise regimen:

- Set a goal
- Pick an exercise you like: one that is compatible with your schedule, fits in logistically with your life
- Enjoy, not only should you enjoy the activity, but allow music or the right companions, or sense of competition, to fulfill their roles.
- Always do your exercise: make it a high priority in your daily schedule. Don't allow exceptions to become the rule.
- Routine is extremely helpful

¹⁸⁸ *Putting Emotional Intelligence to Work*, 200.

List of Congregational Care Resources

- Books
 - Old Paths, New Power by Daniel Henderson (Prayer Training)
 - The Caring Congregation by Karen Lampe (Congregational Care)
 - Next by William Vanderbloemen (Pastoral Transition)
 - The Hidden Lives of Congregations by Israel Galindo (Congregational Systems)
- Websites
 - www.9marks.org (Congregational Care & Systems)
 - www.ministrymatters.com (Congregational Care)
- Articles/Blogs
 - <http://careynieuwhof.com/how-pastoral-care-stunts-the-growth-of-most-churches/>

Mock Modifiable Plan for Life

Physical

- Adequate sleep, 6-8 hours
- 30 minutes of physical exercise, 3-5 times per week
 - A local gym can create a customized workout plan tailored to you
- Maintaining a diet that limits, or restricts, processed food intake
- Annual checkups with a Physician for preventative care

Devotional

- Following a Bible reading plan
 - Keeping accountable to a group together
- Carving out blocks of time each day for prayer
 - Setting a timer each day
 - Inviting others to pray with you at the same time every day
- Weekly household prayer and Bible reading with spouse and children, if applicable

Ministry

- Capacity
 - Capacity should answer the question of, “What’s next?” and should seek to accomplish a goal that is far beyond our capacity and requires divine intercession. It answers the question, “What do we know to be the capacity of God?”
- Vehicle
 - Vehicle describes what the organization will do to achieve the vision

- The vehicle should be short and easily memorable
 - Alliteration is a useful method when considering vehicle development
- Pillars
 - Pillars dictate the behaviors of the organization
 - What needs to be done in order to accomplish the capacity and vehicle
- Gauge
 - Organizations should have metrics in place to know when they are being successful
 - Short term victories help foster the anticipation of larger ones
 - An example of short term victory: 1 baptism within the next month, or 1 new small group developed

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