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AMBITION AND LEADING TEAMS EFFECTIVELY

A THESIS PROJECT SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DOCTOR OF MINISTRY DEGREE
IN SERVANT LEADERSHIP

BY
NICHOLAS R. RUPORT
ST. PAUL, MINNESOTA

MAY 2021

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ABSTRACT

The problem that this project addressed was the impact of ambition and ambitious leaders in relation to team effectiveness. In response to this problem the researcher explored the biblical foundations of ambition and ambitious leadership, with special interest in one's ambition being aimed at knowing God more fully, fulfilling God's mission, and glorifying God. He reviewed literature related to CliftonStrengths, team leadership, and the practice of the first-among-equals in teams with attention to the CliftonStrength of Competition and its connection to ambition. He conducted two case studies by way of interviews with four pastors who had Competition as a top five CliftonStrength and six pastors who did not. From the thesis findings the researcher developed a set of eight strategic principles of successful team leadership for the ambitious pastor.

Of these eight principles, four of them were shared principles among all team leaders with an additional four principles being uniquely geared for the ambitious pastor to lead teams most effectively. The shared principles of team leadership for all pastors included being aimed at God (knowing God, glorifying God, fulfilling God's mission), providing stability, relational investment, and growth investment. The four unique principles for the ambitious leader included building trust, promoting unity, setting an example through one's work ethic, and creating, measuring, and celebrating wins. When applied, these principles would positively impact the team leadership of an ambitious and competitive pastor.

CHAPTER ONE: THE PROBLEM OF AMBITION

Statement of the Problem

As a response to the negative perspective of ambition in the church, the problem that this project addressed was the impact of ambition and ambitious leaders, or those with one of their top five CliftonStrengths in Competition,¹ in relation to team leadership and team effectiveness. Ambition is evidenced in the realms of organizational ambition, personal ambition, and spiritual ambition. When a church's ambition is to fulfill God's mission, a pastor's personal ambition is to glorify God, and a pastor's spiritual ambition is to know God more fully, each of these aspects are intricately connected. This combination of ambition defines what it means for ambition to be aimed at God.

Addressing this problem, the researcher explored ambition, both the positives and negatives, as described in Scripture and the influence that a leader's ambition had within the teams he or she led. He reviewed literature related to the CliftonStrength of Competition² and team leadership. He conducted case studies by way of interviews in two groups including those with Competition in their top five strengths and those without to determine how ambition impacts team leadership. The researcher compared the patterns from the two sets of interviews and from the thesis findings the researcher

¹ Tom Rath, *StrengthsFinder 2.0* (New York: Gallup Press, 2007). 69-72.

² Rath, 69.

developed a strategic set of eight principles of successful team leadership geared for the ambitious leader and pastor.

Delimitations of the Problem

The scope of the field research was limited to those serving as the lead or senior pastor of a local church who had been serving in this role or at this particular church for five or more years. The research focused exclusively on those who had already taken StrengthsFinder 2.0 to participate in this project and could articulate how their CliftonStrengths were utilized in their leadership.

Assumptions

This project assumed that the Bible provides several models of leadership for the local church. The second assumption was that the servant leadership model could be employed within many branches of leadership, including team leadership. The third assumption was that healthy teams are the best avenue for implementing change within organizations and churches. The fourth assumption was that an ambitious leader can lead change in the church individually but when a team takes the lead on change the church is able to handle it much more effectively.

Subproblems

The first subproblem was to research biblical evidence in both Old and New Testaments for the impact of a leader's ambition and how that ambition must be aimed at God. The second subproblem was to explore what current literature and academia revealed relating to the impact of the CliftonStrength of Competition in team leadership. This involved understanding how the ambitious team leader is influential in creating and growing healthy churches. The researcher examined writings about team leadership, Competition and CliftonStrengths, and ministry and leadership theses and articles.

The third and fourth subproblems were to identify and interview team leaders with and without the Clifton Strength of Competition to determine how their strengths were influencing their leadership. In the interviews with lead pastors, the researcher was looking to recognize patterns and connections between those with Competition and those without. The fifth subproblem was to identify the patterns that were specific to those with Competition. The sixth subproblem was to classify those practices that were effective for the ambitious team leader in leading teams well. The seventh subproblem was to develop a strategic set of principles of successful team leadership for the ambitious team leader.

Setting of the Project

The researcher conducted his research project while employed as a senior pastor of Majestic Pines Community Church (MPCC) and after his resignation and subsequent time away from vocational ministry. MPCC is an evangelical congregation of the Christian and Missionary Alliance (C&MA), located in the suburbs of Saint Paul, MN. The church celebrated twenty-five years of official ministry during the researcher's tenure. From the beginning to the end of the researcher's employment at MPCC in December 2019, the average attendance on a Sunday morning worship service was approximately 40 attenders. Attendance records indicated that the church's highest attendance averaged just over 200 attenders to the lowest point in 2019 with an average of 40 attenders. The rollercoaster seen in the attendance records indicated that the church had some levels of health and growth while the direct opposite can be said of other years.

A key negative result of these low attendance numbers was that approximately 60 percent of the budget had been spent on the mortgage and facilities, leaving very little finances available for ministry or staffing. The staffing situation during the researcher's

ministry was a stipend administrator and a half-time pastor with only 7 percent of the annual budget being given to actual ministry.

Due to the lack of financial stability at MPCC, decision-making and direction-setting were met with hesitation. There was hesitation to make big decisions as previous decisions had resulted in the current situation, but there was also hesitation and deliberations because no one wanted to make a mistake and lead the church to closure. No significant decisions or changes were made to the overall direction of the church during its most recent gap in pastoral placement. The expectation seemed to be that once a new pastor was installed the direction could be reset and the church could look to future health and growth. This was made more evident in that the pastor was 30-years old, while a near majority of attenders were retired. The expectation was that a younger pastor could help grow the church through younger families. In over two years of the researcher's ministry at MPCC, some conversations about direction had been met with hesitation and caution. There was hesitancy to make any change, even when the need for change had been observed by the leadership teams.

This was the first solo and lead pastorate for the researcher. As a leader, the pastor's primary CliftonStrengths were that of Competition and Achiever. As a competitor and achiever, the pastor was a driven and ambitious leader and desired to see health and growth occur, but for it to occur quicker than the church and elders preferred.

In addition to the pastor's personality and strengths, the pastor desired to be collaborative through implementation of a team leadership style. This was a never-ending struggle, considering the pastor's ambition and the leadership teams' hesitancy and

reluctance. In order to foster a collaborative environment and to lead the teams well, the pastor had to set aside the need for accomplishing goals and rapid change.

Importance of the Project

The Researcher's Vocational Calling

The motivation for this project came as a response to the researcher's own vocational calling. The calling to full-time vocational ministry for the researcher was established in 2004 shortly after conversion and has remained to this day. He has served in churches in excess of 750 and below 50 in many capacities including service in children's ministry, youth ministry, and as an associate and lead pastor. The researcher's most recent leadership role was as the lead pastor at MPCC, where he served for just over two years.

During those ten-plus years in ministry the researcher had never been involved in a fully collaborative, team-based leadership structure in the local church. Every leadership structure was primarily centered around the principal leader or pastor of that ministry. Others were invited to give insight as needed, but the general structure of leadership was hierarchical.

This project was important to the researcher because he desired to develop a collaborative, team-based leadership atmosphere while also growing a healthy ministry at a local church that utilized the strengths of each leader. The researcher's personality and strengths to achieve and compete drove him to see not only effective change, but efficient change. In order to grow in his own ministry leadership, the researcher undertook this project to study the role of ambition in team leadership.

Ambition and the Local Church

At MPCC, the most widely used model for ministry in its history had been hierarchical. The leaders and pastors of the church had been out front, leading the charge and shepherding the people of God as solo leaders. These were effective for a time in ministry. In recent years, the church had found itself in a place of decline. Due to the nature of this decline, it was important to re-evaluate the direction and vision, but also the structures and models of ministry employed. Twenty-five years was a long time for practices and methods to become ends in and of themselves, so it was important for MPCC to evaluate all of the ministries of the church, along with all of the leadership structures, to determine how to best navigate the decline of recent years.

To that end the importance of this project for the local church was to make proper adjustments in their leadership structure, while also recognizing and utilizing the strengths of their leadership teams. These were determined to be essential for the growth and health of MPCC.

Ambition and the Church at Large

Outside of MPCC, it has been reported that the church at large is experiencing plateau or decline in approximately 80 percent of all churches in the United States.³ There were many reasons for this decline, such as the decline of populations in rural towns, denominational mistrust, and the general secularization of America. Another reason was that pastors and church leaders continue to be expected to not only be caring shepherds, but phenomenal teachers, exciting visionaries, master theologians, and on the

³ Aubrey Malphurs, "The State of the American Church: Plateaued or Declining," The Malphurs Group, August 18, 2018, <https://malphursgroup.com/state-of-the-american-church-plateaued-declining/>.

list continued. The local church pastor has been compared to other celebrity pastors regularly and could not compete.

Pastors have been attempting to fulfill roles and responsibilities they were not uniquely qualified or gifted for. This resulted in further frustration, burnout, and resignation. Churches and organizations have needed to find ways to allow their leaders to function from their strengths, while collaborating with other leaders whose strengths filled the void left by the others' weaknesses. One way that this could be done was through collaborative, team-based leadership, which this project analyzed.

It is foundational that church leaders understand the impact of their strengths and their ambition in building and growing healthy teams and churches. This project provided those ambitious leaders and pastors with appropriate practices for leading collaborative teams well, all while functioning within their own strengths and personality.

Nature of the Research

This research was qualitative in nature with multiple case study as the primary research method. Case study was utilized because of its investigative nature which allowed for the researcher to engage with other leaders' strengths and their implementation and practice of those strengths more deeply. The secondary data, used to supplement these case studies, included biblical and theological resources and relevant secular literature, including books and articles that highlighted aspects of leadership theory and practical team-leadership implementation that were relevant to the problem and subproblems of this study. A final source of secondary data was the findings from the team leaders' StrengthsFinder 2.0 assessments.

Project Overview

The researcher first reviewed Scripture and literature related to the study. He looked at the role of ambition in leadership and examples of that ambition in Scripture concluding by having presented a theology of teams. Then the researcher examined the impact of the CliftonStrength of Competition in team leadership and how the ambitious team leader was influential in creating and growing healthy churches. This was done by studying team leadership, the ambitious team leader and the need for such a leader in churches, and how the ambitious team leader could serve the church as the agenda-setter, decision maker, and change implementer.

The third and fourth steps in the research were to identify and interview lead pastors who fit the parameters of this project including those with and without the CliftonStrength of Competition. The next step in the process was to collect, organize, analyze, and synthesize all the data gathered from the interviews in order to recognize patterns among the two groups of interviews. The sixth step was to compare the findings from both case studies, along with any pertinent information from the biblical and theological study and literature review, in order to classify what particular practices are effective for leading teams well. Finally, the researcher took these findings in order to develop a strategic set of principles of successful team leadership for ambitious leaders.

CHAPTER TWO: A BIBLICAL-THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATION OF AMBITION IN THE CHURCH AND MINISTRY

Ambition in the New Testament

A quick survey of open pastoral positions within the researcher's denomination revealed themes and phrases used frequently to describe the type of pastor and leader that local churches are looking to hire: humble, evangelistic, people-person, biblical preacher, biblically trained, strategic, bold and caring, team player, and the like.⁴ Churches have been looking for the right persons who could join them in worshipping the Lord and honoring his name in ways that were relevant to that particular culture and church.

The descriptions of “competitive” or “ambitious” were never seen on a search committee's pastoral profile. Ambition may often be construed negatively as more of a vice than that of a virtue.⁵ This helps to explain why churches and other organizations similar to churches (such as denominational leadership teams or seminaries) neglected to include this particular strength as something sought for in potential pastoral candidates.

In light of this neglect, ambition was an interesting study as it is only as valuable, or as harmful, as the motivation behind it, or rather the target before it. Ambition is necessary in church leadership so long as a leader's ambition is to glorify God, know God more fully, and fulfill God's mission.

⁴ “Serve: US Church Openings,” The Christian & Missionary Alliance, accessed October 12, 2020, <https://www.cmalliance.org/serve/#us-church>.

⁵ Glen Pettigrove, “Ambitions,” *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice* 10, no. 1 (January 2007): 53.

The intent of this biblical-theological study was to review relevant passages of Scripture that addressed ambition and the value that ambition aimed at God could produce in church ministry and leadership. While ambition is often viewed negatively throughout Scripture there are various references to godly ambition or to those who ambitiously sought to fulfill God's mission. However, there are also warnings against selfish ambition or ambition that is aimed primarily at one's own benefit. Each of these types of ambition must be addressed to better understand the value of godly ambition in leadership and ministry.

Warnings Against Ambition

Paul used the term sometimes translated "selfish ambition" twice in his letter to the Philippians (Phil. 1:17; 2:3). In each of these instances, Paul warned his readers that this specific type of ambition had no place in the life and leadership of the local church.

Introducing the Philippian Church

The first biblical mention of Philippi was in Acts 16 in which Luke wrote of Paul and his companions,

From Troas we put out to sea and sailed straight for Samothrace, and the next day we went on to Neapolis. From there we traveled to Philippi, a Roman colony and the leading city of that district of Macedonia. And we stayed there several days (Acts 16:11-12).⁶

This introduction of Philippi as a Roman colony was significant, for as G. Walter Hansen writes, "By reading Philippians in the light of the Roman character of Philippi

⁶ Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture citations are from The Holy Bible, New International Version (Colorado Springs, CO: International Bible Society, 2011).

and the importance of the imperial cult in this city, we gain an appreciation for the significance of Paul's report of his witness."⁷

The city of Philippi was a key location for two great battles that took place on the plains west of the city. The first was the defeat of Julius Caesar's assassins, Brutus and Cassius, by the forces led by Octavian and Mark Antony.⁸ Following that, Mark Antony was defeated by Octavian who was later renamed Caesar Augustus and presented as the only legitimate successor of Caesar,⁹ which led to a significant number of Roman generals moving to this city where they would live luxuriously.¹⁰ Connected with this were the Roman ideals of wealth, power, and prestige, which could always be gained through social advancement. Even the "full name of the colony itself – Colonia Augusta Julia Philippensis – broadcast its proud history of military glories and magnificent conquests by reference to its notable founders and benefactors."¹¹ Lastly, Philippi was a city of approximately 15,000 residents (3% Roman elites, 20% Roman farmers, 37% service groups of which one-third were Romans and two-thirds Greeks, 20% poor, and 20% slaves).¹² James W. Thompson describes the Roman elite further: "Romans owned

⁷ G. Walter Hansen, *The Letter to the Philippians*. The Pillar New Testament Commentary, ed. D.A. Carson (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2009), 3.

⁸ Ekaterini Tsalampouni, "Citizens of Heaven in *Res Publica Colonia Philippensium*: Constructing Christian Identity in The Roman Colony of Philippi," *Sacra Scripta* 16, no. 2 (2018), 129.

⁹ Tsalampouni, 130.

¹⁰ Charles B. Cousar, *Philippians and Philemon: A Commentary*. The New Testament Library (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009), 4.

¹¹ Gordon Zerbe, *Philippians*. Believers Church Bible Commentary (Harrisonburg, VA: Herald Press, 2016), 28.

¹² Dennis Hamm, *Philippians, Colossians, Philemon*. Catholic Commentary on Sacred Scripture, eds. Peter S. Williamson and Mary Healy (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013), 63.

most of the land and dominated local institutions.”¹³ Ambition, as evidenced above, was essential to the culture in which the Philippian Church would seek to develop and grow.

In Acts 16, Luke described Paul’s ministry in Philippi as different from that in many other cities. Luke noted that Paul and his companions did not go to the synagogue to preach the Gospel of Jesus to the Jews, as was their common practice, but instead on the Sabbath they went outside the city down to the river to find a place of prayer (Acts 16:13). While this was a different tactic from that used elsewhere, Mikeal Parsons argues that it was not necessarily out of the ordinary. He writes, “It was not unreasonable to search for a Jewish community near water.”¹⁴ This was a known practice: Josephus wrote that Jews “may make their places of prayer at the seaside, according to the customs of their fathers.”¹⁵ Yet, Paul did not find a group of Jewish men, or even Jewish women, meeting together. Instead, he found a group of Gentile God-fearing women. This revealed that Philippi did not have a “quorum of ten Jewish men necessary for the establishment of a synagogue.”¹⁶ The Philippian Church would not grow due to the conversion of Jewish people from the local synagogue, but rather would grow through the conversion of Gentiles entrenched in this Roman culture of Philippi. Further evidences of this were the first conversions in this city, the Gentile Lydia and her household (Acts 16:14-15) and a Philippian jailer and his household (Acts 16:25-34). In addition, the slave girl delivered

¹³ James W. Thompson, “Philippians,” in *Philippians and Philemon*. Paideia Commentaries on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2016), 4.

¹⁴ Mikeal Parsons, *Acts*. Paideia Commentaries on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 229.

¹⁵ Josephus, *Antiquities*, 14.10.23, accessed October 12, 2020, http://www.attalus.org/old/aj_14b.html#185.

¹⁶ Hansen, 4.

from a spirit may also have been one of the first converts in the Philippian Church (Acts 16:16-18), but there was no formal evidence to support this claim. Luke introduced the Philippian Church as that of being primarily constructed from Gentile believers, the same Gentile believers who were surrounded and influenced by the Roman culture of ambition previously referenced.

Introducing the Apostle Paul

In light of the church consisting of those influenced by such an ambitious culture, there was no one better, perhaps, to reach out to them and preach the Gospel than the Apostle Paul. Paul wrote of his own ambition and achievements,

If someone else thinks they have reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for righteousness based on the law, faultless (Phil. 3:4-6).

In this passage, Paul was listing his ascribed and achieved honors in the form of a Roman *cursus honorum*.¹⁷ The ascribed honors were those he received or inherited at birth such as being born to the tribe of Benjamin, of the people of Israel, and circumcised on the eighth day. The achieved honors are those that Paul sought out and accomplished by his own efforts, such as becoming a Pharisee and upholding the Law. While all of Paul's honors were impressive, each type of honor revealed insightful background into the life of Paul and as such were used by Paul to highlight his achievements as well as his spiritual and leadership credentials.¹⁸

¹⁷ Joseph H. Hellerman, *Philippians*. Exegetical Guide to the Greek New Testament, eds. Andreas Kostenberger and Robert Yarbrough (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2015), 176.

¹⁸ Moises Silva, *Philippians*. Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, 2nd ed., eds. Robert Yarbrough and Robert Stein (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 141.

In reference to the ascribed honors, none of these could be achieved or changed by personal efforts. While they were received at Paul's birth and first days, they functioned as markers of prestige.¹⁹ Each of these distinctions ascended upward from one degree to another, each one higher than the one before.²⁰ There were few who could compete with Paul's ascribed prestige or status. George Hunsinger writes, "In short, from whatever standpoint – law-observant, ethnic, tribal, or cultural – Paul commands the highest ascriptive status."²¹

Paul also listed his achieved credentials. These achieved honors were not inherited, but instead were chosen and accomplished. Paul's commitment to become a high-ranking Pharisee, to have lived with and under the Law, and to have studied as a disciple under Gamaliel gave him extremely high status in rabbinical circles.²² It was from this high status that Paul sought out ambitiously, with zeal, to persecute the Church for its supposed heresy and false teaching. Paul used stronger language of this ambition in Galatians where he wrote, "For you have heard of my previous way of life in Judaism, how intensely I persecuted the church of God and tried to destroy it" (Gal. 1:13).

Additionally, Paul wrote that he was faultless. Joseph Hellerman believes Paul's claim was not that he had satisfied all of God's demands, but rather that the focus of his faultlessness was to be viewed horizontally in comparison to other humans, rather than to

¹⁹ George Hunsinger, *Philippians*. Brazos Theological Commentary on the Bible (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2020), 93.

²⁰ Hunsinger, 93.

²¹ Hunsinger, 94.

²² Cousar, 71.

being faultless in comparison with Jesus or God.²³ Paul argued in Philippians 3 that in comparison to most others in this world, none could stand as faultless and as nearly perfect as he was. He was a Hebrew among Hebrews (Phil 3:5) and knew the life of ambition well, as did many of those in the Philippian Church.

These achievements and credentials were primarily used for a theological purpose.²⁴ That purpose was to present all of Paul's accomplishments as rubbish compared to knowing Jesus Christ (Phil. 3:7-8). Paul was ambitious in his own right and had achieved much in his life that was worth boasting about, however, the greatest of Paul's boasting was done not in his accomplishments but in knowing Christ. Paul's ambition shifted from his own personal ambition to an eternal ambition of knowing God more fully, glorifying God, and fulfilling God's mission.

Warnings Against Selfish Ambition

The Apostle Paul was an ambitious man of God who not only inherited high status and honors but earned them by his own efforts as well. Paul's life would have been understood by those in the Philippian Church for they grew up and lived in a culture that valued such honors, perhaps even desired similar honors of their own. In his epistles to various churches, Paul made several references to ambition. While the focus of this project were those references to the church in Philippi, it was imperative that a few of his other references be reviewed as well.

Paul used the term *eritheia* (translated as "selfish ambition") twice in non-Philippian epistles while listing negative actions and attitudes to avoid. To the

²³ Hellerman, 180.

²⁴ Silva, 141.

Corinthians, he wrote, “For I am afraid that when I come I may not find you as I want you to be, and you may not find me as you want me to be. I fear that there may be discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, slander, gossip, arrogance, and disorder” (2 Cor. 12:20). Similarly, to the church in Galatia he wrote,

The acts of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God (Gal. 2:19-21).

In the first list to the Corinthians Paul was describing his worry about what he would find in the Corinthian church as he prepared to visit for a third time. It highlighted patterns of sin in the church that may not yet have been addressed and he further wrote that they would be held accountable for their immorality.²⁵ This list of vices was similar to that found in Galatians 2 and Paul warned the Corinthians that he would act with boldness and authority against the church if these vices were found among them.²⁶

In the Galatians passage Paul warned of fifteen sinful acts of the flesh including selfish ambition. While this list was not meant to be exhaustive, the vices listed were commonly known.²⁷ Yet, it is important to recognize that Paul did not refer to these as vices, but rather as works of the flesh, which meant that Paul regarded “the behaviors listed not as regrettable character traits nor as poor moral choices, but instead as the manifestation of a malevolent power that, apart from Christ and his Spirit, determines

²⁵ George H. Guthrie, *2 Corinthians*. Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, 1st ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2015), 501.

²⁶ Colin Kruse, *2 Corinthians: An Introduction and Commentary*. Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, vol. 8, ed. Eckhard J. Schnabel (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2015), 275.

²⁷ Martinus C. de Boer, *Galatians: A Commentary*. The New Testament Library (Louisville: Presbyterian Publishing Corporation, 2011), 357.

human life for the worse.”²⁸ Selfish ambition, along with the rest of the works of flesh, were described as part of the sinful, human condition.²⁹

In his letter to the Philippians, Paul addressed ambition several times, emphasizing two specific warnings against selfish ambition. Selfish ambition was not the primary theme of the epistle. Rather, the primary motivation for Paul’s writing Philippians was the advance of the Gospel (Phil. 1:12-25).³⁰ Yet, selfish ambition caused disunity in the church and hindered the Gospel’s advancement, resulting in Paul having addressed it several times in the letter. As such, selfish ambition was one of the primary oppositions to Paul directly.³¹ There were a number of potential oppositions to the Gospel that could be derived from Philippians, as many as eighteen different opponents, but there was only one primary opposition to Paul directly and that opposition was the selfish ambition of his opponents.³²

Selfish Ambition in Philippians 1:17. The first instance in Philippians where Paul warned against selfish ambition occurred in the passage in which Paul emphasized his main motivation to advance the Gospel (Phil. 1:12-25). In the midst of Paul’s reporting of the advancement of the Gospel, he wrote:

It is true that some preach Christ out of envy and rivalry, but others out of goodwill. The latter do so out of love, knowing that I am put here for the defense of the gospel. The former preach Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing that they can stir up trouble for me while in chains. But what does it

²⁸ de Boer, 357.

²⁹ de Boer, 357.

³⁰ Hansen, 19.

³¹ Hansen, 25, 28.

³² Hansen, 28.

matter? The important thing is that in every way, whether from false motives or true, Christ is preached. And because of this I rejoice (Phil. 1:15-18).

Frank Thielman argues that in this passage Paul was explaining how the Gospel had advanced through the preaching of his rivals.³³ Paul divided those preaching the Gospel into two distinct camps: those who preached out of goodwill and those who preached out of envy and rivalry. The former were described as being motivated by love and knowing the truth of Paul's suffering.³⁴ The latter were motivated by selfish ambition, assuming they could make Paul's suffering worse.³⁵ Yet, after having described these two groups, Paul concluded with a remarkable ending: Both preach Christ and in this he rejoiced. After all they sought to do against Paul, the rivals succeeded in doing the one thing that mattered most to Paul in that they had preached Christ. This was Paul's ultimate ambition, for he wrote in Romans, "It has always been my ambition to preach the Gospel where Christ was not known" (Rom. 15:20). These preachers, whether from good will or from selfish ambition, had proclaimed and advanced the Gospel, fulfilling what was Paul's own ambition.

It is impossible to truly identify the rivals in this passage, or precisely why they sought to add to Paul's suffering by preaching the Gospel and advancing their own agendas. Thielman articulates, "As the balanced rhetoric of the passage shows, Paul's concern is not with the groups themselves but with the advancement of the Gospel."³⁶

³³ Frank Thielman, *Philippians*. The NIV Application Commentary, ed. Terry Muck (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 61.

³⁴ Thielman, 61.

³⁵ Thielman, 61.

³⁶ Thielman, 62.

Thielman further argues that even the stance of either group does not matter to Paul,³⁷ but in this the researcher does not agree, for if the motivation or the stance of both groups did not matter, then there seemed little reason for Paul to structure this passage in such a way as to compare and contrast the two parties so intricately. Instead, as Lynn Cohick writes, “It serves as a warning to the Philippians.”³⁸ There was a disconnect between the rivals’ mouths and hearts.³⁹ While preaching the true message of the Gospel of Christ, they failed to allow that message to penetrate their own relationships, especially with Paul.⁴⁰ So while these rivals preached Christ ambitiously, they had failed to allow that same Gospel to transform their own hearts and it was this that Paul was warning the Philippians to avoid.⁴¹

In this context, the Apostle Paul’s warning was not against ambition in general. Rather the warning was against a particular type of ambition referred to as selfish ambition. This was an ambition that was motivated by one’s own agenda and not the advancement of the Gospel of Christ. Yet even though these rivals preached Christ for their own purposes and influence, Paul still rejoiced (Phil. 1:18). Paul could, and did, rejoice that the Gospel of Christ was proclaimed, regardless of his own feelings towards his rivals and their personal motives.⁴²

³⁷ Thielman, 62.

³⁸ Lynn Cohick, *Philippians*. The Story of God Bible Commentary, eds. Tremper Longman III and Scot McKnight (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2013). 46.

³⁹ Cohick, 48.

⁴⁰ Cohick, 47-48.

⁴¹ Cohick, 48.

⁴² Homer A. Kent Jr., “Philippians” in *Ephesians through Philemon*. The Expositor’s Bible Commentary, vol. 11, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981), 112.

Selfish Ambition in Philippians 2:3. The second instance in which the Apostle Paul warned against selfish ambition was in Philippians 2: “Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves” (Phil. 2:3). Cohick notes that many of the same phrases used in the previous warning of Philippians 1 are used here as well, noting a similarity in the overall context of the message.⁴³ Paul’s language in Philippians 2 referred to a manipulating and maneuvering which was derived from selfish ambition.⁴⁴

After having exhorted the Philippians to be like-minded and united, Paul then warned them against doing things out of selfish ambition, that is, to avoid those things that divide the gathering of believers. Gordon Fee argues that Philippians 2:3 fits into the overall message of this passage, arguing for the church to unite in their shared, common life in Christ.⁴⁵ The primary warning of this passage against selfish ambition stemmed from a self-centered mindset.⁴⁶ It was this type of self-centeredness that destroyed community.⁴⁷ Fee goes so far with this as to argue, “Selfish ambition stands at the heart of human fallenness. . . . People with such a ‘mindset’ not only stand over against the apostle, their dear friend, but also over against God.”⁴⁸

⁴³ Cohick, 46.

⁴⁴ Cohick, 46.

⁴⁵ Gordon Fee, *Paul’s Letter to the Philippians*. The New International Commentary on the New Testament, eds. Ned B. Stonehouse, F.F. Bruce, and Gordon D. Fee (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1995), 138.

⁴⁶ Grant R. Osborne, *Philippians. Verse by Verse* (Ashland: Lexham Press, 2017), 50.

⁴⁷ Fee, *Paul’s Letter to the Philippians*, 138.

⁴⁸ Fee, *Paul’s Letter to the Philippians*, 154.

Paul's prior use of selfish ambition in Philippians 1 was used to describe egocentric preachers who were rivals or opponents of Paul, but this usage in chapter two, argues Grant Osborne, was describing a person willing to divide the group or church over a selfish personal agenda.⁴⁹ This was an important distinction for the selfishly ambitious preachers of Philippians 1 did not seem to be seeking to divide the church, but rather to increase their own influence as they advanced the Gospel. Osborne further argues that the term for "vain conceit" (Phil 2:3) is the flipside of selfish ambition in that a person would seek a meaningless self-glorification that helped no one and accomplished nothing aside from stroking a person's ego.⁵⁰

Selfish ambition and vain conceit, as used in Philippians 2:3, were the contrast to humility. A humility that was a particular mindset best described in the Christ hymn (Phil. 2:5-11) that followed this passage in reference to Jesus' life. In this hymn, Paul would argue that Christ's humility was the standard for evaluating the worth of others and our actions towards them.⁵¹

Selfish or Godly Ambition?

In reviewing the warnings against selfish ambition in Philippians 1:17 and 2:3, there did not appear to be any warning against ambition in general. The issues that Paul took with the selfish ambition of the preachers and that of other believers, was how it revealed one's own lack of transformation into the image and likeness of Jesus Christ.

⁴⁹ Osborne, 50.

⁵⁰ Osborne, 50

⁵¹ Richard Melick, *Philippians, Colossians, Philemon*. The New American Commentary, Vol. 32, ed. David S. Dockery (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 1991), 78.

When one ambitiously sought out his or her own personal agenda, for their own purpose and glory, the church was divided, and that person revealed their own lack of imitating the way of Jesus Christ in humility.

In other passages, such as 1 Thessalonians 4:11, Paul argued for believers to be ambitious and to take care of our own affairs as an act of love for the Church and Jesus.⁵² Ambition, then, was one's ultimate goal and the motivation to accomplish that goal.

Jesus' Response to His Disciples Ambition

Jesus also had much to say about ambition, though not directly. In the Gospel of Mark 9-10, there were two key incidents in which the disciples argued and sought their own greatness. The disciples' words and actions revealed their ambition for greatness and Jesus responded by teaching his disciples that their ambition should not be for greatness. Instead, their ambition should be aimed at God and seeking personal humility.

The Disciples' Ambition for Greatness

Mark wrote about the first incident with the disciples,

They came to Capernaum. When he (Jesus) was in the house, he asked them, "What were you arguing about on the road?" But they kept quiet because on the way they had argued about who was the greatest. Sitting down, Jesus called the Twelve and said, "Anyone who wants to be first must be the very last, and the servant of all." He took a little child whom he placed among them. Taking the child in his arms, he said to them, "Whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me does not welcome me but the one who sent me" (Mark 9:33-36).

This episode occurred immediately after Jesus' second announcement of the passion, his own crucifixion and death, which was forthcoming. This was an important contextual insight as the conversation on the road should have included a reflection on

⁵² Melick, 78.

what Jesus had just told them about his impending death. Camille Focant argues that the disciples' "preoccupations are even at the extreme opposite of those of Jesus, since they are concerned to know who is the greatest (Mark 9:34); they believe they are on a way of preeminence."⁵³ While Jesus was preoccupied with his mission to redeem sinful humanity, the disciples were preoccupied with their own glory as followers of Jesus.

The disciples' conversations were inappropriate and in contrast to the way of Jesus, as he had taught them. Nicole Duran, Teresa Okure, and Daniel Patte argue that the disciples "lack communal solidarity to be sustained in a key kind of kinship relation and instead pursue a path of their honor."⁵⁴ The disciples' hearts were estranged from the heart of Jesus and as Jesus taught and lived out perfect humility in service to God and others, the disciples further considered their own honor and glory.

There was a real narrative irony in this scene and the primary explanation for the disciples' misguided conversation had to do with their own ambition – their goal for greatness and the motivation that brought with it. In order to illustrate, Jesus used a child in his teaching. In this culture, a child such as the one Jesus used in teaching his disciples was regarded as a minor or someone without status and easily ignored.⁵⁵ Yet, Jesus used this child to show that to receive the Father and to receive Jesus himself was to receive those overlooked and ignored. To be a disciple one had to choose humility, as Jesus himself had consistently done. The disciples' goal and ambition was not to be their own

⁵³ Camille Focant, *The Gospel According to Mark: A Commentary*, trans. by Leslie Robert Keylock (Eugene: Pickwick Publications, 2012), 379.

⁵⁴ Nicole Wilkinson Duran, Teresa Okure, and Daniel M. Patte, *Mark. Texts@Contexts* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2011), 65.

⁵⁵ Kim Huat Tan, *Mark. New Covenant Commentary Series*, eds. Michael F. Bird and Craig Keener (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2015), 127.

greatness, glory, or honor, but to have honored those considered unworthy and overlooked in the name of Jesus.

The Ambition of James and John

One chapter later, despite those private lessons, it would seem that the disciples still had not fully grasped the teachings of Jesus. David Garland writes, “The life to which Jesus calls disciples to live requires a fundamental change of perspective, to think the things of God.”⁵⁶ Through Mark 9 the disciples had continually shown their incomprehension and blindness.⁵⁷

In this second incident two disciples approached Jesus to ask that their greatness be increased by Jesus in glory. Mark wrote,

Then James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came to him. “Teacher,” they said, “we want you to do for us whatever we ask.” “What do you want me to do for you?” he asked. They replied, “Let one of us sit at your right and the other at your left in your glory.” “You don’t know what you are asking,” Jesus said. “Can you drink the cup I drink or be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with?” “We can,” they answered. Jesus said to them, “You will drink the cup I drink and be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with, but to sit at my right or left is not for me to grant. These places belong to those for whom they have been prepared.” When the ten heard about this, they became indignant with James and John. Jesus called them together and said, “You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Mark 10:35-45).

⁵⁶ David E. Garland, *A Theology of Mark’s Gospel*, Biblical Theology of the New Testament, ed. Andreas Kostenberger (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015), 408-409.

⁵⁷ Garland, 408.

Kim Huat Tan rightly argues, “James and John approach Jesus with a request that has, as its credit, boldness, but as its debit, rank self-centeredness.”⁵⁸ These disciples wanted their share of greatness and prominence because they still believed that Jesus was headed for glory and triumph.⁵⁹ This type of self-centeredness was similar to that warned against by Paul in Philippians.

Jesus challenged both disciples’ understanding and commitment. While they committed in word to be able to face whatever awaited them on their path to this glory, the other disciples became angry. This caused Jesus to turn from focusing on just the two ambitious disciples and to teach the whole group, yet again, about the new perspective that those belonging to the community of God must have. Great ones would not be tyrants and rulers would not lord it over others but, instead, those who were great were those who were humble and served.⁶⁰

Jesus ended this teaching with the supreme model of such humility and servanthood: himself – the Son of Man.⁶¹ Jesus’ motivation for humility and servanthood was revealed in this conclusion. The coming of the Son of Man was not to be served, but to serve. The first places are measured by one’s service to God and others,⁶² and the

⁵⁸ Tan, 142.

⁵⁹ William C. Placher, *Mark. Belief: A Theological Commentary on the Bible*, eds. Amy Plantinga Pauw and William C. Placher (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011), 150.

⁶⁰ Placher, 150-151.

⁶¹ Kent Brower, *Mark: A Commentary in the Wesleyan Tradition*. New Beacon Bible Commentary (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 2012), 284.

⁶² Focant, 425.

ambition of all leaders was not to be aimed at being served but, in imitating the ways of Jesus, to humbly serve.

Peter's Appropriate Ambition

Jesus taught his disciples that their ambition should have been to serve God humbly (Mark 9:33-36, 10:42-45). That message was not easily understood by the disciples, yet at the end of John's gospel Peter was confronted with the reality of what it meant to be humble and ambitiously follow after Jesus.

After his death and resurrection, Jesus appeared before some of the disciples and challenged Peter three times to feed and tend to his lambs – to be a shepherd and love Jesus' sheep just as Jesus had (John 21).⁶³ While there are different terms used by Jesus to instruct Peter to love, “what is important about this passage is not the varieties of love but Jesus' charge to love as he has loved. Peter's love for Jesus should translate into his care of Jesus' flock.”⁶⁴

As Jesus, the Great Shepherd, had faced death for his flock, now Peter was being called by Jesus, himself, to do the same.⁶⁵ Peter had previously volunteered to follow Jesus to the cross but had failed to do so. Jesus was giving Peter another chance to follow him, ultimately to death and the cross.⁶⁶ Peter did not pass up this chance. On his own

⁶³ Gail R. O'Day and Susan E. Hylan, *John*. Westminster Bible Companion, eds. Patrick D. Miller and David L. Bartlett (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), 203.

⁶⁴ O'Day and Hylan, 203.

⁶⁵ Craig Keener, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*, vol. 2 (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 2003), 1237.

⁶⁶ Keener, 1238.

cross, “Peter would be given grace to glorify God in his death, having previously failed Christ because of his fear of death.”⁶⁷

As Garland has noted, following Jesus required a change of perspective to the things of God.⁶⁸ The rest of Peter’s life was now to be lived in the shadow of the cross, just as Jesus’ was.⁶⁹ Peter finally overcame his own pride and self-centeredness and focused his ambition on following Jesus and loving like him.

The Changing Nature of the Disciples’ Ambition

While Jesus never explicitly approved or condemned ambition in general, his teaching regarding true greatness revealed that ambition must be aimed at God. Instead of his disciples seeking their own honor and glory, Jesus instructed them to seek humility and to humbly serve God and others in his name. Instead of the disciples setting personal goals for recognition and worth, Jesus instructed them to follow him, even unto their own punishments and deaths.

Ambition according to Jesus, as evidenced in his teachings on greatness, service, and humility in the passages above, came down to one’s ultimate goal and the motivation for accomplishing that goal. For the disciples early on in Jesus’ ministry, their motivation was their own greatness, honor, and glory. As Jesus continued to teach and humbly serve others, the disciples were confronted with their selfish ambition and were able to change

⁶⁷ Richard D. Phillips, *John – Volume 2: Chapters 11-21*. Reformed Expository Commentary (Phillipsburg: P&R Publishing Company, 2014), 717.

⁶⁸ Garland, 409.

⁶⁹ Andreas J. Kostenberger, *John*. Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), 598.

their perspective to ambitiously seek the things of God, as evidenced with the responses and life of Peter in John 21 and other New Testament epistles.

At the conclusion of the New Testament Gospel of John, the disciple Peter, fearing for his life, questioned Jesus on the future of another disciple wondering if he too would face the same fate and challenges that Peter would? Jesus responded, ““If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you? You must follow me”” (John 21:22). The Gospel of John concluded with Jesus reminding Peter to keep his eyes, his heart, his goals, and his ambitions on following Jesus. Peter’s ambition had to be knowing God more fully, glorifying God, and fulfilling God’s mission.

Benefits of Godly Ambition

Ambition had, and continues to have, a role in the life and leadership of the Church. That role can be used to serve God and his purposes, or to serve one’s own self and purpose. Paul had been born with specific honors but had earned others through his own achievements and accomplishments. Compared to nearly everyone else, Paul was faultless (Phil. 3:6). Yet, Paul then described in more detail how his ambition changed upon knowing Jesus Christ:

But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith. I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead.

Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward

the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus (Phil. 3:7-14).

Paul's newest ambition was the preaching and advancement of the Gospel (Rom. 15:20). Paul articulated how his ambition had changed from achieving his own honors and prestige to knowing Jesus and making him known to the world (Phil. 3). In the first paragraph of this passage from Philippians 3, Paul made clear again that he wanted to know Jesus Christ and in the second paragraph Paul articulated how he strived ambitiously to know him.

Paul's Former Ambition

Paul expressed that, while his ascribed and earned honors were of value, they were nothing compared with the surpassing value of knowing Jesus Christ his Lord (Phil. 3:7-11).⁷⁰ Dean Flemming argues that verse 7 serves as a dramatic turn, or a great reversal, in Paul's own life due to the transforming personal encounter that he had with Jesus on the Damascus road.⁷¹

Whereas Paul seemingly had it all at one point in his life, he did not really have anything until he had Jesus (Phil. 3:7). This is further evidenced as Paul wrote, "not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ" (Phil. 3:9). Paul may have been blameless according to the standard of the law, but that righteousness fell short of God's righteousness. Instead of having his own righteousness, Paul argued that he sought to have that righteousness that is grounded in

⁷⁰ Dean Flemming, *Philippians: A Commentary in the Wesleyan Tradition*. New Beacon Bible Commentary (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 2000), 165.

⁷¹ Flemming, 165.

Christ's faithfulness.⁷² Stephen Fowl further argues that this transition in Paul's own life changed the standards by which Paul would measure success and failure.⁷³ It was no longer about his own ascribed or achieved honors, but rather success or failure would be defined by the measure to which he knew Christ.

Much of the rest of the paragraph described what Paul meant by seeking to know Christ. "To know Christ" was not amassing data about Jesus but about the "fundamental reality of Paul's life, the relationship which suffuses all that he is and does."⁷⁴ Paul expressed this with the imagery of profit and loss or asset and liability.⁷⁵ The first expression of knowing Christ began for Paul by considering his former way of life, his achievements and ascribed honors, as rubbish or as loss. (Phil. 3:7-8). The second way of knowing Christ was by profit or by gaining Christ and being found in him (Phil. 3:8-9). Fowl addresses a concern with the idea of adding Christ by writing, "Christ is no longer a commodity to be gained but a place, a home where the lost Paul is found."⁷⁶ To be found in Christ and to gain Christ, according to Paul, led to knowing Christ (Phil. 3:10-11) and to view one's own life in the light of this knowledge.

⁷² Stephen Fowl, *Philippians*. The Two Horizons New Testament Commentary, eds. Joel B. Green and Max Turner (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2005), 151.

⁷³ Fowl, 151.

⁷⁴ Marcus Bockmuehl, *The Epistle to the Philippians*. Black's New Testament Commentaries (London: A. & C. Black, 1998), 206.

⁷⁵ Fowl, 161.

⁷⁶ Fowl, 161.

Paul's New Ambition

In the next paragraph of Philippians 3, Paul wrote about how knowing Christ impacted his next steps and his ambitions. Paul made what Gordon Fee refers to as a “striking change of metaphors.”⁷⁷ The metaphor shifted from profit and loss to that of running a race or marathon. In this passage Paul looked back to the past, embraced the present, and emphasized his pursuit of the final goal.

In looking to the past, Paul wrote that he was forgetting what was behind (Phil. 3:13). Fee argues that the past to which Paul referred is what was written in verses 4-6, about his own ascribed and earned honors.⁷⁸ Paul had cast that aside, forgot it, and did not look back. Just as a runner would not look back and risk getting passed on the other side by a competitor, so too any person who would seek after Jesus could not look back in comparison with others.

In embracing the present, Paul noted that he had not yet arrived at his goal (Phil. 3:12). Paul saw himself with new eyes and in a new light and thus sought to do exactly what he instructed the Philippians to do: to “press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me” (Phil. 3:12). “To press on” was a term denoting one’s vigor, for in the same way that he vigorously persecuted the Church, and in the same way a runner must know his or her present course and condition, Paul was now vigorously pressing on to know Christ.⁷⁹

⁷⁷ Gordon Fee, *Philippians*. The IVP New Testament Commentary Series, ed. Grant R. Osborne (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press Academic, 1999), 152.

⁷⁸ Fee, *Philippians*, 152.

⁷⁹ J.A. Motyer, *The Message of Philippians*. The Bible Speaks Today, eds. J.A. Motyer and John R. W. Stott (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press Academic, 1984), 171.

Finally, in emphasizing his new pursuit, Paul strained toward what was ahead (Phil. 3:13). The picture in mind here was that of a runner coming down the home stretch, leaning forward, and extending out to be the first to cross the finish line.⁸⁰ Paul pressed on toward what was ahead, toward the ultimate goal, in order to win the prize. Fee concludes that the goal was God's eschatological conclusion of things and the prize was Christ and knowing him.⁸¹ G. Walter Hansen's comments would support Fee's argument to a degree. Hansen's view of Paul's goal is a bit more personal in that the goal was either the return of Christ, God's eschatological conclusion of things, or being with Christ at death. Either of these options would essentially lead to the same ultimate conclusion. Just as the runner would ambitiously seek to cross the finish line, Paul ambitiously sought after the prize of knowing Jesus Christ.

Paul further clarified this type of new ambition that to ambitiously know Christ should lead to reaching others for Christ in 1 Corinthians 9:

Though I am free and belong to no one, I have made myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law), so as to win those not having the law. To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some. I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings (1 Cor. 9:19-23).

Although Paul was free in his knowledge of Jesus Christ and he had ambitiously sought to know Jesus, that knowledge served Paul to also fulfill the mission of Jesus to reach others with the Gospel. Paul used his ambition and his knowledge of Christ to preach the

⁸⁰ Fee, *Philippians*, 155.

⁸¹ Fee, *Philippians*, 155.

Gospel and to make Jesus known to people groups and lands as far as he was able to go. Paul's ambition to know Christ was not focused on church growth, but rather on serving God by reaching and serving others.

Godly Ambition Defined

In Philippians 3, Paul expressed his own ambition in terms pressing on toward the goal, forgetting the past, and straining toward what was ahead. Each of these terms described godly ambition, which the *Baker's Dictionary of Christian Ethics* defines as the desire for fulfillment or achievement of the good for God.⁸² This supports the thesis of this biblical and theological study that ambition must be aimed at God – knowing him, glorifying him, and fulfilling his mission. There were warnings to consider and actions to be wary of, as ambition for selfish purposes or reasons would only lead to pride and sin. In direct opposition to selfish ambition, the godly ambition of a leader could bring about and express God's goodness in the ministry, work, and lives of his followers.

Biblical Models of Ambitious Leadership

The studies done in Paul's epistle to the Philippians and Jesus' responses to his disciples' ambition in Mark 9-10 gave further evidence that a leader's ambition must be to fulfill God's mission, know him more fully, and glorify him. Two examples in Scripture that model this type of godly ambition include Nehemiah rebuilding the walls and gates of Jerusalem and the aspirations of one seeking to be an elder and overseer of the local church.

⁸² Walter H. Johnson, "Ambition" in *Baker's Dictionary of Christian Ethics*, edited by Carl F.H. Henry (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1973), 18.

The Ambitious Leadership of Nehemiah

The first chapters of Nehemiah were a narrative describing the return of many of God's people to their homelands and the challenges and goals accomplished by the people, as led by Nehemiah. Nehemiah ambitiously led the people to overcome various obstacles and issues and utilized his position with the king and his position with the people to see them through.

While there are many areas of Nehemiah's leadership worthy of study, it must be noted that the book of Nehemiah is not a leadership how-to or treatise on godly leadership. Instead, Nehemiah was simply a man who utilized his passion, his strengths, and his ambition in order to lead God's people to better days that better reflected the community in relationship with God. By having led God's people back to relationship with God, Nehemiah provided various aspects of ambitious leadership that are valuable for church leaders today.

Ambitious Leadership is Driven by Prayer

In the book of Nehemiah, the main character was a Jewish man who would become known as both a prophet and political leader.⁸³ Nehemiah became known as the man who rebuilt the walls of the destroyed city of Jerusalem and helped to restore a stable Jewish community following their return from exile.⁸⁴ It was in the first chapters of Nehemiah where the reader was not introduced to someone known for such ambitious feats, but rather, as someone who was known only as the cupbearer of Artaxerxes, ruler

⁸³ Sara E. Karesh and Mitchell M. Hurvitz, "Nehemiah" in *Encyclopedia of World Religions: Encyclopedia of Judaism*, 2nd ed. (New York: Facts on File, 2016).

⁸⁴ Karesh, "Nehemiah."

of the Persian empire (Neh. 1:11). It was also in the first chapter of Nehemiah where the reader became aware that the narrative surrounding Nehemiah began with him in prayer to God.

Nehemiah had just heard from his brother Hanani and other Jews that the walls and gates of Jerusalem had been destroyed and were still laying in ruins. While the gates and walls were likely to have been destroyed years ago when Jerusalem was besieged and the people exiled, it was because Cyrus had permitted Babylonian Jews to return and restore the temple years prior that this news came as a shock to Nehemiah.⁸⁵ Some 50,000 people accompanied Sheshbazzar and returned to their homeland.⁸⁶ Years later it was reported to Nehemiah that the walls and gates were still in ruin and the people were in great trouble. This news brought Nehemiah to God in prayer. While it is outside the scope of this project to delve deeply into all of the specifics of Nehemiah's prayer, there were a few key statements which point to Nehemiah's leadership and ambition being aimed at God.

First, Nehemiah addressed God in his prayer, as the God of heaven and the one who keeps his covenant of love with those who love him and follow him (Neh. 1:5). Nehemiah's prayer began by acknowledging a great and awesome God, not some local deity. Additionally, the words of Nehemiah's prayer reflected that he had knowledge of God beyond that of a generic god out there somewhere. Nehemiah knew the history of his people with God and the covenants that God had established with them. This knowledge

⁸⁵ Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Ezra-Nehemiah*. The Old Testament Library, 1st ed., eds. Peter Ackroyd, James Barr, Bernhard W. Anderson, and James L. Mays (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Publishing Corporation, 1988), 40.

⁸⁶ Blenkinsopp, 39.

led Nehemiah to begin his prayer in adoration of God.⁸⁷ The focus of Nehemiah's attention, in light of the disgrace his people faced in Jerusalem, was that of the personal, covenant God of Israel. Derek W. H. Thomas further argues that "The prayer in fact shows us that Nehemiah's mind is saturated with God, whether it be God's greatness, or faithfulness, or redemptive love."⁸⁸ This is further evidenced by Nehemiah's steadfast trust in God in this prayer: first by his deep understanding of who God was and secondly by his thorough knowledge of God's word.⁸⁹ The steadfast trust Nehemiah had in God, his knowledge of God's word, and his attention of focus being solely on the Lord, God of heaven, each gave strong evidence that Nehemiah's ambition was aimed at God.

A second important consideration for Nehemiah's ambition being aimed at God is evidenced in verse 9 of his prayer. After Nehemiah acknowledged that God told his people they would be exiled and scattered if they continued to act wickedly, God said, "but if you return to me and obey my commands, then even if your exiled people are at the farthest horizon, I will gather them from there and bring them to the place I have chosen as a dwelling for my Name" (Neh. 1:9). Repentance was the keynote of Nehemiah's prayer and through much of this prayer Nehemiah repented for the people of God as a nation.⁹⁰ Nehemiah did not just remind God in his prayer that God promised to

⁸⁷ Derek W. H. Thomas, *Ezra and Nehemiah*. Reformed Expository Commentary, eds. Richard D. Phillips and Philip Graham Ryken (Phillipsburg: P&R Publishing Company, 2016), 211.

⁸⁸ Thomas, 211.

⁸⁹ Mervin Breneman, *Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther*. The New American Commentary, Vol. 10 (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 1993), <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/betheluniversity-ebooks/reader.action?docID=729931>.

⁹⁰ Leslie C. Allen and Timothy S. Laniak, *Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther*. Understanding the Bible Commentary Series, eds. W. Ward Gasque, Robert L. Hubbard Jr., and Robert K. Johnston (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2012), 89.

return his people to their homeland, instead he remarked that God would bring them to the place he had chosen as a dwelling for his Name (Neh. 1:9). Nehemiah's prayer suggested that he and God's people knew they were not getting back to their homeland for their own sakes and for their own comforts or glory, but rather when they repented and were gathered back by God, it was for God. Their return was not aimed at their own benefit but was aimed at glorifying God.

One final aspect of Nehemiah's ambition being aimed at God as evidenced in his prayer, was that this was just one of nine prayers shared by Nehemiah in this book.⁹¹ Most of Nehemiah's prayers were short, but the repetitiveness of Nehemiah having gone to prayer nearly once every chapter in the book revealed that his focus and life were aimed at God.

At this juncture, there was little in the way of ambition being evidenced. As a preface to the mission and ambition of Nehemiah this prayer gave support that this ambitious leader was driven by prayer and had a focus of heart and mind on the Lord, God of heaven.

Ambitious Leaders Gain Support and Build Successful Teams

In Nehemiah 2 the mission for which he had been called by God to fulfill was presented. Nehemiah, burdened by the disgrace and trouble of his people in a land he had never been to, determined a course of action which would result in the walls and gates of Jerusalem being restored, amidst opposition and obstacles. In this second chapter,

⁹¹ Breneman, *Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther*.

Nehemiah provided an example that the ambitious leader must gain support and build successful teams.

The first example was found as Nehemiah had sought support for his mission from his superior and boss, the ruler of the Persian Empire – Artaxerxes. After having been questioned by the ruler for his sad demeanor and sharing that the city of his ancestors still lied in ruins, the king asked pointedly, “What is it you want?” (Neh. 2:4). In response, “Then I prayed to the God of heaven, and I answered the king, ‘If it pleases the king and if your servant has found favor in his sight, let him send me to the city in Judah where my ancestors are buried so that I can rebuild it’” (Neh. 2:4-5). This further confirmed that Nehemiah was a man of prayer aimed at God, but also that amidst his own burden and sorrow, Nehemiah sought the support of the great and mighty ruler of Persia, with whom he had a subordinate relationship.

Fortified by his appeal to the Lord God and having been confident in the quality of his service, Nehemiah was encouraged to boldly request the king’s support not only in this burden, but also in the actual rebuilding of the walls and gates.⁹² Nehemiah wrote, “‘And may I have a letter to Asaph, keeper of the royal park, so he will give me timber to make beams for the gates of the citadel by the temple and for the city wall and for the residence I will occupy?’ And because the gracious hand of my God was on me, the king granted my requests” (Neh. 2:8). Nehemiah, having recognized the ambitious nature of this mission from God, sought the support and aid even of those who did not acknowledge the Lord God as such. In doing so, with divine agency (God) as the sole

⁹² Edwin Yamauchi, “Ezra, Nehemiah” in *1 and 2 Kings, 1 and 2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, Job*. The Expositor’s Bible Commentary, vol. 4, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1988), 685.

motive force behind the ruler's authorization of aid, the support and supplies needed for this mission had been approved and received.⁹³

With the support of the king and with aid from his supply, Nehemiah went to Jerusalem and inspected the walls firsthand (Neh. 2:13-15). Upon his inspection, Nehemiah reported to several others with him,

Then I said to them, "You see the trouble we are in: Jerusalem lies in ruins, and its gates have been burned with fire. Come, let us rebuild the wall of Jerusalem, and we will no longer be in disgrace." I also told them about the gracious hand of my God on me and what the king had said to me. They replied, "Let us start rebuilding." So they began this good work (Neh. 2:17-18).

The language used by Nehemiah and by those in response revealed a team-like approach to the mission. The trouble of the fallen walls and gates was upon all of them. They, together, had to rebuild the wall so they, together, were no longer in disgrace. And in response the others with him agreed that they, together, would begin this good work of rebuilding the walls and gates.

The mission, while given specifically to Nehemiah by God, was aimed at God but for the people together. Nehemiah understood this, shared with them that the gracious hand of the Lord had been on him, and brought the people together to do the work. While those who joined with him did so under Nehemiah's authority, Nehemiah sought their support in order to build teams that would fulfill this mission of God for the people.

Ambitious Leaders Delegate Leadership and Work to Others

Nehemiah 1 provided support that ambitious leaders such as Nehemiah drove their ambition for God by prayer. Nehemiah 2 gave evidence that ambitious leaders

⁹³ David J. Shepherd and Christopher J.H. Wright, *Ezra and Nehemiah*. The Two Horizons Old Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2018), 54.

would seek the support of others and build successful teams as a means of accomplishing a great work. Nehemiah 3 provided the reader with another important aspect of ambitious leaders: ambitious leaders delegate leadership and work to others.

A survey of Nehemiah 3 and the paragraph divisions given it by translators of the Bible indicate that there were at least ten gates that needed repairing along the wall and each of them was repaired and fixed by a different person and team of people. Between these gates were various sections of walls and each of those was repaired by a different person and team of people. Under the leadership, motivation, and organization of Nehemiah, ordinary folk with no special skills noted for repairing gates or walls worked together in a way that achieved a great deal in a relatively short amount of time.⁹⁴ Over forty different groups were identified and together they worked, relied on God's promises, practiced neighbor-love, and exercised loyal faith in a project they believed to be at the heart of God's design.⁹⁵

In Nehemiah 3, with the shift from first-person narrative to third-person, the reader would not find Nehemiah taking sole credit for the rebuild but instead he delegated the work and distributed the credit generously to those involved.⁹⁶ With an ambitious project from the Lord, Nehemiah was able to accomplish it through teams of people working together on mission.

⁹⁴ Thomas, 237-238.

⁹⁵ Thomas, 238.

⁹⁶ Matthew Levering, *Ezra and Nehemiah*. Brazos Theological Commentary on the Bible (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2007), 137.

Nehemiah's Model of Ambition

The first chapters of Nehemiah provided an appropriate understanding for how godly ambition – ambition aimed at God – could be used well in service of God and others. Nehemiah, like other ambitious leaders, was driven by his knowledge of God and prayer, sought support from others and built successful teams, and delegated to those teams in order to achieve a lofty goal. Nehemiah 1-3 stands as an important and positive model for ambitious leadership aimed at knowing God, fulfilling his mission, and glorifying him.

The Ambitious Leadership of Elders

The Apostle Paul wrote several personal letters of encouragement to leaders in the church, such as Timothy and Titus. In one of those letters, First Timothy, Paul provided a framework for local church leadership and eldership structure. While the scope of this project was not to address the fullness of that framework, it did model ambitious leadership aimed at God.

Church Leadership Structure and Function

The Apostle Paul wrote to his protégé Timothy, “Here is a trustworthy saying: Whoever aspires to be an overseer desires a noble task” (I Tim. 3:1). Paul followed this introductory statement in regard to church leadership, or eldership, with a list of qualifications and specifications that a person must have fulfilled in order to qualify to serve in such leadership.

At the very end of the list of qualifications for church leaders, such as elders and deacons, Paul wrote, “Although I hope to come to you soon, I am writing you these instructions so that, if I am delayed, you will know how people ought to conduct themselves in God’s household, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and

foundation of the truth” (1 Tim. 3:14-15). While this passage was indicative of Paul having described the role of elders and deacons, it was also that of the church’s structure and foundation of local church governance. Thomas P. Lea and Hayne P. Griffin Jr. write of Paul’s purpose with this passage, “Since Paul here viewed the church as God’s family, it is more likely that he applied these statements to the entire Ephesian church and not merely to Timothy.”⁹⁷ This perspective coincides much better with the first-among-equals style of leadership that is emphasized in both the Old and New Testaments. While not all agree with this, J.R. Briggs and Bob Hyatt do affirm that Scripture does, “offer specific elements of the character of church leaders.”⁹⁸ Similarly, Gene Getz argues that “the Bible is very specific about the character of those who serve as church leaders.”⁹⁹ Character, according to Paul, was integral to the health of a local church.

It is these qualifications for church leaders that gave new light to understanding church governance, structure, and function. For one, Paul commented that the qualifications for elder, although similar to deacon, were more stringent. In her commentary on 1 Timothy, Aida Besancon Spencer argues that the term used for overseer in this passage was a synonym of the term used for elder in others and that both roles served as leaders, shepherds, stewards, and managers over God’s household.¹⁰⁰ She

⁹⁷ Thomas D. Lea and Hayne P. Griffin, Jr, *1, 2 Timothy and Titus*. The New American Commentary, vol. 34 (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1992), 122.

⁹⁸ J.R. Briggs and Bob Hyatt, *Eldership and the Mission of God* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2015), 55.

⁹⁹ Gene A. Getz, *Elders and Leaders: God’s Plan for Leading the Church* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2003), 13.

¹⁰⁰ Aida Besancon Spencer, *1 Timothy*. New Covenant Commentary Series, eds. Michael F. Bird and Craig Keener (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2013), 79.

further notes that the role of deacon was that of servant, which included some leadership roles, but often was not the case.¹⁰¹

The pattern of church governance displayed in 1 Timothy taught that the primary leaders, elders or overseers, were over the sub-leaders, deacons. The term used for serving tables in Acts 6 is the Greek word for deacon.¹⁰² In this case, some aspects of church governance have held a common structure from the formation of the early church in Acts to its forming years.

The Ambition of Church Leadership

The foundation of church leadership was the elders or overseers of the church. These people must have been those of great faith and great character, as evidenced by the list Paul provided. The beginning of that framework in 1 Timothy 3:1 had set the standard for those in church leadership to be people of godly ambition.

First, Paul started this section on making reference to a person's ambition as he wrote in regard to a person "aspiring" to be an elder, which meant that they also desired the noble task of such leadership. Both terms, aspiring and desiring, brought with them the concept of ambition, but as has been stated from the outset of this biblical review, for any ambition to be godly was an ambition that was aimed at God. The appointment, selection, or election of a church elder, according to Paul, was to first be the candidate's own desire.¹⁰³

¹⁰¹ Spencer, 90.

¹⁰² Philip Graham Ryken, *1 Timothy*. Reformed Expository Commentary, eds. Richard D. Phillips and Philip Graham Ryken (Phillipsburg: P&R Publishing Company, 2007), 123.

¹⁰³ Alexander Strauch, *Biblical Eldership: An Urgent Call to Restore Biblical Church Leadership* (Littleton: Lewis and Roth Publishers, 1995), 281.

In one sense there was a concern that a person desiring or aspiring to an office of authority, such as elder or church leader, would be seeking position and prominence for their own benefit. However, as suggested by George T. Montague, Mary Healy, and Peter S. Williamson, “Perhaps then, as now, there were sacrifices entailed in accepting leadership in the Church.”¹⁰⁴ To aspire to be a church leader should never have its source from one’s own ambition, but rather, should be sourced by one’s own character and convictions, which will have shown themselves in that person’s service to God and others prior to appointment.

Raymond Collins, in his commentary on 1 Timothy, defines the term used by Paul to aspire as “striving after something good, even the kingship.”¹⁰⁵ Adding to this, Ralph Earle writes, “One needs to be sure that such a desire is not an expression of carnal pride, but that rather it reflects a deep consecration to the work of the church.”¹⁰⁶ The motivation behind one’s aspirations or ambitions to be an elder or church leader, could not come from the basis of one’s own pride or seeking one’s own prominence. Rather, a leader’s ambition must have been aimed at God and his mission. The ambitious church leader must have aspired to take on the responsibility of leading God’s people on to God’s agenda.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁴ George T. Montague, Mary Healy, and Peter S. Williamson, *First and Second Timothy, Titus*. Catholic Commentary on Sacred Scripture, eds. Peter S. Williamson and Mary Healy (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 74.

¹⁰⁵ Raymond F. Collins, *I and II Timothy and Titus*. The New Testament Library (Louisville: John Knox Press, 2002), 79.

¹⁰⁶ Ralph Earle, “1 and 2 Timothy” in *Ephesians through Philemon*. The Expositor’s Bible Commentary, vol. 11, ed. Frank Gaebelin (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981), 363.

¹⁰⁷ Henry T. Blackaby and Richard Blackaby, *Spiritual Leadership: Moving People on to God’s Agenda* (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2011), 36.

A Theology of Teams

John Kotter argues that one reason an organization might fall short of expectations is because it failed “to create a sufficiently powerful guiding coalition.”¹⁰⁸ Like organizations, churches can often fail because of their inability to create a healthy leadership team. Teams in churches, therefore, are vital to their effectiveness in terms of advancing the Gospel and mission of Jesus.

Teams in Biblical Perspective

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth (Gen. 1-2). From the first to the last page of the Bible the Creator of the universe worked as a team – a trinity. God created by means of His Word and Spirit. The model of teamwork and team leadership is found perfectly in the work and relationships of the Trinity.

The Old Testament evidence suggests that the nation of Israel was led by teams. This was not something they chose for themselves, but rather the Lord instructed Moses to tell the nation how their leadership would be structured (Deut. 1:12-15). The structure that God implemented was one of a team-based approach, with multiple leaders having come together to oversee the various tribes. Israel, a large nation at this time, was instructed to utilize a team-based approach to leadership evidenced by the various leadership roles of Moses or Joshua, the high priest, the Levites, and even the roles stipulated within the Levitical structure. The reason for this could go back to the way in which God created life as a team, but also in how the Trinity called Israel to be his people and to imitate him.

¹⁰⁸ John Kotter, *Leading Change* (Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 1996), 6.

In the New Testament, a strong image of team-based approach to ministry is found in the image of the body. The Body of Christ (1 Cor. 12) was described as being many parts, yet one body. A functioning body needs all members to work in unison to continue to give it life. In the same way a functioning team, or church, needs all members to work in unison, in growing relationship to be effective.

Godly Ambition

Arrogance and selfish ambition have no place in church leadership. This is the essence of the warnings of ambition from the Apostle Paul and Jesus. Ambition that is aimed at God, however, is an ambition that is aimed at knowing God more fully, glorifying God, and fulfilling God's mission. This type of godly ambition is exemplified in the leadership narrative of the book of Nehemiah and in the encouragements and exhortations of the Apostle Paul to Timothy and other local churches.

Throughout this study it has been repeated that ambition is valuable and necessary when it is aimed at God. Ambition is a desirable attribute when understood and expressed properly and it is essential in some church leaders, for it provides the drive and desire necessary to carry the burdens, joys, and responsibilities of leadership.¹⁰⁹ In short, ambition is the fuel of leadership.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁹ William D. Lawrence, "Distinctives of Christian Leadership" *Bibliotheca-Sacra* 144, no. 575 (July – September 1987), 323.

¹¹⁰ Lawrence, 323.

CHAPTER THREE: COMPETITION AND AMBITION IN TEAM LEADERSHIP

Team Leadership

Since a leader is only a leader so long as there are followers, the reality for most pastors is that they must know how to navigate team leadership in the churches where they lead. This is especially true for the competitive and ambitious leader as his or her personality and drive can often come into conflict with other leaders in the church. This is a concern for all leaders because church conflict can harm those in the church, obscure God's glory, and hurt the advancement of the Gospel as the world watches the church's relational struggles.¹¹¹

It is the thesis of this chapter that ambitious team leaders are influential in creating and/or growing healthy churches, teams, and organizations. While other types of leaders can be influential or effective in this capacity the emphasis of this chapter was in relation to the ambitious team leader.

Effectiveness of Teams in Churches

Near the beginning of their practical work in regard to building healthy teams in churches, Ryan Hartwig and Warren Bird write, "You need an outstanding team because it sets the pace for almost everything in the life of your church."¹¹² The core and center of

¹¹¹ Scott Maurer, "Conceptualizing and Engaging with Pastoral Authority" (D. Min diss., Bethel Seminary, 2017), 10.

¹¹² Ryan T. Hartwig and Warren Bird, *Teams That Thrive: Five Disciplines of Collaborative Church Leadership* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2015), 33.

the local church is Christ, yet the ministry and life of the church is often driven by how a team of hired and elected leaders in the church determine Christ's leading. Team effectiveness, then, is an integral aspect to the life of the church.

Models of Church Leadership

There are occasions where the leadership model of the church can be noticed by simply attending a worship service. In some churches, an attender will find that the pastor does the majority of the work and makes the majority of the decisions. This can be witnessed during a worship service when the pastor welcomes everyone, recites the prayers, gives all of the announcements, leads the singing, preaches the sermon, and gives the benediction, and does not share the platform or pulpit with anyone else. In this case there is a fairly high probability that this church practices a top-down, or perhaps hierarchical, model of leadership. If, on the other hand, you were to attend a church's worship service and the pastor gives the sermon but there are other people leading the various components, then the probability goes up that the leadership model used is that of team leadership. If you attend a third church and each component of the service is led by a team of people with each team consisting of both paid and volunteer staff, then you may be at a church that follows a shared leadership model.

Each of these models brings to the church aspects of biblical truth. Each of these models can be interchangeable, to an extent, within various ministries within the same church. Each of these models can work effectively depending on the church's culture and setting. While there are many models and many interpretations of those models available for churches to adopt or adapt there are three which are more commonly practiced models of church leadership including the hierarchical model, the shared model, and the team

model. Each model brings value and structure to the church but they also bring many obstacles that the local church needs to overcome.

Hierarchical Leadership Model

The hierarchical leadership model has a history that goes back generations and is often reflected more in small churches, as there may be a lack of spiritually mature, aspiring leaders in the local church. In these cases, the pastor often serves similar to how a CEO would of a small business. The pastor or leader carries the majority of the decision-making authority and is able to direct change with limited counsel or even limited accountability. There may be a team of leaders near the top of the pyramid chart for the church but often that leadership “team” serves more as support group for the pastor or as a fire department to help the pastor get things back to the status quo when emergency issues arise.¹¹³ In this model the leadership structure is organized into ranks or orders, each of which is subordinate to the rank above it.¹¹⁴

The biblical evidence for such leadership can be derived by reviewing the ministry of Jesus. He was the leader of his disciples and the large groups that followed him. Rarely, if ever, did Jesus consult with the disciples about how to cast out demons, heal the sick, or preach the Gospel. Instead, he did what he knew to do and the disciples served as learners, giving little counsel. Historically, it is argued, “From apostolic times the hand of God has rested upon certain men, most often associated with a local parish or

¹¹³ Hartwig and Bird, 30.

¹¹⁴ Charles R. Ryrie, *Basic Theology* (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1986), 407.

congregation.”¹¹⁵ Additionally, it is argued that the bond between the hierarchy of the church and the church itself, as instituted by God, are so closely knit that there can be no church without a hierarchy.¹¹⁶ As evidenced, the hierarchical model has foundations biblically and historically. One of its primary benefits as an effective church model is that it can produce change more quickly. In summary of what Justin Irving often said in class, “If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together.”¹¹⁷ The hierarchical model allows for churches to adjust faster to the changing culture.

There are some issues to take with the hierarchical model of leadership in the church. For one, as written by Charles Ryrie, “The hierarchical church was a postbiblical development.”¹¹⁸ While there is evidence that the Church would follow a hierarchical model at different points of her history that did not mean it was God’s intended plan. Additionally, in regard to church leadership, the hierarchical model became more prevalent years after the development of the Church. In modern times, the hierarchical model has come to connote a social structure which is authoritarian, dominative, patriarchal, and static.¹¹⁹ In light of this, George Cladis argues that this old-style of church government is having a difficult time adjusting to the postmodern world which places a higher level of value on collaboration, accountability, and authenticity, which is

¹¹⁵ Paige Patterson, “Single-Elder Congregationalism,” in *Four Views on Church Government: Who Runs the Church?* ed. Paul E. Engle and Steve B. Cowan (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), 133.

¹¹⁶ John Papadopoulos, “On the Hierarchy of the Church,” *The Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 1, no. 2 (March 1955), 142.

¹¹⁷ Justin Irving, “What is Team Leadership?” (lecture, Bethel Seminary, St. Paul, MN, June 21, 2017).

¹¹⁸ Ryrie, 407.

¹¹⁹ Terence L. Nichols, “Hierarchy and the Church,” *Pro Ecclesia* 4, no. 3 (Summer 1995), 281.

often lacking in the hierarchical model.¹²⁰ The lack of trust people have in an individual today, as compared to a team, has made this model much tougher to implement and practice in the church.

Shared Leadership Model

The shared leadership model for church ministry is often noted for its flexibility, as leadership can rotate fluidly in any given situation with decisions becoming more collaborative.¹²¹ Craig Pearce and Jay Conger write that shared leadership “is an activity that is shared or distributed among members of a group or organization.”¹²² Teams that utilize a shared leadership model are gaining momentum, which has enabled others to give input, make decisions, and take ownership of the organization’s vision.¹²³ People want to be further invested in the decisions of the churches they are involved in, rather than simply providing financial support for others to do the work and make decisions.

A suggested biblical portrait of the shared leadership model is in the shared unity of the Triune God. In the creation account of Genesis, “God said, ‘Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness’” (Gen. 1:26a). Later on in the biblical account of Isaiah God said, “Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?” (Isa. 6:8). These two references of God bring many scholars to see the partnership shared within the Triune God, which can also be expressed in church leadership. Hartwig and Bird write “Christianity is

¹²⁰ George Cladis, *Leading the Team-Based Church: How Pastors and Church Staffs Can Grow Together into a Powerful Fellowship of Leaders* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1999), 21.

¹²¹ John Alexander Harrison, “Shared Leadership: Bringing the Local Church Back to its Biblical Roots of Leadership” (D. Min diss., Bethel Seminary, 2017), 23.

¹²² Craig L. Pearce and Jay A. Conger, eds., *Shared Leadership: Reframing the Hows and Whys of Leadership* (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2003), xi.

¹²³ Harrison, 10.

unique among major religions in presenting one God who eternally exists and functions as a divine team. This fact certainly undergirds the idea of God's people likewise working in unity through teams."¹²⁴ As God works within a shared model, so too, can the local church.

Whereas the hierarchical model allows for quick adaptations and changes within a church, the shared leadership models allows for the local church to approach any obstacles with a focus on the long-term needs of and benefits to the church. While change may come more slowly as decisions can become delayed, this model allows for a deeper and more broad review of changes that could occur within a church and forces the church to strategize with a long-term framework.

John Alexander Harrison presents an in-depth study of both the benefits and challenges of shared leadership. The issues of shared leadership and the challenges churches face who follow this model include group think, inadequate accountability, ambiguity of leadership, resistance to structure, and bogged down decision-making.¹²⁵ Additionally, the shared leadership model must often be adopted across the full spectrum of church leadership teams and ministries, which may force additional bylaw or governance changes. Each of these must be addressed and considered when a church adopts such a model.

Another significant issue with the shared leadership model is its biblical basis being the shared leadership within the Trinity. It is a fair assessment that God is Trinity and that he is three distinct persons, yet one God. The specific working among the

¹²⁴ Hartwig, 44.

¹²⁵ Harrison, 109-112.

Godhead, however, is often construed as being fully shared as noted above. This inner working is not directly or distinctly clear in the canon of Scripture. One must be sure not to make this rhetorical move from the assumption of how God works as Trinity to being the way that human beings should work. While God may function as a divine team the specifics of that teamwork are often only assumptions.

Team Leadership

The team leadership model shares some similarities with the shared leadership model addressed above. One difference is that the team leadership model of ministry is one that can work within most forms of church governance and polity and does not require significant change to bylaws or governance in order to function well. The team leadership model allows the team to establish and carry out vision, set direction, wrestle with thorny issues to come to conclusions, fight for unity, and model gospel-centered and mission-driven community for the congregation.¹²⁶

There are plenty of biblical examples of team-based leadership. One example was that of Nehemiah functioning with various teams to accomplish the ambitious goal of rebuilding the walls and gates of Jerusalem. Additionally, biblical evidence for team leadership is found in the Triune God, who works together as One.

One of the many benefits of team leadership is that the structures in the church become smaller, yet the networks become larger.¹²⁷ In this sense it follows in the pattern of Jesus' relational ministry by allowing relationships and the network of the church's influence to grow while keeping the bureaucracy of formal structures away. Another

¹²⁶ Hartwig, 30-31.

¹²⁷ Cladis, 19.

benefit, as noted by Irving, is that “teams are best when the stakes are high and quality is more important than speed.”¹²⁸ As a leadership team approaches any concern, they are able to address it with emphasis on the quality of their response, rather than on the immediacy of a response.

One key struggle for team leadership can be the lack of spiritually mature members and constituents to make up the team, especially in newer or smaller churches. Briggs and Hyatt note two additional struggles for team leadership. One struggle is the personal aspect of a leader’s ego wanting more power and authority.¹²⁹ Secondly, because leaders do not want to give up their authority or power, there is a concern for the church as a whole if authority is given to those on the team with less formal training or experience.¹³⁰ These concerns are best addressed up-front before any changes to the leadership structure are implemented.

In the very first sentence to the introduction to Cladis’ work on building teams within churches, he writes, “The most effective churches today are the ones that are developing team-based leadership.”¹³¹ While each of the above models have a foundation in Scriptural interpretation and practice, and each have merits and benefits that can be utilized for the local church, it is the perspective of the researcher that the team leadership model is most effective in the majority of church cultures, owing to its adaptability.

¹²⁸ Justin A. Irving and Mark L. Strauss, *Leadership in Christian Perspectives: Biblical Foundations and Contemporary Practices for Servant Leaders* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2019), 72.

¹²⁹ Briggs, 125.

¹³⁰ Briggs, 125.

¹³¹ Cladis, 1.

Teams or Groups

While teams have been addressed extensively for years in organizational leadership, they are often one of the more difficult aspects of leadership to truly incorporate into a church or organization owing to the confusion between a leadership team and a group of leaders. Jon Katzenbach and Douglas Smith argue that a team is “a small number of people with complementary skills who are committed to a common purpose, set of performance goals, and approach for which they hold themselves mutually accountable.”¹³² Groups on the other hand “rely on the sum of ‘individual bests’ for their performance, but pursue no collective work-products requiring joint effort.”¹³³ While Katzenbach and Smith describe seven differences between teams and groups,¹³⁴ one of the key differences is in relation to accountability. Groups have individual accountability, whereas teams include both individual and team accountability.¹³⁵ This mutual accountability allows leadership teams to reach goals and achieve higher standards than a typical group.

Teams are far more effective at creating and building healthy organizations or churches than groups. As Patrick Lencioni writes, it is not finance, strategy, or technology that sets an organization apart, instead it is teamwork that gives them the

¹³² Jon R. Katzenbach and Douglas K. Smith, “The Discipline of Teams,” in *Harvard Business Reviews Top 10 Must Reads On Teams* (Boston: Harvard Business Review Press, 2013), 39.

¹³³ Jon R. Katzenbach and Douglas K. Smith, *The Wisdom of Teams: Creating the High-Performance Organization*, reprinted ed. (Boston: Harvard Business Review Press, 2015), 85.

¹³⁴ Katzenbach, *The Discipline of Teams*, 36.

¹³⁵ Katzenbach, *The Discipline of Teams*, 36.

ultimate competitive advantage.¹³⁶ As such, it is important that those in ministry leadership make a clear determination regarding building teams, and not just groups, in their churches.¹³⁷

Defining Success for Teams

“Church” and “success” do not often appear in the same sentence. Eugene Peterson writes of success, “The biblical fact is that there are no successful churches. There are, instead, communities of sinners, gathered before God week after week in towns and villages all over the world. The Holy Spirit gathers them and does his work in them.”¹³⁸ While the researcher agrees with this statement, it must also be noted that this does not mean there are not successful teams leading these churches.

For a pastor to refer to his or her sermon as successful leaves much to be desired, as it is a broad term with little definition and the potential for significant pride. For a ministry leader to say that she had a successful outreach event could mean that no major issues occurred, or that the church was able to connect with a certain number of individuals in the community, or that a specific number of conversions were made. As such, success is relative until it is defined, which is why it is imperative that churches define success for their leadership teams.

Richard Hackman and Diane Coutu give the primary reason for teams to define success, “Research consistently shows that teams underperform, despite all the extra

¹³⁶ Patrick Lencioni, *The Five Dysfunctions of a Team: A Leadership Fable* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2002), vii.

¹³⁷ Tony Whitley, “The Power of Language in Defining and Developing Teams,” *Christian Education Journal: Research on Educational Ministry* Vol. 15 no. 1 (2018): 23.

¹³⁸ Eugene H. Peterson, *Working the Angles: The Shape of Pastoral Integrity* (Grand Rapids: William B Eerdmans Publishing, 1987), 2.

resources they have.”¹³⁹ Teams should be structured with mutual and individual accountability, as noted above, which better allows for teams to overcome this type of underperformance. In order for team leadership to be implemented appropriately and for the church to take advantage of the benefits of team leadership the church will need to define leadership contextually and in light of servant leadership theory.

Defining Success Contextually

In order for a team to define success appropriately, they must do so in their cultural and geographical context. There are various aspects that must be considered for a team to articulate its definition of success contextually.

In their work on teams and team leadership, Frank LaFasto and Carl Larson specify six dimensions of team leadership.¹⁴⁰ The first of these dimensions is that the team must be able to focus on the goal.¹⁴¹ Of this dimension, they write, “The team goal is your team’s reason for existence, and it should be clear and inspiring.”¹⁴² A church’s leadership team must be able to articulate the reason for its existence and what its goal is. This goes beyond having goals for the church in terms of attendance, giving totals, baptisms, conversions, and small group participation. Instead, the team must determine why they exist and what their goals are for structuring and leading the church with a team-leadership model and how to measure the achievement of those goals.

¹³⁹ Diane Coutu, “Why Teams Don’t Work: An Interview with J. Richard Hackman,” in *Harvard Business Reviews Top 10 Must Reads On Teams* (Boston: Harvard Business Review Press, 2013), 100.

¹⁴⁰ Frank LaFasto and Carl Larson, *When Teams Work Best: 6,000 Team Members and Leaders Tell What It Takes to Succeed* (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, Inc., 2001), 98-100.

¹⁴¹ LaFasto, 100-108.

¹⁴² LaFasto, 101.

Success for the church leadership team must be contextual. Each church has a different setting in regard to areas such as the number of available spiritually mature and aspiring leaders, challenges and obstacles to ministry, and training and experience of the leaders, to name a few. One of the most effective avenues of articulating a successful team is done through appropriate communication.

Of Alex Pentland's research in relation to teams, he writes, "the data confirmed that communication indeed plays a critical role in building successful teams. In fact, we've found patterns of communication to be the most important predictor of a team's success."¹⁴³ Pentland observed three key elements of communication that affect team performance and therefore their success. These key elements included the team's energy, engagement, and exploration.¹⁴⁴ A team's energy is the measure of the number and nature of exchanges among the team.¹⁴⁵ A team's engagement reflects the distribution of that energy among team members.¹⁴⁶ A team's exploration involved communication that members engage in outside of their team.¹⁴⁷

As church leadership teams approach defining success in and for their church it is important that they consider not only their church, culture, and people, but they must also consider the role of communication and patterns of communication, as these areas give evidence to a team's success. The church leadership team must consider their

¹⁴³ Alex Pentland, "The New Science of Building Great Teams," in *Harvard Business Reviews Top 10 Must Reads on Teams* (Boston: Harvard Business Review Press, 2013), 2.

¹⁴⁴ Pentland, 6-8.

¹⁴⁵ Pentland, 6-7.

¹⁴⁶ Pentland, 7.

¹⁴⁷ Pentland, 7.

communication energy, engagement, and exploration as each affects the potential success that the team can achieve.

Defining Success for the Servant Leader

A second area of study in defining success for team leadership is doing so for the servant leader. Ken Blanchard wrote that servant leadership is not an option but rather it is a mandate for followers of Jesus.¹⁴⁸ As each member of the leadership team of the church is to follow in the ways of Jesus the servant leadership theory provides an outline for defining success.

While Jesus may be considered the first and ultimate, or exemplar, of servant leadership,¹⁴⁹ it was Robert Greenleaf who articulated that the servant leader's primary focus is on serving their followers.¹⁵⁰ The servant leader is servant first and seeks to meet the highest needs of his or her followers.¹⁵¹ One role of the servant leader is "to draw out, inspire, and develop the best and highest within the people from the inside out."¹⁵² As the members of a leadership team implement this model to their team leadership structure they will not only build stronger relationships with the church's constituents but also be better informed on the needs of the church as a whole.

¹⁴⁸ Ken Blanchard, *Lead Like Jesus – Revisited: Lessons from the Greatest Leadership Role Model of All Time* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishing, 2016), 14.

¹⁴⁹ Nick Francis Stephens, "Fivefold Ministry: An Expressional Church Model for Releasing 21st-Century Disciples into their Missional Potential and Design" (D. Min diss., Bethel Seminary, 2018), 7.

¹⁵⁰ Robert K. Greenleaf, *Servant Leadership: A Journey into the Nature of Legitimate Power and Greatness* (Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1977), 21.

¹⁵¹ Greenleaf, 21, 27.

¹⁵² Greenleaf, 3.

These aspects of servant leadership give direction for how a church leadership team can define success. If the team is serving the church, meeting the needs of the church members, and developing the best within their people, then they can know that they have been successful as a team in leading the church.

Definition of Success for Teams

In his book on building a culture of discipleship in the church, Mike Breen argued that personal success is obedience to what the Father asks.¹⁵³ Similarly, when considering the definition of success in youth ministry, Lisa Brown argued that a biblical model of success understands the role that ministers are called to play and being obedient to that calling.¹⁵⁴ Each of these statements bring truth to the reality of defining success in team leadership: successful team leadership in the church is obedience, as a team, to what God asks and to how God leads. This obedience is expressed mostly through loving service of God and the local church.

Leadership teams in the local church would benefit from understanding and defining success in their church. As a team they must be in obedience to what God asks and to how God leads. In doing so they can better hold themselves accountable and be held accountable by the church-at-large.

First-Among-Equals

While team leadership is a biblical model of leadership for the church to implement and practice, one additional component studied in relation to team leadership

¹⁵³ Mike Breen, *Building a Discipling Culture* (Greenville: 3DM International Publishing, 2014), 34.

¹⁵⁴ Lisa Brown “What is Success in Youth Ministry?,” *St. Mark’s Review* 2, No. 224 (May 2013), 74.

is that of the practice of the first-among-equals. In regard to a primary leader, or first-among-equals in team leadership, Getz writes, “The New Testament definitely teaches and illustrates that when there is a plurality of leadership, someone needs to function as the primary leader of the team.”¹⁵⁵ This primary leader of the team is what is referred to as the first-among-equals.

The first-among-equals within team leadership is best articulated by Alexander Strauch. He writes, “Although elders act jointly as a council and share equal authority and responsibility for the leadership of the church, all are not equal in their giftedness, biblical knowledge, leadership ability, experience, or dedication.”¹⁵⁶ Since there are a diversity of gifts and experiences a few will stand out as leaders among the team.¹⁵⁷ The advantage of such a practice in team leadership is that the first-among-equals principle allows for “functional, gift-based diversity within the elder team without creating an official, superior office over fellow elders.”¹⁵⁸ Each leader can serve within his or her own giftedness, yet one elder’s giftedness should be that of serving the team as the first-among-equals.

This concept of the first-among-equals was mentioned in the biblical and theological study of chapter two but has been more fully developed below. Since the researcher’s own application of the findings of this project are focused on pastors,

¹⁵⁵ Getz, 217.

¹⁵⁶ Strauch, 45.

¹⁵⁷ Strauch, 45.

¹⁵⁸ Strauch, 48.

including himself, in the Christian and Missionary Alliance (C&MA) the perspective of the first-among-equals was viewed in light of that denomination's beliefs.

Biblical Identity and Purpose for the First-Among-Equals in the Christian and Missionary Alliance

Within the C&MA there are various documents available that detail their statement on a plethora of topics or issues. One such statement is on church government. Without copying the entire text of the seven-page document, this section summarized the C&MA's position on church government.

There are many models of church governance and polity currently being practiced in the local church. In regard to the biblical and background evidence the C&MA recognizes that much of the understanding of eldership today comes from elders within Israel in the Old Testament, the synagogue, and the New Testament.¹⁵⁹ Modern eldership often resembles what is recorded in the New Testament. Much of the church's organizational structure is assumed in the New Testament, yet there was a development of that structure witnessed in the church's organization throughout the New Testament.¹⁶⁰

This development was considerably extensive, but what is worth noting is that as the church grew, so did the need and roles of those serving as elders. This explains the substantial evidence of the plurality of elders in a city. The leadership of the church did not rest on a single individual, but on a team. In addition, the C&MA further argues, "There seems to be in the New Testament a growing pattern of one elder in a community

¹⁵⁹ The Christian & Missionary Alliance, "Statement on Church Government," in *Manual of The Christian & Missionary Alliance Church*, H1: 1 (accessed October 16, 2020), [https://www.cmalliance.org/resources/publications /manual-cma.pdf](https://www.cmalliance.org/resources/publications/manual-cma.pdf).

¹⁶⁰ The Christian & Missionary Alliance, "Statement on Church Government," H1: 2.

as head of a board of elders (1 Tim. 5:17), something like the pastor of today.”¹⁶¹ This affirms the C&MA’s perspective of the first-among-equals style of church government.

The C&MA holds firm to the biblical patterns of local church organization, in regard to leadership, as prescriptive and not descriptive. Most notably, the New Testament prescribes the principles, not necessarily every detail, of church government and organization.¹⁶² In their statement, they further review the various forms of church government structures common among churches today, noting that many of the differences revolve around the selection, number, and authority of eldership.¹⁶³

In summary, according to the researcher, the C&MA has sought to balance out biblical prescription, historical practice, and relevant practicality in their church governance. Below is the conclusion of the C&MA’s views of church government,

On the basis of the biblical evidence, historical precedent, and practical considerations, the Christian & Missionary Alliance recognizes a form of government which is combination of elements of the Congregational and Presbyterian systems. Thus local churches are not wholly entities unto themselves but are externally related through the district and national organizations and are amenable to these authorities in such areas as the ownership and transfer of property and the calling of a pastor. On the other hand, within the definite bounds, there is considerable self-determination. Internally, the government is through elected representatives (governance authority).¹⁶⁴

¹⁶¹ The Christian & Missionary Alliance, “Statement on Church Government,” H1: 3.

¹⁶² The Christian & Missionary Alliance, “Statement on Church Government,” H1: 4.

¹⁶³ The Christian & Missionary Alliance, “Statement on Church Government,” H1: 5.

¹⁶⁴ The Christian & Missionary Alliance, “Statement on Church Government,” H1: 6.

Practical Identity and Purpose for the First-Among-Equals in The Christian and Missionary Alliance

Within the C&MA constitution is a set of model bylaws that leaders and leadership teams are encouraged to work through, modify, and adopt for their own churches. Within those model bylaws, there is an article in regard to governance authority. It is the belief of the C&MA that the governance authority is to conduct the affairs of the church between annual meetings and is cooperative with the membership as well as the district superintendent. Along with this article is the note that the senior pastor is to be the chairman of the governance authority, unless the pastor chooses to have the governance authority elect an elder as chairman. This fits with the first-among-equals style of leadership and eldership that this project unveiled in earlier sections.

Regarding the structure of this governance authority, the C&MA recommends one of three different models or options including a single board system of all elders, a single board system of a majority of elders, or a two-board system. In each of these options, all elders must fulfill the requirements of eldership as detailed in Scripture and must be active members of the church.

The first option is a single-board system with all male elders. In this model, the elder board is also the governing board. The elders serve as the elected officials of the church. There must be a minimum of five elders, including the senior pastor, in this model. It also requires that the elders serve in other roles such as secretary, treasurer, and assistant treasurer. The leadership of the church in this option is comprised of a team of elders and it is assumed that the first-among-equals will be whoever is serving as the pastor and/or teaching elder.

The second option is a single board system with a majority of elders. This is similar to the first one, with slight deviations. The male elders serve as the majority of the governing board; however, females and other males may serve in an officially elected role such as treasurer or secretary, but at least two of the roles must be filled by elders. As with option one, there is a minimum of five people serving on the governing board, including the senior pastor. Although not elders, these additional board members must maintain a lifestyle in keeping with the intent of Scripture's qualifications and be active members of the church. Similar to option one above, this model follows a team leadership approach and has an appointed first-among-equals.

The third option is a two-board system which includes a board of elders and a board of ministries. The governance authority of the church resides with the elders, but their work and ministry is shared by the board of ministries, including treasurer, assistant treasurer, and secretary. The board of elders delegate appropriate responsibilities to the board of ministries, thus the board of ministries serves as a sub-committee to the board of elders. In this model, the board of elders requires a minimum of three, including the senior pastor, whereas the board of ministries requires a minimum of five and the chair of this board is appointed by the board of elders. Whereas the other options only have one team, this model provides the church with multiple leadership teams, each tasked with different authority and responsibility. Each team will often have a first-among-equals leader who facilitates the team.

In each of these options, the church practices a first-among-equals style of leadership. Whether that is implemented in a hierarchical model, shared leadership

model, or team leadership model will depend on the church. It the belief of the researcher that the first-among-equals is best suited to serve in a team-based leadership approach.

The Pastor and the First-Among-Equals

Of the practice of the first-among-equals, David T. Houglum writes, “There is not necessarily a specific formula that determines who the primus will be. The servant whose gifts, traits, skills, and other pertinent aspects intersect with particular goals and challenges situated in a specific place and time emerges as the temporary primus.”¹⁶⁵ The C&MA tasks the senior or lead pastor as the first-among-equals, but that role can be passed on to another team member with the lead pastor’s approval and approval by the elder board. As noted by Briggs and Hyatt, “Even if one person is identified as the lead pastor ... he or she is first-among-equals, not simply first.”¹⁶⁶ The best role for the pastor in church leadership depends on the church, the pastor, and the role that he or she is best suited for.¹⁶⁷ This role is most often the first-among-equals in the C&MA, but it does not have to be. This is why, as stated previously, successful team leadership must be defined and understood contextually for that local church.

The practice of the first-among-equals follows a biblical pattern and is a practical aspect of healthy and successful team leadership. It allows for the leadership team to be flexible and adaptable as to who serves in such a role but does not diminish the value of the team or its members.

¹⁶⁵ David T. Houglum, “Myth-Busters: Traditional and Emergent Leadership,” *Emergence: Complexity and Organization* 14, no. 2 (June 2012): 34.

¹⁶⁶ Briggs, 114.

¹⁶⁷ Larry Osborne, *Sticky Teams: Keeping Your Leadership Team and Staff on the Same Page* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 87.

Ambitious Team Leaders

There is a need to implement a team-based leadership model in the church, as noted above. There is also a need for ambitious team leaders in the leadership of the local church. While each type of leader has merit and value, the researcher believes that the church would benefit greatly from an increase of ambitious team leaders.

The Need for Ambitious Team Leaders

The need for healthy leaders in the church is obvious to many who study the trends and trajectories of the church. Aubrey Malphurs, in his online blog, wrote that the church at large is experiencing plateau or decline in approximately 80 percent of all churches in the United States.¹⁶⁸ The church is not only in decline but its impact on culture has become minimal.¹⁶⁹

There are many reasons for such a decline and diminished impact in some churches, such as churches in rural areas where the population is decreasing. Other reasons include denominational mistrust and the general secularization of America. In his thesis, Justin Hiebert argued that the North American church is in decline because of ineffective mission results.¹⁷⁰ Two additional reasons, as presented by Ed Stetzer and Mike Dodson, are “First, most churches will not admit how bad it is. Second, most churches will not make the needed changes.”¹⁷¹ Churches are struggling to grow and

¹⁶⁸ Malphurs, “The State of the American Church: Plateaued or Declining,” The Malphurs Group, August 18, 2018, <https://malphursgroup.com/state-of-the-american-church-plateaued-declining/>.

¹⁶⁹ James Davidson Hunter, *To Change the World: The Irony, Tragedy, and Possibility of Christianity in the Late Modern World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 91.

¹⁷⁰ Justin Saul Hiebert, “Multiethnic and Missional: God’s Heart for an Integrated and Diverse Church” (D. Min diss., Bethel Seminary, 2019), 12.

¹⁷¹ Ed Stetzer and Mike Dodson, *Comeback Churches: How 300 Churches Turned Around and Yours Can Too* (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2007), 23.

increase in their influence owing to many reasons, many of which point back to the leadership ineffectiveness of the church.

The Competitiveness of Ambitious Team Leaders

The reality is that the church is in decline and there are many proposed solutions to this decline as noted above. The researcher argues one such solution to this decline that churches must be willing to consider is the need for the ambitious team leader in their leadership teams.

Spencer Click argued that a willingness to share leadership and delegate authority without competition impacted the success of the emerging leader.¹⁷² In addition, competition in the church can lead to churches competing amongst themselves and with other denominations and institutions for the loyalty of their members.¹⁷³ This perspective of competition being a negative influence on teams and leadership is common, yet, in the eyes of the researcher, healthy leadership and competition do not have to be at odds. Competition should and can be understood as a strength.

Competition as a CliftonStrength

In the introduction to his book, *Strengths-Based Leadership*, Tom Rath presents three findings of his studies of leaders and followers. The first discovery is that “the most effective leaders are always investing in strengths.”¹⁷⁴ There is no indication of what

¹⁷² Spencer A. Click, “Cultivating Emerging Leaders: Understanding a Pastor’s Role,” (D. Min diss., Bethel Seminary, 2017), 30.

¹⁷³ Hans Mol, “Religion and Competition,” *Sociological Analysis* 33, no. 3 (Summer 1972), 70.

¹⁷⁴ Tom Rath, *Strengths-Based Leadership: Great Leaders, Teams, and Why People Follow* (New York: Gallup Press, 2008), 2.

strengths were invested in, but rather effective leaders were always investing in their own strengths and their teams' and followers' strengths. One such strength is Competition.

Defining Competition. There are many definitions of the term “competition.” For the economist, viewing competition at the macro level, it is a system, or impersonal mechanism, between groups of people.¹⁷⁵ Psychologists on the other hand view competition “on a micro level of analysis, defining it as a relationship between individuals, set within rules, to gain or keep some scarce and/or valuable thing.”¹⁷⁶ Competition, therefore, can be viewed at both the macro level and micro level. In this project, competition was viewed as a strength for the individual, and as such, was considered at the micro level.

At this micro level, the word “competition” often carries with it the connotation of contests and comparison. Tom Rath writes, “Competition is rooted in comparison.”¹⁷⁷ The person with the Competition strength is often aware of the performance of those around him or her and how one’s own performance compares. Competition is a strength of those who “measure their progress against the performance of others. They strive to win first place and revel in contests.”¹⁷⁸

Benefits of Competition in the Church. While this definition might not seem suitable for the role of pastor or church leader there are some aspects that reveal the

¹⁷⁵ Yvonne S. Smith, Sharon G. Johnson, and Erik M. Hiller, “The God of the Games: Towards a Theology of Competition,” *Christian Scholar’s Review* 41, no. 3 (Spring 2012), 269.

¹⁷⁶ Smith, 269.

¹⁷⁷ Rath, *StrengthsFinder 2.0*, 69.

¹⁷⁸ Rath, *Strengths-Based Leadership*, 135.

benefits of this strength in the church. For one, all competitors need other people.¹⁷⁹

Primarily this deals with needing other people with whom to compare, but additionally it reveals the need of the competitor to be surrounded with other people, both with similar and differing strengths and in a team framework.

A second benefit of Competition in church leadership is that the competitor likes measurements.¹⁸⁰ The competitor is always needing statistics and measurements by which to gauge his or her level of success. Churches oftentimes struggle with understanding their decline, plateau, or diminishing impact because they fail to appropriately track and calculate various measurements. In some ways this could include attendance, conversions, and baptism, but beyond that this could include percentage of involvement in various ministries, volunteers, and so forth. A competitor in leadership of a local church would be more likely to track these numbers and seek to always improve and better them the next time around.

A final benefit of having a competitor in leadership for the church is that it will often help the church to avoid undertaking tasks that cannot be accomplished.¹⁸¹ The competitor is a realist. Challenges or contests that cannot be won or achieved will often be avoided, allowing the church to focus on what it can accomplish, investing in it, and celebrating that victory once accomplished.

Developing Competition. Competition is a strength to develop rather than a vice to avoid. It can add many benefits to the leadership of a church or organization. It must

¹⁷⁹ Rath, *StrengthsFinder 2.0*, 69.

¹⁸⁰ Rath, *StrengthsFinder 2.0*, 69.

¹⁸¹ Rath, *StrengthsFinder 2.0*, 69.

be noted, though, that having the strength is not enough. Leaders must develop their strengths. Leaders become stronger by “using those unique talents as the foundation for developing strengths.”¹⁸² Mary Bendall Henley writes in reflection of this quote above, “The uniqueness factor is critical. Pastors can become overwhelmed by the wide variety of tasks and demands and often overlook their own God-given uniqueness.”¹⁸³ The best way for leaders and pastors to take advantage of their unique God-given strengths is to develop and utilize them consistently in service of God and others.

For the Competition strength there are many ways leaders can build on their strength. For one, as noted above, the leader and leadership team should find ways of measuring progress.¹⁸⁴ Competition thrives on comparison, keeping score, and tracking victories. The possibilities are significant for the different aspects of ministry that can be measured, so the leader with a strength in Competition should be sure to find ways to measure progress and successes to celebrate as a church and leadership team.

A second way that Competition can be developed is by competing against yourself, or church, in comparison to what has been accomplished before.¹⁸⁵ This is an extension of the previously stated development aspect, but if the leader and church have done well at tracking progress and measurements, then the church can focus on beating her previous recordings the next time. In this way the leader and leadership team seek to

¹⁸² Albert L. Winseman, Donald O. Clifton, and Curt Liesveld, *Living Your Strengths: Discover Your God-Given Talents and Inspire Your Community* (New York: Free Press, 2008), 21.

¹⁸³ Mary Bendall Henley, “Clergy Leadership Development: Exploring Factors in the Leadership Development Process of United Methodist Clergywomen,” (D. Min diss., Bethel Seminary, 2016), 147.

¹⁸⁴ Donald O. Clifton, Edward Anderson, and Laurie A. Schreiner, *StrengthsQuest: Discover and Develop Your Strengths in Academics, Career, and Beyond*, 2nd ed. (New York: Gallup Press, 2006), 112.

¹⁸⁵ Clifton, 112.

achieve their personal and organizational best in all that they do, helping to stave off the plateau and stagnation evidenced in many churches.

A third way for Competition to be developed in a leader is to recognize that his or her opponents do not need to be people.¹⁸⁶ As the competitive leader seeks victories and winning, it is imperative that he or she recognize that sometimes victories can be spiritual, emotional, or relational in nature. One victory for the church can be new friendships growing between the members in the local church and those who have never trusted in Jesus Christ. Hate, racism, and injustice in a community can also be an opponent that the leadership team and church members go up against in trying to defeat or diminish in their local community.

Leading with Competition. There are many benefits for Competition in the leadership of a local church. In connection, there are also many ways that leaders and churches can further develop this God-given uniqueness and strength. In connection with this strength also come some significant issues or challenges. One challenge to overcome is the belief that competition is not a good aspect of or in leadership. In a published essay, Robert Greenleaf asserted that “if we are to move toward a more caring, serving society than we now have, competition must be muted, if not eliminated. Serving and competing are antithetical.”¹⁸⁷ As argued earlier, it is not the belief of the researcher that competition is at odds with leadership, but rather it can be used as a strength. Competing with oneself

¹⁸⁶ Clifton, 112.

¹⁸⁷ Robert K. Greenleaf, *Servant: Retrospect, and Prospect* (Peterborough: Windy Row Press, 1980), 30-31.

or within the organization's history can provide the church a better framework to measure how well they have served and grown their constituents.

Another challenge is that competition can and often does lead to social conflict.¹⁸⁸ As such, competitive leaders must be able to learn to lead well in light of their strength. Rath presents four ways the competitive leader can do so.

The first way a competitive leader can lead well is to build trust.¹⁸⁹ Trust is integral to the health of a team, organization, and church. Competitive leaders can often become at odds with others due to their innate desire for victory, so it is imperative that they learn to build trust with others. Lencioni suggests the best way to build trust in teams is through vulnerability.¹⁹⁰ Vulnerability is centered in relationships. C.S. Lewis in his book *The Four Loves* writes, "To love at all is to be vulnerable."¹⁹¹ The essence of love, according to Lewis, is vulnerability. In love a person risks pain and hurt but may also experience joy and celebration. The practice of vulnerability, such as described here, builds the trust between members of a team and organization that cannot be accomplished without it.

A second task for the competitive leader in leading well is to show compassion.¹⁹² "Compassion," writes John Baldoni, "is a vital element of leadership."¹⁹³ Since

¹⁸⁸ Peter C. Hill, "Cooperation and Competition," in *Baker Encyclopedia of Psychology and Counseling*, 2nd ed., edited by David G. Benner and Peter C. Hill (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1999), 269.

¹⁸⁹ Rath, *Strengths-Based Leadership*, 135.

¹⁹⁰ Lencioni, 195.

¹⁹¹ C.S. Lewis, *The Four Loves* (New York, NY: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1960), 169.

¹⁹² Rath, *Strengths-Based Leadership*, 135-136.

¹⁹³ John Baldoni, *Great Communication Secrets of Great Leaders* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2003), 182.

competition can often be construed negatively by others, the competitive leader can and should be sure to bring out the fun in competition, which can help to create bonds with others.¹⁹⁴ Also, he or she must be sure to recognize not everyone is in it to win it. If the competitive leader is able to accept and recognize others for their strengths, even if not Competition, that will add to the value in the relationship.

A third aspect of overcoming the struggles of competition is for the competitive leader to provide stability by helping others to see their own potential and capacity for performance based on their own natural abilities.¹⁹⁵ Additionally, with a team a competitive leader must remember the ultimate goal or purpose of their team and be sure to remind the team of it regularly.

A fourth and final way to lead with competition is to create hope.¹⁹⁶ Create clear targets for the team and followers in a way that is communicated well and helps the leader to champion others towards those targets.¹⁹⁷

All leaders, not just the competitive leader, must be willing to lead out of these four areas: building trust, showing compassion, providing stability, and creating hope. Each of these is instrumental to the health of an organization. For the competitive leader, his or her ability to add value to relationships in these areas will build stronger, healthier teams for the local church.

¹⁹⁴ Rath, *Strengths-Based Leadership*, 135.

¹⁹⁵ Rath, *Strengths-Based Leadership*, 136.

¹⁹⁶ Rath, *Strengths-Based Leadership*, 137-138.

¹⁹⁷ Rath, *Strengths-Based Leadership*, 137.

Competition as an Influencing Theme

Competition, while carrying negative connotations and even history for some people, is a CliftonStrength. It is a strength of certain individuals that helps them to focus on measurable outcomes while always seeking to win and improve on what has been done before by the self or by others. Competition is not an end in and of itself, rather it is part of a group or domain of other CliftonStrengths known as the Influencing domain.¹⁹⁸

Influence is a common term used in definitions of leadership. Leadership is, in some capacity, influence within organizations, a team, and with others. Those who lead by influencing, writes Rath, will help their team reach a much broader audience.¹⁹⁹

Michael Hackman and Craig Johnson note that influence is important in understanding leadership,²⁰⁰ but go on to describe how leaders can influence others successfully by developing perceptions of credibility, developing and using power bases effectively, making use of verbal and nonverbal influence cues, developing positive expectations of others, managing change, gaining compliance, and negotiating productive solutions.²⁰¹ These aspects of influencing effectively all deal with how a team can reach a broader audience, as they each speak to the reality that people with strengths in the

¹⁹⁸ Rath, *Strengths-Based Leadership*, 24.

¹⁹⁹ Rath, *Strengths-Based Leadership*, 25.

²⁰⁰ Michael Z. Hackman and Craig E. Johnson, "Leadership Communication Skills," in *The Leader's Companion: Insights on Leadership Through the Ages*, edited by J. Thomas Wren (New York: The Free Press, 1995), 428-429.

²⁰¹ Hackman and Johnson, 429.

Influencing domain are always selling the team's ideas to those both inside and outside of their organizations.²⁰²

Influencing, as a domain, is about winning followers and others over to the ideas and practices of the leadership team. This includes getting buy-in from followers, getting people involved in a hands-on way, and helping them connect to the goal or target before the organization or church. In the environment of team leadership those with the strengths to influence are likely best at serving in a role that allows them to take charge, speak up, and make sure the group is heard.²⁰³ In the local church those with strengths in influencing, such as Competition, would be best suited to serve in a role similar to that of the first-among-equals discussed previously.

Competition or Ambition?

The CliftonStrength of Competition is a theme that revolves around the influence and leadership of others. Those with the strength of Competition seek to be the victor of a good contest or challenge and thrive in their accomplishments.

In the previous chapter, a biblical and theological study was done regarding ambition. Ambition cannot be viewed as either positive or negative, but rather it is only as appropriate as the motivation behind it. Selfish ambition, or ambition aimed at the self and one's own merits and accomplishments, falls short of the ambition that godly leaders must seek. Ambition is the drive or determination of an individual to see success in all of his or her endeavors. Ambition must be aimed at God by being focused on knowing him more fully, glorifying him, fulfilling his mission.

²⁰² Rath, *Strengths-Based Leadership*, 25.

²⁰³ Rath, *Strengths-Based Leadership*, 25.

Competition and ambition, the researcher argues, are two sides to the same coin. Both seek success or victory in their tasks and challenges. Both, while being construed negatively in many respects, are assets or strengths to leadership and leadership teams. Competition and ambition, while not exactly the same, serve a similar purpose in leadership and as such, the ambitious team leader acts similarly to that of a competitive leader. Both serve a similar purpose with similar facets of understanding.

The competitive or ambitious team leader referred to throughout this project is one that fulfills both of these descriptions. The ambitious team leader is one who is competitive, attempts and expects victory, leads others through influence, and seeks success in every endeavor. This is why the terms “competitive” and “ambitious” have been interchangeable throughout this project when describing a particular type of leader and why they continued to be so.

The Character of Ambitious Team Leaders

The character of an ambitious team leader can be extremely varied. Since ambitious team leaders face challenges and obstacles unique to their skillset and strength, this project addressed the character that must be present in ambitious team leaders to be effective in leading church teams.

In his book on team leadership, Larry Osborne writes that character is always more important than giftedness.²⁰⁴ Whereas the giftedness of a leader in Competition and to be ambitious is beneficial in many ways, the reality is that one’s character is more important. Character, as defined by Samuel Rima, is the integration of one’s beliefs,

²⁰⁴ Osborne, *Sticky Teams*, 59.

values, and morals.²⁰⁵ The internal beliefs, values, and morals that a person holds will reveal his or her character to the outside world and the ambitious team leader must be able to model strong and healthy character in leading teams well. While this project was not intended to provide a full list of healthy character aspects, there were three detailed below that relate to the ambitious team leader.

Humility

One model that highlights the high character of leadership is that of servant leadership. In the servant leadership model, “The servant leader’s primary objective is to serve and meet the needs of others.”²⁰⁶ In this way, a primary character trait of those serving as leaders on teams is that of humility. Humility, Blanchard writes, emphasizes the importance of others.²⁰⁷ Ambitious team leaders, because of their desire to come out on top in comparison with others, must be the type of person whose character reflects the importance of others by serving and meeting their needs in humility.

Integrity

A second character component of ambitious team leaders is that they must be a person of integrity. Robert Clinton, in his book *The Making of a Leader*, noted that integrity is foundational for effective leadership and that it must be instilled early in a

²⁰⁵ Samuel D. Rima, *Leading from the Inside Out: The Art of Self-Leadership* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000), 38.

²⁰⁶ A. Gregory Stone, Robert F. Russell, and Kathleen Patterson, “Transformational versus Servant Leadership: A Difference in Leader Focus,” in *Servant Leadership Research Roundtable* (August 2003), Regent University, Virginia Beach, VA. <https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/34bd/f0f7db71489ddbef82754df7f79fe2d144d5.pdf?>

²⁰⁷ Blanchard, 80.

leader's character.²⁰⁸ Integrity can be understood as “a faith that has a ‘rubber-meets-the-road’ quality, where goals, words, and actions are consistent.”²⁰⁹ Justin Irving and Mark Strauss argue that integrity and authenticity are some of the most important traits that a leader can and should model.²¹⁰ Competition and ambition can often lead those whose character is lacking to cheating or cutting corners, which is why the ambitious team leader will need to model integrity in his or her leadership and life.

Empathy

A final contribution to understanding the type of character that an ambitious leader must have is that of empathy. Larry Spears argues that one of the characteristics of a servant-leader, and in this case an ambitious team leader, is empathy because he or she strives to understand others and help others feel accepted and recognized for their uniqueness.²¹¹ Spears writes, “One must assume the good intentions of co-workers and not reject them as people, even when forced to reject their behavior or performance.”²¹² This is a tough balance for the ambitious leader, but in being able to listen and add value to interactions and relationships the character of the ambitious leader will promote health and growth in the team and organization.

²⁰⁸ J. Robert Clinton, *The Making of a Leader: Recognizing the Lessons and Stages of Leadership Development*, Rev. ed., (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2012), 54.

²⁰⁹ David T. Gortner and John Dreibelbis, “Mentoring Clergy for Effective Leadership,” *Reflective Practice: Formation and Supervision in Ministry* 27 (2007): 80.

²¹⁰ Irving, 20.

²¹¹ Larry Spears, “Introduction: Servant-Leadership and the Greenleaf Legacy,” in *Reflections on Leadership: How Robert K. Greenleaf’s Theory of Servant-Leadership Influences Today’s Top Management Thinkers*, edited by Larry C. Spears (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1995), 5.

²¹² Spears, 5.

The Motivation of Ambitious Team Leaders

As ambitious team leaders are focused on influence and victory, it will be important to remember their ultimate motivation or the object of their ambition as they lead teams within their respective organizations. Motivation is used to refer to “factors that energize and direct behavior. It addresses why behavior is initiated, continues, and stops, as well as what choices are made.”²¹³ The ambition of team leaders must be aimed at God, or rather, the primary motivation of ambitious team leaders must be to know God more fully, glorify him, and fulfill his mission. An ambitious team leader should base his or her motivation on what God has revealed in Scripture.²¹⁴ This concept was developed in chapter two, but a few more aspects of an ambitious leader’s motivation were considered below.

Aside from God being the primary motivator, another motivation for ambitious team leaders is to help others. Spears writes,

True leadership emerges from those whose primary motivation is a desire to help others. This new leadership model puts serving others – including employees, customers, and community – as the number one priority. Servant leadership emphasizes increased service to others, a holistic approach to work, a sense of community, and shared decision-making power.²¹⁵

While this is a key motivation for the servant leader, it has also been established that the ambitious leader should seek to implement the practices and perspectives of servant leadership in one’s team leadership practices. In this way, a key motivator that directs the ambitious team leader’s behavior should be a desire to help and serve others.

²¹³ Martin Bolt, “Motivation,” in *Baker Encyclopedia of Psychology and Counseling*, 2nd ed., edited by David G. Benner and Peter C. Hill (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1999), 766.

²¹⁴ J. Robert Clinton, 158.

²¹⁵ Spears, 3-4.

Finally, the motivation of ambitious team leaders must stem from their need to build trust with others. Building trust was already highlighted previously in how ambitious team leaders can lead well, but it should also be an aspect of his or her motivation. A study of 500 professionals revealed that “95% agreed that pay and benefits were not the main motivators in their decision whether or not to stay with a job. The key issue was the ability to develop trusting relationships with upper management.”²¹⁶ The ability to build successful teams, and therefore healthy teams and churches, is reflective of the leaders’ ability to build trust. Building trust is one of several key motivators of ambitious team leaders.

Competitive Leader Versus Other Influencer CliftonStrengths

Competition is one of several CliftonStrengths that belongs within the Influencing domain of Strengths-Based Leadership. The other influencing CliftonStrengths include Activator, Command, Communication, Maximizer, Self-Assurance, Significance, and Woo.²¹⁷ Each of these themes, while specific to the theme of influence in leadership, are implemented and practiced in various ways.

For example, a leader with a lot of Command and Self-Assurance may use few words, but her confidence will continue to project authority and win followers. In contrast, a leader using Communication or Woo might get people involved by helping individuals feel comfortable and connected to the issue at hand.²¹⁸

In view of these differences, Competition will be compared to three specific CliftonStrengths including Activator, Maximizer, and Woo. The reason for these selected

²¹⁶ Dana Shilling, “How to Find and Keep Top Talent in Today’s Tight Labor Market,” *Medical Marketing and Media* 35, no. 9 (September 2000), 125.

²¹⁷ Rath, *Strengths-Based Leadership*, 24.

²¹⁸ Rath, *Strengths-Based Leadership*, 25.

themes was due to the researcher's own experience of these themes being present and active in several former leadership team members.

It is understood by the researcher that one strength does not make up a person's leadership. Several people can have both Competition and Activator as their top two themes and lead in different, yet effective ways. Other strengths and themes will impact how the strength of Competition looks in action. Considering that Competition is mainly dealing with influence or leadership at its core and is a very visible strength in most cases, it is valid to compare it to other themes that can look similar yet have a different foundation of influence.

Comparing Competition with Activator

The Activator theme best describes those who “can make things happen by turning thoughts into action. They want to do things now, rather than simply talk about them.”²¹⁹ The activator is someone who is well equipped to initiate a project or change. For the activator, the best way to quality performance is not through analysis or discussion, but through action.

Both Activator and Competition are about influencing others and teams towards performance and accomplishment. One difference is that the Activator seeks to take action as soon as possible, perhaps even impatiently. The Activator knows that their performance is judged by the actions completed.²²⁰ In contrast, the Competition theme views performance in comparison with other people, organizations, or even the self. As

²¹⁹ “Activator,” CliftonStrengths Theme, Gallup, (accessed October 17, 2020), <https://www.gallup.com/cliftonstrengths/en/252140/activator-theme.aspx>.

²²⁰ Rath, *StrengthsFinder 2.0*, 41.

such, the Activator, in the researcher's views, is less likely to fit the description of an ambitious team leader in comparison with Competition. The Activator prioritizes action, whereas those with Competition prioritize success.

Comparing Competition with Maximizer

If someone is a Maximizer, he or she is the type of person who loves to take something already in existence and make it better and excellent. The measure used by the Maximizer is that of excellence.²²¹ One description of the Maximizer is, "Like a diver after pearls, you search them out ... and polish the pearl until it shines."²²² The Maximizer is one who takes advantage of what is already there and tries to make it into something excellent. Maximizers stimulate personal and group excellence.²²³

One of the many qualities of the Maximizer is their ability to coach others to realizing their own potential. The primary influence of the Maximizer is in areas for both personal and team benefit. While everything Maximizers do is about attaining excellence, and their work, ministry, and leadership can reflect that excellence, that does not mean they are ambitious. Whereas those with the Competition theme want to be the best and be first in their endeavors, and set goals to that target, the Maximizer can often seek excellence in less ambitious areas.

²²¹ Rath, *StrengthsFinder 2.0*, 137.

²²² Rath, *StrengthsFinder 2.0*, 137.

²²³ "Maximizer," CliftonStrengths Theme, Gallup, (accessed October 17, 2020), <https://www.gallup.com/cliftonstrengths/en/252140/activator-theme.aspx>.

Comparing Competition with Woo

The theme of Woo is one that can often be misunderstood. In one sense, in the realm of sales, it is very impersonal. The salesperson can woo another into a sale that may not be to their benefit. Another perspective shared by those with Woo as a CliftonStrength is that they “love the challenge of meeting new people and winning them over.”²²⁴ Woo is a strength that focuses on gaining influence by building connections with other people. Woo is a very personal strength. Performance is often not measured by excellence and accomplishment or in comparison to other leaders or members but is measured in new relationships.

Due to the personal nature of Woo and the goal of new connections, the ambitious nature that is so prevalent in Competition is often not the same with Woo. Those with Woo can be ambitious for new relationships and making new friends, yet if a goal or target is not personal, it may not be as energizing to this person. Competition is driven by success, whereas Woo is driven by relationships.

Ambitious Team Leaders Create Healthy Teams and Churches

The ambitious or competitive team leader is one who seeks victory and to be the best in all he or she and the team are engaged in. This is why churches need these leaders on their teams. This ambitious or competitive leader is to be motivated primarily by God and his or her character must reflect that relationship in humility, integrity, and empathy. Ambitious team leaders, as proven in this section, are influential in creating and growing healthy teams and churches.

²²⁴ Rath, *Strengths-Based Leadership*, 233.

Ambitious Team Leaders as the First-Among-Equals

In the two sections above of this chapter, the project addressed team leadership and Competition as a strength and asset in leadership. In regard to team leadership, the study focused on the implications, benefits, and challenges faced by churches who practice this leadership model at their highest levels. While this may have seemed a break away from ambition and ambitious team leader themes as presented in the biblical-theological study of chapter two, it was imperative to have a foundation of team leadership in order to address how the ambitious leader can work well in and with a team.

In this chapter it is argued that the ambitious team leader is influential in creating and growing healthy teams and churches as the first-among-equals. This does not mean that other types of leaders with varying strengths or abilities cannot serve in such a role, but as the thesis of this project is focused on the ambitious team leader this final section only considered how he or she is able to lead teams well in this role.

There are many important responsibilities for the first-among-equals on a team, but three give particular evidence toward having an ambitious leader as the first-among-equals. This final section of chapter three addressed how the ambitious team leader can utilize that influence as the first-among-equals in roles of the agenda-setter, decision maker, and change implementer.

Ambitious Team Leader as the Agenda-Setter

The role of setting the agenda for any team or organization is an essential one. The agenda will, more than anything else, set the tone and direction of a team and meeting, or even an organization. In their work, Hackman and Johnson argue that one of the main elements of envisioning, or casting vision among an organization or team,

involves creating new agendas.²²⁵ The setting of the agenda, and the person or people involved in such a role, do so out of a need and desire to cast vision and set direction, whether that be the big-picture and long-term vision or even setting the agenda on a smaller scale such as that of a team meeting.

In an interview exploring why teams do not work, Hackman and Coutu argued that without a compelling direction or vision, there is a real risk that the various members of the team will pursue different agendas.²²⁶ Additionally, Lee Bolman and Terrence Deal, write, “The effective leader creates an agenda for change.”²²⁷ This type of agenda for change involves both a vision that balances the long-term interests of the leadership team and a strategy for achieving that vision.²²⁸ Bolman and Deal conclude, “A vision without strategy remains an illusion.”²²⁹ The vision and the agenda are tantamount to the effectiveness and efficiency of the church or team.

Commenting on Moses’ leadership, Cladis writes, “The people did not follow Moses because they thought he had a good idea. The people followed Moses because they sensed that God truly sent him, that his mission was God inspired.”²³⁰ Although Moses was not a team leader, per se, the reality is he was the agenda-setter for the people of Israel. And the people followed him because they believed he was sent by God to

²²⁵ Hackman and Johnson, 431.

²²⁶ Coutu, 29.

²²⁷ Lee G. Bolman and Terrence E. Deal, *Reframing Organizations: Artistry, Choice, and Leadership*, 6th ed. (Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2017), 205.

²²⁸ Bolman, 205.

²²⁹ Bolman, 205.

²³⁰ Cladis, 51.

accomplish the goals laid before them. Similarly, an ambitious team leader as an agenda-setter must navigate the tumultuous reality of setting an agenda on course with God's direction and not one's own.

Ambitious team leaders, with the Clifton Strength of Competition, are a good fit for such a role and responsibility because they celebrate their wins and victories, no matter how small. In a church leadership team, it can often be hard to see progress or realize that positive change is happening. The ambitious team leader celebrates victories and each of these types of celebrations, whether big or small, can motivate and create hope for the leadership team.

Another reason why the ambitious team leader should serve as the first-among-equals is because he or she is always keeping score or tracking measurements. While data can be construed or manipulated the reality of measuring progress and celebrating victories is very important to any team. As an agenda-setter the ambitious team leader with one's score-keeping can serve the team well as the first-among-equals by consistently bringing the score and measurements to the team and helping the team to stay on track with the established vision.

Ambitious Team Leader as the Decision Maker

Another component of ambitious leaders as the first-among-equals on a leadership team is their function as a decision maker. Leadership teams serve their respective organizations and members, but they do so, most often, by the decisions they make for the church or organization.

Within a team the first-among-equals is not the sole decision maker, nor should he or she use authority in such a way. Instead, although one may set the agenda and lead the team, he or she must find a way to balance decision-making based on what is best for the

team. This means that the first-among-equals must be willing to allow conflict to be explored, so long as that conflict is task conflict and not relational conflict among the various team members.²³¹

Team decision-making has many facets and can look different in various settings. In many it can look “more like an intense conversation between friends and less like a board meeting.”²³² This may result in things moving slower than desired, but the entire team must be on board and moving together. This is precisely why the ambitious team leader is qualified to serve as the first-among-equals. The competitive and ambitious nature of the leader does not equate to forcing decisions or action immediately, such as the Activator might desire. The ambitious team leader desires victory and to be the best, whether in comparison with others or in comparison with self and the organization previously. As such, the ambitious team leader will help the team to make the best decision for the team and church, even if that decision has delays or takes a while to come to fruition.

Ambitious Team Leader as the Change Implementer

A final characteristic of the first-among-equals is that he or she is a change implementer. Similar to making decisions, implementing change is not something done overnight, or at least it should not always be. Additionally, “While individuals can and do create change, it is collection action that broadens impact and deepens the benefit.”²³³

²³¹ Cheng Long, Zhong-Ming Wang, and Wei Zhang, “The Effects of Conflict on Team Decision Making,” *Social Behavior and Personality: AN International Journal* 39, no. 2 (2011): 189-198.

²³² Briggs, 122.

²³³ Barbara Kellerman, *Followership: How Followers Are Creating Change and Changing Leaders* (Boston: Harvard Business Review Press, 2008), 250.

Change must be implemented by a team, yet in setting the agenda and helping teams to make decisions, the first-among-equals is a very important person in the implementation of change.

Gary R. Collins in his book *Coaching Christians* wrote, “Change is more likely to be resisted if objections are ignored or minimized.”²³⁴ The same is observed on a team or in an organization as well. The team and the team leader must be able and willing to address the obstacles and objections to change. The ambitious team leader, while always pushing forward and seeking the best, can be a good asset in this regard since he or she will continually push people and organizations to be the best.

Additionally, as noted with ambitious team leaders as an agenda-setter, one of the many benefits they bring in this role is that of creating hope and celebrating victories. This is essential, for as Juana Bordas argues, “If people are not hopeful, they won’t act to change things.”²³⁵

Serving as the First-Among-Equals

The role of the first-among-equals on a team involves many gifts, strengths, and abilities, but ambitious team leaders, serving in this capacity, can help the team navigate all the challenges well, as described in this section. They serve well in team leadership by setting the agenda, helping in the decision-making process, and in implementing change. They are but one member of the team, but their gifts, as explored above, can be utilized to

²³⁴ Gary R Collins, *Christian Coaching: Helping Others Turn Potential into Reality*, 2nd ed. (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2009), 67.

²³⁵ Juana Bordas, *Salsa, Soul, and Spirit: Leadership for a Multicultural Age* (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc., 2007), 188.

their potential as the primary leaders or the first-among-equals on their respective teams in their local churches.

Ambitious Leaders in Team Leadership

In the biblical-theological study of chapter two the researcher discovered that ambition is neutral, until it is given a motivation or focus. For the church leader and the Christian that motivation must be to know God more fully, fulfill his mission, and glorify him with one's life. In chapter three, the literature review built upon the foundation Scripture laid in chapter two. In this chapter the researcher provided evidence that the church is served well, perhaps best, with a team leadership model with a first-among-equals helping to facilitate the team. Additionally, the researcher believes that the person serving in this first-among-equals role is best suited for someone who is ambitious and has the CliftonStrength of Competition.

This ambitious team leader serves in a unique role as the first-among-equals in helping to set the agenda, make decisions, and implement change in an organization, such as the declining or plateaued church. While other leadership strengths and types of leaders or models of leadership can prove effective, the researcher believes if an ambitious team leader can keep one's ego in check, have the appropriate biblical motivation as discussed in chapter two, and fulfill the character qualities as described in Scripture and this project, they will be influential in creating and building healthy churches and church leadership teams.

Whereas ambition is often viewed negatively within leadership, especially within the church, this project sought out to highlight the opposite. While the problem that this dissertation addressed was that of the impact a leader's ambition and competitiveness can have on teams he or she leads, this project has unveiled, piece by piece, that a leader's

ambition must be aimed at knowing God more fully, fulfilling his mission and glorifying him, and only then are they best qualified to influence the creating and building of healthy teams and churches.

CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH METHODS FOR EXAMINING AMBITION AND COMPETITION IN CHURCH LEADERSHIP

Thesis Project Review

The purpose of this thesis project was to study the impact of ambition and ambitious leaders in relation to team leadership and effectiveness in the local church. The researcher chose a qualitative research approach to this problem and utilized the multiple case study method. The specific goal was to discover a strategic set of principles that the ambitious team leader could utilize in their team leadership and ministry.

The researcher first focused on the biblical perspective of ambition and examples of ambitious leadership in both Old and New Testaments. Secondly, a review of relevant literature in relation to team leadership, church leadership, and utilizing one's strengths provided insight into the need and benefits of ambitious leaders in the church.

For the field study, the researcher utilized the multiple, or collective, case study method. The findings from the biblical study and literature review helped guide the creation of interview questions. These questions were in relation to the participant's strengths, evidence of those strengths in ministry and leadership, and the structure and function of the church leadership team(s). The questions and the interview itself were used to collect data from the participants. Participants were initially identified as those men or women who served as the solo pastor or lead pastor of a local church and had been serving in this role or at this church for five or more years. The participants were divided into two categories. One category consisted of those pastors who had

Competition as a top five CliftonStrength. The second category included those pastors who did not have Competition as a top five CliftonStrength.

Through the process of identifying pastors, their CliftonStrengths, and their responses to the interview questions, various patterns emerged in relation to the utilization of their strengths, revealing how one's strengths impact their leadership and ministry. These patterns affirmed that one's leadership was impacted significantly by their strengths and uncovered those particular principles that assisted the ambitious or competitive leader in their leadership and ministry more directly than others.

Research Methodology

Qualitative Research

The research of this project was qualitative in nature and used multiple case study by interviewing pastors to uncover the patterns of leadership evident by those in each category of the case study. Research, in general, is “a systematic process of collecting, analyzing, and interpreting information (data) in order to increase our understanding of the phenomenon about which we are interested or concerned.”²³⁶ The qualitative method of research was the best approach for this project because it gathered “data in a natural setting sensitive to the people and places under study.”²³⁷ This approach was beneficial in creating integrity within the interviews because the changes that COVID-19 have created among churches and leadership allowed the pastors to participate in their natural settings. Another benefit, as addressed by John Creswell, is that qualitative studies analyze the

²³⁶ Paul D. Leedy and Jeanne Ellis Ormrod, *Practical Research: Planning and Design*, 11th ed. (Boston: Pearson, 2016), 2.

²³⁷ John W. Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design*, 3rd ed. (Los Angeles: Sage Publications, 2013), 44.

data in ways that “establish patterns or themes.”²³⁸ This met the researcher’s goal of identifying patterns of leadership within the two categories of pastoral participants. An additional benefit of qualitative research was the emergent design, in which data collected early in the investigation influenced the kinds of data the researcher gathered.²³⁹ The researcher was able to establish the thesis of this dissertation more firmly as more information was gathered in the research process.

The qualitative method of inquiry was applied to this project because it allowed the research process to move beyond numbers and assessments to hear the practiced styles of leadership implemented in the responses of the pastoral participants. In these responses, the researcher discovered connections among the two categories of participants. The qualitative method allowed the researcher to better understand the complex details of the pastors’ ministry leadership which could only be established by talking directly with them and allowed them to tell their stories unhindered.²⁴⁰ In the end, this approach best empowered the researcher to define what was important and valuable in ministry and team leadership for the two categories of participants.²⁴¹

Multiple Case Study through Interviews

The researcher followed a multiple or collective case study approach which looked at the leadership style of two sets or categories of pastors. Although the case study method benefits from collecting data from “multiples sources of information,” the

²³⁸ Creswell, 44.

²³⁹ Leedy, 289.

²⁴⁰ Creswell, 48.

²⁴¹ Leedy, 251.

restrictive nature of COVID-19 during the time of the research resulted in the researcher having collected data for the case studies from the participants' responses exclusively through face-to-face video interviews, or phone interviews when video was not accessible to the participants for a variety of reasons.

The collective case study method was chosen because it allowed the research to investigate a topic that was little-understood.²⁴² While there has been a growth in literature focused on leading from one's strengths the thesis of this project did not fit seamlessly into it as the scope and quantity of ambitious or competitive leaders in positions of pastoral authority are limited. It is the specific issue of the ambitious and competitive nature of a leader serving as pastor that has been under-researched. For this primary reason, the collective case study method was a helpful tool for this project.

The collective aspect of this case study further increased the external validity.

Robert Yin writes,

If you can do even a 'two-case' case study, your chances of doing a good case study will be better than using a single-case design. Single-case designs are vulnerable if only because you will have put 'all your eggs in one basket.' More important, the analytic benefits from having two (or more) cases may be substantial. ... Analytic conclusions independently arising from two cases, as with two experiments, will be more powerful than those coming from a single-case (or single experiment).²⁴³

As this project was unable to access additional sources of information, the inclusion of two cases, rather than one, added validity to the research process.

²⁴² John Gerring, *Case Study Research Principles and Practices* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 68.

²⁴³ Robert K. Yin, *Case Study Research and Applications: Design and Methods*, 6th ed. (Los Angeles: Sage Publications, 2018), 61.

Case study methodology further uncovers the aspects of church leadership and ministry often overlooked by Christian leadership literature. These pastors better know the impact of their own leadership within the churches they serve compared to that of quantitative research measures. Their direct and indirect knowledge and experience of leading churches and church teams is integral to understanding how pastors lead out from their strengths differently than others. Yin writes, “Whatever the field of interest, the distinctive need for case study research arises out of the desire to understand complex phenomena. In brief, a case study allows investigators to focus on a ‘case’ and retain a holistic and real-world perspective.”²⁴⁴ This coincides with the researcher’s purpose for this project.

The data was collected through the use of face-to-face video interviews, or live phone interviews when video was not an option. This was crucial to the research as it provided depth and breadth that would not have been accessible through informal surveys or other methods.²⁴⁵ Surveys and other methods often leave room only for agreements or disagreements of various statements by the participants, whereas interviews allow for participants to share the reasoning and evidence for their perspective and experience.²⁴⁶ Through these interviews the researcher was able to gain significant data through “actual (conversational) questions in an unbiased manner.”²⁴⁷ The questions for the interviews

²⁴⁴ Yin, 4.

²⁴⁵ Nancy Jean Vymeister, *Quality Research Papers for Students of Religion and Theology*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 161.

²⁴⁶ Vymeister, 161.

²⁴⁷ Yin, 110.

were open-ended, as general as possible, and focused on the key themes of the thesis addressed in the biblical study and literature review of this dissertation.

The interviews always began with general information about the thesis, the participant's role, and the guarantee of anonymity in the finalized project. The participant's anonymity guaranteed that no names, church names, or direct quotes from the participants would be used in the final project of this dissertation. Additionally, the interviews provided the researcher with key information in regard to the qualifications of the participant in relation to the parameters and delimitations of the project, along with their top five CliftonStrengths. While the interviews were not recorded the researcher took detailed notes throughout the interview and was able to follow-up with the participants if there was need, although this never occurred as the notes from the interviews provided the data necessary for this project. A final note about the interview process was that the interview and biographical questions were given to the participants ahead of time in the event they wanted time to consider their responses as this project was not focused only on a participant's immediate or initial response.

While the participants were categorized into two groups the questions asked were similar. The researcher asked the interviewees with Competition as a top five strength to respond to these six questions and/or statements: "Briefly explain how each your strengths (above) are utilized in your leadership and ministry." "Specifically, in regard to competition, how does this strength add value to your leadership? How do you see this strength promoting higher levels of influence in your leadership team?" "As a competitor, how do you define success in your context personally and organizationally with your team?" "Describe the leadership team of the church (Example: elders vs. governing

board; size and makeup of leadership team; team led vs. individually led; etc.).”

“Describe some intentional things you do as a high-level leader in the church to promote a healthy leadership team.” and “Through StrengthsFinder, Tom Rath identified four primary things that followers desire from their leaders above all else: Trust, Compassion, Stability, and Hope. Which of these do you think the church and leadership team receives the most through your leadership? Explain.”

For those participants without Competition in their top five CliftonStrengths, they were asked to respond to the following six questions and/or statements: “Briefly explain how each your strengths (above) are utilized in your leadership and ministry.” “How do your strengths add value to your leadership? How do you see your strengths promoting higher levels of execution, influence, relationship building, or strategic thinking?” “How do you define success in your context personally and organizationally with your team?” “Describe the leadership team of the church (Example: elders vs. governing board; size and makeup of leadership team; team led vs. individually led; etc.).” “Describe some intentional things you do as a high-level leader in the church to promote a healthy leadership team.” and “Through StrengthsFinder, Tom Rath identified four primary things that followers desire from their leaders above all else: Trust, Compassion, Stability, and Hope. Which of these do you think the church and leadership team receives the most through your leadership? Explain.”

The only significant difference between the interviews for the two categories was the second question. For those with Competition, this question emphasized the value of the Competition strength exclusively. For the non-competitive category, that question was broader in seeking the value of all of the pastor’s strengths. The reason for this

difference was that focus of this study is primarily on Competition as a strength and more attention to this strength aided the researcher in discovering specific variables in this type of leader's ministry.

The first question, in connection with the second question, focused on the pastors' strengths, how those strengths were evident in their leadership and ministry, and the value those strengths added. These questions typically resulted in the longest and most detailed responses from the participants.

The third question focused on success. As competitors are driven by their desire to succeed and win in their pursuits, it was a valuable question in collecting data comparing the two categories. This question emphasized the drive or motivation behind the participant's leadership and ministry. An additional clarifying question was asked of the pastors, not listed, in relation to how the pastor would define success after having left a team leadership meeting. The question was "How would you know a leadership team meeting was successful?"

This added question streamlined the interview into the fourth question in regard to the makeup of the leadership team of the church. As some participants might serve in a church where the pastor was the main or only authority, it was imperative that the researcher understood the makeup and structure of the churches served by these pastors.

After having addressed the organizational structure of the church and how success was defined among the church leadership, the fifth question emphasized the intentional practices implemented by the pastor to promote a healthy team leadership environment and culture. This question, while focused on a different area of leadership than the other questions, dove into the heart of the pastor's actual implementation of healthy leadership.

The researcher did not want to only know what the pastor thought about leadership and teams in ministry, but rather the actual practices being utilized. This question also gave significant data when comparing the two categories of participants.

The final question was in relation to what the followers of the church get from their primary pastor or leader (trust, compassion, stability, or hope). Each leader must promote those four elements in their leadership, but since leaders emphasize different strengths and characteristics, it was imperative to learn, from the pastors' perspective, what element(s) their church received the most through their leadership.

Each of these questions were specific and valuable to the data necessary for this thesis project. Each question allowed the participant to respond according to his or her own understanding and share what he or she believed to be relevant to their ministry leadership in the local church.

Participants

There were ten interviewees that were selected and agreed to participate in this research project. Of those interviewees, six qualified and fulfilled the category without Competition in their top five CliftonStrengths compared to the four participants who had Competition in their top five.

There were two primary reasons for the difference in the number of interviews between the categories. The first, and most applicable, is that the researcher could not find any more qualified participants who had Competition as a top five strength. The researcher searched through his own network, denominational district directories, networks of friends and associates, unsolicited emails to those in the Converge and Evangelical Free Church of America church directories, along with seeking assistance from his thesis advisor, program director, and the Alumni office of Bethel University to

find qualified individuals who fulfilled the parameters of this project. This expansive network was only able to net the four interviewees for the competitive category. A second reason for the difference is that there is no number of interviews required in order to engage in qualitative research. As Howard S. Becker writes,

How many qualitative interviews is enough? Every experienced researcher knows this question has no reasonable answer, no magic number you can do and then you're out of danger. The only possible answer is to have enough interviews to say what you think is true and not to say things you don't have that number for. The kinds of things you might want to say take a lot of forms and so require varying numbers of interviews.²⁴⁸

The number of interviews for each category were determined by the number of qualifying participants found and the necessary number to discover patterns within each category.

The participants were those who were currently serving as the primary pastor of a local church, who had been in that church for at least five years and has to have had taken the StrengthsFinder 2.0 assessment at some point prior to the interview. These were some the delimitations for this thesis in the initial proposal with one change, noted below.

Data Analysis

Once the totality of the interviews within each category were completed, the researcher analyzed the data using the process described by Creswell as the data analysis spiral.²⁴⁹ This process forced the researcher to go through the data several times adding

²⁴⁸ Howard S. Becker, "How Many Qualitative Interviews is Enough?" *NCRM National Centre for Research Methods*, edited by Sarah Elsie Baker and Rosalind Edwards (March, 2012): 3-4, accessed December 8, 2020, http://eprints.ncrm.ac.uk/2273/4/how_many_interviews.pdf.

²⁴⁹ Creswell, 182.

depth and breadth to the patterns that emerged.²⁵⁰ The four steps in the process were organization, perusal, classification, and synthesis.²⁵¹

The first step was organization. The researcher organized the data using folders. Each folder consisted of the responses to each numbered question. For example, for the third question in relation to defining success, every response from the non-competitive participants were typed into a separate document and put in this folder. This step was repeated for both categories of pastors and for each question.

As the researcher had all the responses to individual questions on one document, common ideas or phrases were easy to identify. This was the second step of perusal in the data analysis spiral. It required the researcher to review each page in depth multiple times and forced the patterns within to emerge.

These findings helped to identify the themes and patterns evident in the data in the third step of classification. This assisted the researcher in understanding what the data actually meant in relation to the project.²⁵²

The final step of synthesis involved the researcher integrating and summarizing the findings. Each of these above steps was done for each of the categories of pastors before being summarized individually and uncovering the principles of effective team leadership for the competitive and ambitious team leader.

²⁵⁰ Leedy, 297.

²⁵¹ Leedy, 298.

²⁵² Leedy, 297.

Project Changes from the Proposal

There were a few key changes from the proposal in regard to the actual research project. One such change was to eliminate the delimitation of church size previously noted. The initial proposal required that participants serve in churches between 75-250 regular adherents. During the networking phase of finding appropriate participants, there were only four pastors found with the strength of Competition in their top five and all of them served in churches that were above the church size delimitation. Each of the competitive pastors served in churches that exceeded this delimitation of 250 average attenders. This change actually served as a pattern that emerged from the research in that pastors with Competition were more often found serving in larger churches. A more detailed explanation of this finding is found in chapter five. In response to this change to the group with Competition as a top five strength, the researcher included interviews from those whose churches were outside of the initial parameters for the non-competitive group as well.

A second significant change is that the researcher focused only on the CliftonStrength of Competition, instead of the combination of Competition and Achiever as originally proposed. The reason for this change was that upon further research and considering that these strengths belong to two different domains, it was imperative that the focus of this project be limited to the CliftonStrength which the researcher most associated with ambition. That strength was Competition, so Achiever was removed from the focus of the study.

CHAPTER 5: ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS OF NON-COMPETITIVE AND COMPETITIVE CHURCH LEADERS

Introduction

The collective case study approach required multiple sections of data observation and analysis prior to discovering the findings of this project. The process undertaken included data observations within each case study, or category of pastoral strengths, in both the preliminary and interview responses followed by an analysis of the relevant data in each case study.

Non-Competitive Leader Analysis

Preliminary Observations of Non-Competitive Leaders

The first completed case study field research for a designated category in this project included those pastors who did not have Competition as a top five CliftonStrength. The researcher was able to conduct six interviews.

The pastors who made up this category had a wide-array of leadership experiences with some having over twenty-five years of experience compared to others with five years. This also provided the researcher with a wide-ranging category in terms of the age of the participants. Additionally, all of the pastors had been serving in ministry leadership in the upper Midwest of the United States of America.

An interesting, although unexpected, preliminary finding of this case study was that the majority of the pastors had three Relationship Building strengths represented in their top five. For the two pastors who did not have three Relationship Building strengths, their situations could provide the reasoning. For one participant, the pastor had taken the

StrengthsFinder 2.0 assessment in the early stages of planting the church. Church planting often requires a more specialized set of strengths to be successful than the typical senior pastor. For the second participant without three Relationship Building strengths, the reason could be due to the assessment having been taken before serving in his current lead pastor role, which was over fifteen years ago. Each of these participants still had at least one Relationship Building strength in their top five. While these pastors did not re-take the assessment prior to the interview, it would be interesting to see if and how those strengths would change and if three Relationship Building strengths would be evident at this point in their ministry.

In Table 5.1 below, all of the strengths represented from the six non-competitive category interviews are provided in their appropriate domain.

Table 5.1 Non-Competitive Pastor Clifton Strengths

Executing	Influencing	Relationship Building	Strategic Thinking
Belief (x2)	Maximizer (x2)	Adaptability (x4)	Learner (x2)
Achiever	Woo (x2)	Includer (x3)	Analytical
Arranger	Communication	Empathy (x2)	Strategic
Consistency		Harmony (x2)	
Discipline		Positivity (x2)	
Responsibility		Developer	

Relationship Building

An analysis of these findings and numbers reveal that the highest represented domain for non-competitive pastors was that of Relationship Building strengths. Relationship-Building strengths represented fourteen of the thirty total strengths listed in this table, or 46.667 percent.

Of all thirty strengths represented among the non-competitive pastors interviewed, the two most often found strengths were both in this Relationship Building domain.

Adaptability and Includer each appeared in the pastors' top five strengths three or more times. Three other strengths were from the Relationship-Building domain including Empathy, Harmony, and Positivity were tied for third among all strengths appearing. A final strength in this domain that appeared was that of Developer.

Executing

The second highest represented domain of strengths for non-competitive pastors was that of the Executing domain. The Executing strengths represented seven of the thirty total strengths, or 23.333 percent. This reveals that the highest category, Relationship Building, appeared in the top five strengths for non-competitive leaders twice as often as the next highest category, Executing.

While strengths in the Executing domain were second in total number of appearances in this category, they represented just as many individual strengths as the Relationship Building domain. Relationship Building strengths had fourteen total appearances represented by six individual strengths. The Executing domain also had six individual strengths but represented a total of seven appearances. The only Executing domain strength that appeared more than once was Belief, which was tied for third most appearances. The other Executing domain strengths included Achiever, Arranger, Consistency, Discipline, and Responsibility.

Influencing

The third highest domain of strengths represented by the non-competitive pastors was the Influencing domain. Influencing strengths represented five of the thirty strengths, or 16.667 percent.

The Influencing domain was only represented by three individual strengths appearing a total of five times. The most represented strengths in this domain were Maximizer and Woo, each appearing twice. The other Influencing strength represented was Communication.

Strategic Thinking

The lowest represented domain of strengths for this category was the Strategic Thinking domain. Strategic Thinking strengths represented four of the thirty strengths, or 13.333 percent.

As with the Influencing domain, this Strategic Thinking domain was only represented by three individual strengths, with one appearing more than once. That strength, Learner, was represented twice with the other two strengths, Analytical and Strategic, being found once in the results.

Conclusion

While the nature of this research was qualitative and not quantitative, the numbers revealed patterns of the type of leader that most churches have hired to lead their organizations. The numbers created a pattern that it was more likely to find pastors who excel in building relationships and relating well with people over that of some of the other domains. The pattern set by these preliminary observations described pastors without competition as relationship builders.

Interview Response Findings of Non-Competitive Pastors

Valuable observations were made in the preliminary conversations with the participants, as noted above. The most important and valuable findings for this study were discovered in the analysis of the interview responses. Each question of the interview

was asked in connection with a major theme or idea of the biblical and literature review of this project and the responses resulted in several key findings below.

Question One: Briefly explain how each of your strengths are utilized in your leadership and ministry.

The first question was simply focused on the participants' understanding of their own CliftonStrengths results. At times, some pastors would have the book or a handout readily available to review and give their own spin on their particular strengths whereas others were familiar enough with the strengths to describe them in their own terms. Each participant shared their understanding of the strengths they possessed and explained where and how those strengths were being implemented in ministry and leadership.

Adaptability. The CliftonStrength of Adaptability was the most commonly evidenced strength during the interviews of this case study. With more than half of the pastors representing this strength there were a couple of findings within the responses to this strength.

First, all four of the participants with this strength made specific note that adaptability has helped the most in regard to their environment, culture, or community. While there was some reflection in regard to the late-changing dynamics of planning a worship service in partnership with others, the main responses surrounding adaptability reflected the need to adapt to their surroundings.

Secondly, as noted above, each of the participants also made comments in regard to this strength being important in order to move easily with changes. This idea was more broad-based such as including worship service planning, COVID-19, and even scheduling time with busy volunteers to invest time, attention, and appreciation.

Includer. The only other CliftonStrength that was represented by at least half of the participants was Includer. Each participant recognized this strength as one that is implemented or utilized by bringing people together.

The specific comments made by each participant about this strength were in regard to “identifying” people. This process of identifying included not only recognizing those who were on the fringes of the community, but also helped to identify their talents and their interests and how they could use those in service of God.

Question Two: How do your strengths add value to your leadership? How do you see your strengths promoting higher levels of execution, influence, relationship building, or strategic thinking?

The second question built upon the first question that required the participants to think beyond how their strengths were utilized and to describing the value of utilizing their strengths in ministry and leadership. Some pastors worked through each of their strengths noting the value they see from them, whereas others focused on just a few specific strengths that they found most valuable.

As each strength was not addressed by every participant identifying patterns within those strengths was not possible. Instead, analyzing all of the comments together brought forth one significant finding in regard to approachability.

Approachability. Five of the six participants in this category reflected on the value of their strengths promoting approachability for those in their congregations and under their leadership. This approachability allowed people to feel comfortable in communicating with the pastor and to being open to engaging with him or her about spiritual and personal matters. Additionally, approachability was integral to getting to know people, identifying them, investing in them, and helping them to understand where they fit into the local church and in the family of God. An additional value noted within

the comments surrounding approachability was that in getting to know the people, both members and non-members, of the church the pastor was better able to appreciate and understand others' point of view in various respects.

Question Three: How do you define success in your context personally and organizationally with your team? (Added question: How would you know a leadership team meeting was successful?)

The third question was focused on understanding and defining success for the participant personally, organizationally, and in team leadership meetings. This question focused on the fuel of the participant's ministry and leadership.

Knowing God More Fully. Each of the six participants noted first and foremost that success is knowing God more fully. While the phrases used were different, success to the non-competitive pastors were people growing in the Lord, whether that was someone beginning a saving relationship with God for the first-time or taking a small step in their spiritual maturity.

Fulfilling God's Mission. A second finding that was evident with all six participants was that they each commented on success being evident when the church was making disciples or growing the kingdom. This is similar to the finding above in regard to knowing God more fully, but specifically these comments surrounded the concept of the Great Commission (Matt. 28:18-20) and making new disciples.

Glorifying God. The personal definition of success for the majority of the participants in this category commented on success as honoring God with one's life. This took the tone of glorifying God with one's marriage, obedience to God's word, being an example to the congregation of making disciples, and building healthy relationships. In short, the personal definition of success from these participants was to glorify God by living a life that reflected the things he or she teaches.

Communication. The question about defining success following a leadership team meeting produced two key findings. The first of those findings was that success was when there was open and honest communication. Four of the six participants shared that they sensed a team meeting was successful when everyone was engaged, communicating directly and openly, and there were good exchanges and dialogue among the team.

Beyond the Agenda. The second finding from this additional question was that half of the participants noted that a team meeting was successful when it moved beyond the scope of the agenda. While the agenda was noted as being important, it was not the most important. For half of the participants what was more important than completing discussion from the agenda was focusing on the people in the meeting.

For one, that meant that the meeting had time for people to talk about wins and stories from ministry and their personal lives. For another, this meant the meeting had substantial prayer for one another. For a third pastor, a successful team meeting meant that people shared about their roles and responsibilities in the church and how they were doing with it. Each of these comments suggested that success in a team leadership meeting was defined by what happens outside of the agenda and in the lives of church.

Question Four: Describe the leadership team of the church.

The fourth question presented to the participants was more objective, than subjective, in nature. Whereas the previous questions were focused on the pastors' understanding of their strengths, this question focused on the objective structure of the churches' leadership teams. While this question could present the researcher with key insights into the dynamics of the church, it was more designed to affirm that the participants represented in the two categories were in similar structural environments.

Hybrid Model. Each of the participants served in a leadership team structure that had the lead pastor being the chair and primary agenda setter for the leadership team. While the makeup, name, and authority of each leadership team were slightly different all practiced a hybrid model of leadership in which the pastor seemed to have the most authority but was accountable to the leadership team and invited the leadership team to engage in the production of the agenda and the topics of the agenda.

Each pastor commented that this hybrid model of leadership was intended to create a team-based atmosphere for conversation, dialogue, and decision making. Each pastor noted at least one instance where a decision made by the team as a whole was different from what the pastor had initially intended further affirming a hybrid model of leadership, rather than that of a fully hierarchical model.

Question Five: Describe some intentional things you do as a high-level leader in the church to promote a healthy leadership team.

Of the six questions presented to the participants, the fifth question emphasized the practices that the pastor engaged in to promote healthy leadership teams. This question moved beyond the hoped-for practices of the pastors and sought the evidence of implemented practices. Two specific types of practices were noted by more than half of the participants in this non-competitive category.

Relational Investment. The first and most commonly referred to intentional practice of promoting healthy leadership teams was relational investment. Five of the six participants commented that they engage with their leaders outside of the regular meeting times to invest in the relationship.

Some practiced regular gratitude and being sure to personally thank their leaders. Others noted how they take the leader and his or her family out for a meal to thank them

for service. Another noted they do an annual appreciation night for all of their ministries, but the pastor specifically focuses on those leadership team volunteers and members. The practice of relational investment for these pastors centered around the idea of building relationships because these teams were more than just friends, as one pastor noted that they are more like family.

Growth Investment. A second finding for these non-competitive pastors was that they invested in the growth of their team leadership members. Not only did these pastors invest in the relationship with their leaders, but also invested in their leaders in order that they might grow in various ways.

This included studies as a team around personal and spiritual growth or church development. Some participated in annual training events such as the Global Leadership Summit. Other pastors invested in their leaders with orientations and creating clear ministry descriptions and responsibilities for their various teams and leaders. Each pastor invested in the growth of their members in order to promote healthy ministry and growth together as a team.

Question Six: Through StrengthsFinder, Tom Rath identified four primary things that followers desire from their leaders above all else: Trust, Compassion, Stability, and Hope. Which of these do you think the church and leadership team receives the most through your leadership? Explain.

The sixth and final question of these interviews focused on what the followers of the church leadership and church received the most from their pastor's leadership. Each leader promotes some, or all, of those four elements in their leadership. Since leaders emphasize different strengths and characteristics, it was imperative to learn, from the pastors' perspective, what element(s) their church received the most through their ministry leadership.

Stability. By using a ranking system based on where the different participants placed those four elements in order, the highest rated element churches received from these pastors was stability. Stability was the top choice for half of the participants and the second choice for the rest.

The pastors' understanding of stability often focused on the stability the pastor had been able to provide the church amidst the turmoil and changes required by COVID-19 during 2020. Another focus of this element was that many of the pastors had been in their role and in their churches for a considerable amount of time, providing a level of stability in the leadership team.

Compassion. A close second in the rankings of these elements and also a top element, or second highest, for many of the participants, was that of compassion. Compassion was understood by many in the context of relationships.

More than one pastor commented that their church was full of compassionate people and that compassion was being modeled by the pastor's own relationships with those inside and outside of the church. Another, stemming from the gratitude noted in question five, was that the pastor would go so far as to know the birthdays and favorite treats of the leadership team members in order to show just how much he cares for those in the church. The followers of these churches would know that their pastor cared for them as people, encouraged them, and as such the churches received compassion through their pastor's leadership.

Competitive Leader Analysis

Preliminary Observations of Competitive Leaders

After having completed the field research for the non-competitive pastors, the researcher undertook to interview pastors who had Competition as a top five CliftonStrength. The researcher was able to conduct four interviews.

Similar to the non-competitive pastors, the competitive pastors had a wide-array of leadership experiences with some having over twenty years of experience compared to others with five years. This also provided the researcher with a wide-ranging category in terms of the age of the participants. Additionally, all four pastors had spent the majority of their ministry in the upper Midwest of the United States of America.

One initial preliminary finding for this case study, mentioned above, was that all of the participants served in churches outside of the project's initial delimitations. All four participants served in churches which had an average attendance in excess of 300 people. This finding could indicate the type of church setting that the ambitious church pastor is more successful in, but the interview and questions did not naturally lean into why this was a common finding. As such, it is a preliminary observation, but no other information was gleaned to determine the reason behind it.

Each of the participants had taken the StrengthsFinder 2.0 assessment within the last few years and the results were easily remembered by the pastors. An interesting preliminary finding of this case study was that each of the four pastors had a combined total of four themes in their top five that were a grouping of the Executing and Influencing themes. This also meant that each of the pastors only had one individual theme that belonged to the strategic thinking or relationship building category in their top five, which was a major finding in the non-competitive case study.

In Table 5.2 below, all of the strengths represented from the four competitive category interviews are provided in their appropriate domain.

Table 5.2 Competitive Pastor Clifton Strengths

Executing	Influencing	Relationship Building	Strategic Thinking
Achiever (x3)	Competition (x4)	Positivity (x2)	Learner (x2)
Belief (x2)	Activator (x2)		
Discipline	WOO (x2)		
Restorative	Self-Assurance		

Influencing

An analysis of these findings and numbers revealed that the highest represented domain for competitive pastors was that of Influencing. Influencing strengths represented nine of the twenty total strengths listed in this table, or 45 percent.

Of all twenty strengths represented among the competitive pastors interviewed, the most often found strength was that of Competition, which is a natural finding as that was what this case study was searching for. Two additional strengths in this domain appeared multiple times including Activator and Woo. These strengths were tied for the third most commonly found strength in this case study. A final strength in this domain that appeared was Self-Assurance.

Executing

The second highest represented domain of strengths for competitive pastors was that of the Executing domain. The Executing strengths represented seven of the twenty total strengths, or 35 percent.

While strengths in the Executing domain were second in total number of appearances in this category, they represented just as many individual strengths as the Influencing domain. Influencing strengths had nine total appearances represented by four

individual strengths. The Executing domain also had four individual strengths but represented a total of seven appearances.

The most commonly found Executing strength in this category was Achiever, which was found in three of the four participants and was the second most common strength in this category. Additionally, the strength of Belief also appeared more than once and tied for the third most common strength. The other Executing domain strengths included Discipline and Restorative.

Strategic Thinking and Relationship Building

The final two domains, Strategic Thinking and Relationship Building, combined to appear once in each of the participants' top five strengths. Two pastors had one strategic thinking strength in their top five while the other two had one relationship building strength. In total, both categories each included one strength represented twice, or 10 percent each.

For the Strategic Thinking domain, the strength that appeared twice was that of Learner. For the Relationship Building domain, the strength that also appeared twice was that of Positivity.

Conclusion

While the nature of this research was qualitative and not quantitative, the numbers revealed patterns for the competitive pastors who lead their churches. The numbers created a pattern that if a pastor was competitive and had Competition as a top five strength, their remaining top five strengths were more likely to be filled by other Influencing or Executing themes rather than that of Relationship Building or Strategic

Thinking. The pattern set by these preliminary observations described competitive pastors as those who take charge and make things happen.

Interview Response Findings of Competitive Leaders

The preliminary observations with the competitive participants provided insightful information that already helped determine differences between the two case studies. In the interviews and from the participants' responses more valuable information was analyzed to further identify the similarities and differences that set these two categories apart. Each question of the interview was asked in connection with a major theme or idea of the biblical and literature review of this project and the responses resulted in several key findings below.

Question One: Briefly explain how each of your strengths are utilized in your leadership and ministry.

This first question helped the participants to begin with their own understanding of their strengths and evidence of those strengths being utilized in their ministry and leadership. Similar to the other case study, some pastors had notes from their assessment with them whereas others were able to articulate their strengths in their own words.

Competition. The most commonly found strength for this case study was Competition, which was represented by all four pastors who participated. This was the expectation to qualify for this group, so it was a natural pattern to uncover.

In terms of the descriptions given by the participants in regard to this strength, all four noted that they do not see this strength being utilized for the purpose of comparing their church with other churches in the area. Rather, they all viewed Competition as a strength of comparing themselves and their church with the self. They all described their

strength of Competition as being one that drives them to be the best they can be at everything they do.

Achiever. As noted in the preliminary observations, the second most common strength found in this group was that of Achiever, which was represented by three of the four participants. Of this strength, each of the three pastors noted that this strength has been focused on setting clear expectations and accomplishing those expectations. They delighted in being aware of what needs to be done and getting it done.

Question Two: Specifically, in regard to Competition, how does this strength add value to your leadership? How do you see this strength promoting higher levels of influence in your leadership team?

With this second question, pastors were asked to not just indicate how their strength of Competition was utilized in their ministry, but the value that being competitive has added to their church and leadership.

Driven. In connection with the strength of Competition, each pastor made remarks about how they are extremely hard workers. They described their strength in terms of being driven or motivated, crossing the finish line, and having lots of energy to address the many facets of leading a church.

The terms for being driven or striving after goals were noted seven times in this question among the four interviews. The pastors recognized their own work ethic adding value as people would see that drive and seek to emulate it in their own lives or seek advice knowing that the pastor was always striving and working towards what was best for the church and the people.

Progress and Measurement. A second key finding from this question in the interviews was that three of the four participants commented on their continued progress and the measurements used to track that progress. One uses a 360-degree feedback

system with the leaders for his own leadership, but they also measure where the church has been and where it is now in many facets. Others noted they set regular goals within their ministries and each ministry must have multiple measurements to track over the various seasons of church life.

Question Three: How do you define success in your context personally and organizationally with your team? (Added question: How would you know a leadership team meeting was successful?)

This third question helped the pastors to address their own understanding of success on various levels including personally, organizationally, and in leadership team meetings. Each pastor fully addressed all three components of the question.

Knowing God More Fully, Glorifying God, and Fulfilling God's Mission. Similar to the non-competitive case study, all of the pastors shared that success both organizationally and personally relates to knowing God, glorifying him, and fulfilling his mission to make disciples.

The comments referred to the “win” in ministry as being the Gospel being preached, heard, and responded to. Many commented on the need for the people and the pastor to grow spiritually in relationship with God and living out the values of the church in their everyday lives.

Unity. Another finding from the interviews that the majority of the participants shared was that success could be defined or noted by unity. Whether in a team leadership meeting or among the church as a whole, they defined success by the level of unity among the people. One pastor's view of unity was that there would be fun and laughter among the team and leadership. Others noted that there was unity about the mission even if there was disagreement about the process of accomplishing that mission.

Excitement. A final finding from this question was that the majority of the participants looked at success in terms of excitement among the church and leadership. There was success when the leaders and people were not just excited emotionally, but excited to engage and serve to fulfill the mission and vision. Service can often be viewed as drudgery or necessary, but several pastors believed that success was when there was an excitement to be faithful to the Lord in service.

Question Four: Describe the leadership team of the church.

The fourth question presented the pastor with an objective question in regard to the makeup and structure of their church. It was designed to affirm that the churches and pastors followed similar leadership structures as the other case study for continuity in the research of this project.

Hybrid Model. Each of the participants served in a leadership team structure that had the lead pastor either serving as the chair and primary agenda setter for the leadership team or partnered with another leader who served as the chair. The makeup, name, and authority of each leadership team were slightly different, but all practiced a hybrid model of leadership in which the pastor seemed to have the most authority but was accountable to the leadership team and invited the leadership team to engage in the production of the agenda and the topics for the agenda.

Staff Driven. One major change from the non-competitive group to this one was that these pastors all served in churches that had multiple staff. As such, there was more authority given to the staff for the day-to-day processes and decisions of the church. In view of this, the leadership team or board would often not get involved in those decisions, but provide feedback as needed.

Question Five: Describe some intentional things you do as a high-level leader in the church to promote a healthy leadership team.

This question inquired of the actual practices of the pastor to promote healthy leadership among their team and in their churches.

Relational Investment. Similar to the non-competitive group the most commonly presented practice of the pastor was to invest in their leaders relationally. One pastor noted that they get together for a meal at one of their houses regularly. Another made sure to include time for everyone to check-in personally in their meetings so they can pray for one another and end their meetings sharing stories of God's working in the church and in their personal lives. Another pastor was intentional to hang out, share meals, play, pray, and cast vision with their leaders outside of regular meeting times.

Growth Investment. A second finding in this question was that each pastor noted some level of investment in the spiritual and leadership growth of their team members. They promoted books, readings, and studies. They held quarterly or annual leadership summits or retreats. Another pastor invested in this practice once per month as a separate meeting to train and discuss what it means to be an elder and leader of the church.

Ministry Plans. A final finding, which was new to this group, was that the majority of the pastors noted that they are intentional to have their leaders, staff, and teams create some form of ministry plan annually. They intentionally structured time to discuss what they wanted to achieve and see in each other, their church, and in those they were discipling over the next season of life.

Question Six: Through StrengthsFinder, Tom Rath identified four primary things that followers desire from their leaders above all else: Trust, Compassion, Stability, and Hope. Which of these do you think the church and leadership team receives the most through your leadership? Explain.

The final question focused on what the pastor of the church provides most for their church and followers, based on the suggested findings of Tom Rath. Leaders emphasize different strengths and characteristics, so it was necessary to learn what element(s) their church received the most through their leadership.

Trust. By using the same ranking system used for the other case study, the competitive pastors most often provided their churches with trust. Trust was not a top element of the other case study.

The pastors shared that their churches received trust through their leadership the most because they hold true to their word and follow through on their promises and vision. The character and heart of the pastor was evident to all and that helped to build trust with the church. These pastors shared that they value honesty and regularly bring up their desire to grow in their trust with the church.

Stability. A very close second in terms of elements provided to the church by the pastors' leadership was that of stability. This was the top element produced by the non-competitive group.

One pastor shared that stability was provided because they had been successful in creating appropriate processes to help the church run and function well. Very little, if anything, would fall through the cracks in terms of priorities or ministries. Another aspect of stability for these pastors was that many had been serving in their churches for a significant period of time (over five years) and they have been a stable presence in the leadership of the church.

Field Research Synopsis

The preliminary and interview findings of the two case studies provided the researcher with several key insights. One insight clearly affirmed that one's strengths often determined one's leadership and ministry practices. This was evident in the differences noted among the two case studies. An additional insight was that there were some core practices of ministry and team leadership that all must consider, but that there were specific practices that are geared for the competitive or ambitious leader.

CHAPTER SIX: EVALUATION AND PRINCIPLES OF SUCCESSFUL TEAM LEADERSHIP FOR AMBITIOUS PASTORS

This thesis researched the connection between successful team leadership and those leaders who are competitive and/or ambitious. The researcher used the thesis findings to develop a set of eight principles of successful team leadership for those ambitious pastors, which is further described below. In addressing this problem of the ambitious leader's impact on their teams the researcher identified both strengths and weaknesses of the project.

Strengths and Weaknesses of the Project

Strengths of the Project

The researcher identified four strengths during the writing and field research of this project. The first of these strengths was the consistency of the interview base. Each of the pastors from both case studies served in their churches for over five years, had taken and were familiar with their StrengthsFinder 2.0 assessment results, and were located in the upper Midwest of the United States of America. The researcher did attempt to seek participants from other districts and areas of the country, but the final product was developed with this consistent interview base.

A second strength for this project was that while there was a consistent interview base, there was also diversity in the years of experience and ages of those represented in both categories. Both case studies were filled with pastors with more than five years of ministry experience and those with twenty or more years of experience. This also meant that the ages of the participants were between approximately thirty years old and sixty

years old. An additional aspect of diversity in the participants was that some served in rural areas, others in the suburbs, and others in the inner-city. The diversity provided further affirmation of the principles and findings of the research of this project.

A third strength of this project was the deep investigation of ambition and competition as an asset in ministry leadership. The early pages of this thesis unveiled that these are often viewed as a vice and detriment to ministry. Through the biblical study, literature review, and field research interviews, this project confirmed that competition as a strength and ambition are viable and important aspects of a pastor's leadership. This deeper look into the value of competition and ambition provided the researcher and the reader with suggested principles to implement for more successful team leadership in ministry that are geared for the ambitious leader.

A final strength of this project was the qualitative and multiple case study nature of the research. As a multiple case study, the findings were more practical and applicable to churches and for leaders who have similar struggles with identifying their strengths and ambition as an asset in ministry. As a qualitative study, it provided the researcher with a broad set of responses with which to analyze and synthesize, more so than a quantitative study would have provided. The qualitative nature allowed the participants to share their own views and perspectives and add personal insight to their understanding of the implementation of their strengths and leadership.

Weaknesses of the Project

Along with the strengths, the researcher identified four weaknesses of this project. The first weakness and most notable one was that of the quantity of qualitative data provided by the limited number of interviews. The initial proposal sought out at least three to five interviews for each case study. The final numbers were within or above that

goal, but with hindsight the research could have been strengthened with additional interviews and a higher quantity of participants.

A second weakness that was identified was that while the researcher reached out to over two-hundred potential participants, a portion of them had never heard of or had taken the StrengthsFinder 2.0 assessment. Even though only four of the two-hundred plus potential interviewees had Competition as a top five CliftonStrength, a portion of those two-hundred had not taken the assessment to know whether they qualified. This particular weakness revealed the limited number of responses the researcher received in the field research.

A third weakness evident to the researcher in this project was the hindrance of time. The researcher took an extra year to complete this project than initially anticipated, but the limited number of qualified participants to the field research required the researcher to move forward without additional data sources that had initially been considered with the proposal. In light of COVID-19 and the deadlines of this project, the researcher was unable to engage with and observe the pastors as they led and facilitated their leadership teams and meetings.

The final weakness evident to the researcher was in the limitations of StrengthsFinder 2.0 as a self-reporting survey. Self-reported surveys can limit the quality of a research project owing to being limited to a person's self-reflection. A person could view oneself as a high-achiever or learner, but that could be a mistaken or altered view of reality from the perspective of others who work with or for that person. As such, this project was limited to each of the participant's own view of himself or herself.

Principles of Successful Team Leadership for Ambitious Pastors

The findings of this project provided the researcher with eight total principles of team leadership, including four unique principles of successful team leadership for the ambitious pastor or leader. When used properly, these principles can significantly impact the influence that an ambitious leader can have as they serve as the first-among-equals in their church leadership teams. All of the principles are provided in Table 6.1.

Table 6.1 Principles of Successful Team Leadership

Shared Leadership Principles	Unique Leadership Principles for the Ambitious Leader
Aimed at God	Build trust
Provide stability	Promote unity
Relational investment	Set an example through one's work ethic
Growth investment	Create, measure, and celebrate wins

An additional principle that is not included in this table that must be noted was that all leaders should seek to fill their leadership teams with a variety of strengths and abilities. Rath argues, "The most effective leaders surround themselves with the right people and then maximize their team."²⁵³ That is a foundational aspect of building a healthy team and is recommended for all leaders and pastors but was not a common finding among the areas of this research project, perhaps due to being assumed.

Shared Principles of Team Leadership

Of the eight principles that this project identified, four of them were shared between the competitive and non-competitive participants. These four shared principles included being aimed at God, providing stability, relational investment, and growth investment. While other principles could be included as noted in the literature review and

²⁵³ Rath, *Strengths-Based Leadership*, 2.

biblical study of this project, they were not repeated enough in the field research to warrant inclusion.

Aimed at God

The first, and perhaps primary, shared principle of effective and successful team leadership was that the team, its success, the goals, and vision must all be aimed at God. For a team to be aimed at God, as this project has proposed, was for that team to direct themselves and their organizations towards knowing God more fully, glorifying God, and fulfilling God's mission.

During the field research of this project, both the competitive and non-competitive participants shared this key insight when defining success personally and for their organization and team. Nearly every pastor in both categories shared quickly and precisely that success must be about growing in our relationship with God and growing God's kingdom through the Great Commission. Additionally, for team leadership meetings, success was often defined by staying focused on the mission before them.

In the biblical study, Paul's epistle to the Philippians and Jesus' own response to his disciples revealed that believers must focus their hearts, minds, and lives on this principle. It is part of one's growing in their spiritual life. Additionally, the first chapters of Nehemiah and Paul's qualifications for those desiring eldership further highlighted the need for individuals to aim their life's pursuits, their ambitions, at God.

Aiming one's life at God is not only an individual pursuit but must also be the pursuit of the collective team. In a way, this principle is about creating a shared vision with and among the team. Cladis writes, "Simply having this vision statement is not enough. The key ingredient is a leadership team that lives the vision, breathes it, models

it, tells its story any chance it gets, sleeps and eats it, and otherwise calls people together around it.”²⁵⁴ While many sermons and devotionals focus on the need for this type of vision living in one’s everyday life, the same must be true for the church leadership team.

The literature review further provided evidence and clarity of successful team leadership being aimed at God. The motivation of the first-among-equals of the team, as well as each member of the team, must be aimed at God. These teams must base their motivation on what God has revealed in Scripture and seek to lead their churches to fulfill God’s vision and purpose.

The ambitious team leader and those in key leadership roles must use their responsibility and authority to lead the congregation through a process of determining their organization’s unique purpose and cause.²⁵⁵ As such, the first successful team leadership principle is that the first-among-equals must help the team to direct and aim their efforts at God in knowing him more fully, glorifying him, and fulfilling his mission.

Provide Stability

A significant role for any team leader is the ability to address the needs of his or her followers. Identifying those needs can often be difficult, particularly in this season of ministry with the social limitations of COVID-19. In his research surveying over 10,000 people, Tom Rath identified four distinct elements that followers need to receive through their leaders: Trust, Compassion, Stability, and Hope.²⁵⁶ While each of these elements is

²⁵⁴ Cladis, 56.

²⁵⁵ Cladis, 57.

²⁵⁶ Rath, *Strengths-Based Leadership*, 82.

necessary for leaders and leadership teams to address, the one that was shared between both case studies as either the primary or secondary element was providing stability.

One of the key aspects of a leader providing stability for his or her followers, especially those followers who are additional team members and leaders, is that he or she lives out and identifies with one's core values. This connects well with the previous principle of being directed or aimed at God. Providing stability takes this to the next level allowing the team leader to daily exemplify the core values and vision laid out by the leadership team.

This principle was discovered first through the literature review. One of the struggles that an ambitious or competitive leader can face is that of social conflict, as the competitive and ambitious nature of the leader can be at odds with others on the team. One aspect of overcoming that struggle is to provide stability and support by helping others see their own capacity for performance.²⁵⁷ In seasons of crisis or upheaval, such as that produced by COVID-19 in 2020, church leaders must be able to support their followers and teams in a way that provides strength.

To provide stability at the team-level the followers and team members must have a basic sense of confidence of where they are headed and how the church is doing. In this way, providing stability, as shared by several pastors in the field research, is being approachable and transparent. Rath argues that transparency is the quickest way to provide stability at the organizational level.²⁵⁸

²⁵⁷ Rath, *Strengths-Based Leadership*, 87, 136.

²⁵⁸ Rath, *Strengths-Based Leadership*, 88.

Transparency includes the leader being willing to share all non-confidential information with the team. Nothing, except that which is determined to be confidential such as payroll, should be accessible to all within the team at any time. Communication is also a significant factor in transparency. If a leader is regularly only providing updates and information long after the concern or issue has been handled, the team will view this as a complete lack of true transparency. Instead, the team leader must regularly update and inform the team of the happenings of the organization, as allowed. Open dialogue in meetings and in regard to the shared vision must be a consistent practice.

Relational Investment

One of the major differences between a group and a team is that of the relationships of those within the group or team. The literature identified one significant difference between groups and teams being accountability. In taking this a step further, accountability is best addressed within the realm of relationships. As such, it is imperative that team leaders attempt to build relationships with and among those who serve on the leadership teams.

This project has argued that teams are far more effective in creating and building healthy organizations and churches than a work group, even one that was elected by the congregation. It is important that those in team leadership make it a priority to build teams rather than groups and one valuable aspect of doing just that is by investing in relationships with those on and among the team.

This was a common argument and intentional practice of pastors in both case studies. Nearly all ten of the participants shared their intentionality to grow in relationships with their teams and leaders. This can be fulfilled in many respects, but one

is through gratitude. Gratitude by the team leader to the followers shows that the pastor cares and is invested not only in the mission of the church, but in living that mission with others in community. Christine Pohl, in her book *Living into Community*, says that thanksgiving and gratitude are shown in the care we give to others.²⁵⁹ In being grateful, giving thanks, and caring for others, pastors can further develop the relational bonds among the team and further create mutual accountability for the team.

A term that can often be exchanged for investing relationally with the team is creating community. Jim Herrington, Mike Bonem, and James H. Furr, define community writing, “Community is experienced as sinful, broken, and highly diverse people joyfully pursue [the] mission in ways that reflect the character and spirit of Jesus.”²⁶⁰ Investing relationally and building community go hand in hand as the team is further directed and aimed at God in their pursuits. This is further promoted by Briggs and Hyatt who write, “The elder team should function as a small model of what the larger church ought to be, bearing each other’s burdens, praying together, challenging and teaching one another, forgiving each other.”²⁶¹ These are all means of encouraging and investing in the team and in one another.

Specifically, for the ambitious leader, he or she must recognize that their strengths are not often geared towards naturally building relationships. In some ways, the ambitious leader sacrifices building relationships for the goal or mission. This is why it is

²⁵⁹ Christine Pohl, *Living into Community: Cultivating Practices that Sustain Us* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2011), 25.

²⁶⁰ Jim Herrington, Mike Bonem, and James H. Furr, *Leading Congregational Change: A Practical Guide for the Transformational Journey* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000) 26.

²⁶¹ Briggs, 113.

compulsory that he or she intentionally engages in relational investment in the ways described in this project.

Significant aspects of relational investment as an undertaking for a team leader should begin with creating community, having a heart and mind of gratitude and thanksgiving, and holding one another accountable individually and corporately. The process of implementing these is varied. It can be as simple as times of conversations and prayer in meetings, sharing meals together, or annual appreciation events.

Growth Investment

A final shared principle of effective and successful team leadership for the team leader is to invest in the growth and learning of those representing the team. Cladis refers to this as a “learning team.”²⁶² The growth and development of a team will often be the responsibility primarily of the team leader.

Effective teams, argues Cladis, are teams that continually grow and are open to new discoveries.²⁶³ One of the more significant practices of investing in the growth of one’s team is to engage and encourage the spiritual disciplines. All church leadership teams must be growing spiritually as they are representative of and leaders for the organization at large. Prayer, Bible study, fasting, and giving, to name a few, are instrumental in the growth of believers and should be reflected in the lives of those on the leadership team. While these practices can often be done individually at one’s own discretion, the team leader should seek ways to encourage and engage in these disciplines

²⁶² Cladis, 141.

²⁶³ Cladis, 141.

corporately. The primary concern of church leadership teams is the spiritual health of the church, not to oversee an event or institution, which is why the need for a spiritually growing and developing leadership team is necessary.

Spiritual growth is just one of several growth investments that the team leader should implement. Another investment is ministry growth investment. Most church leadership teams are elected from the congregation. These leaders are varied in their experiences, education, and development. Some have a graduate degree in Bible, ministry, or business, while others may have learned their vocation or trade through internships and no formal education. Regardless of the makeup of the team, the team leader is responsible for helping the team to develop their ministry skills and utilizing their strengths in service of God and others. Some pastors have engaged in this practice by hosting or virtually attending leadership seminars or retreats with their leadership teams. Others have promoted studying books or articles together as a team. However this is done the team leader must be willing and able to provide the education, funding, and space necessary for others to grow.²⁶⁴

Unique Principles of Team Leadership for Ambitious Pastors

In addition to those four shared principles, this project discovered four unique principles of team leadership specifically geared for the ambitious or competitive pastor. These four principles included building trust, promoting unity, setting an example through one's work ethic, and creating, measuring, and celebrating wins. While these principles are promoted in current team leadership resources for all leaders the research

²⁶⁴ Hartwig, 166.

of this project unveiled these four to be the most instrumental in successful team leadership for the ambitious team leader or pastor.

Build Trust

The primary and most important unique principle of effective team leadership, according to the researcher and his study, was that the competitive leader must be able to build trust with the team and the organization. The reality for most competitive pastors is that they will often sacrifice the relationships on the team for accomplishing and achieving the vision, mission, or purpose of the church which is grounds for creating social conflict with others.

The competitive pastor will often find himself or herself in situations where the pastor is tempted to push others over for the sake of the win. That win can be extremely beneficial to God, his kingdom, and the church, but when that victory is accomplished by sacrificing healthy team relationships, then God is not glorified in it. The pastor must be able and willing to build trust in the team because when we “discuss trust we deal with the greatest possibilities – and the greatest threat – for leadership teams.”²⁶⁵

The first stage of building trust begins with understanding the needs of the followers and team members. This requires that the team leader and the team members are honest and respectful people of integrity. Similar to providing stability as a shared principle of effective team leadership, the most commonly discovered trait of the competitive leader was building trust.

²⁶⁵ Cladis, 108.

Trust is something that is only given, received, or lost within relationships. In order to build that trust in the team requires vulnerability and authenticity. The literature review engaged this practice of vulnerability noting that Lencioni suggests the best way to build trust is through vulnerability.²⁶⁶

Jesus exemplified vulnerability and humility in his crucifixion, death, and resurrection. Jesus did not exploit his divine nature – rather in humility he became vulnerable to death (Phil 2:5-11). The author of Hebrews picks up on this humility having noted that Jesus shared all of himself in his incarnation and that he became vulnerable, even to death on a cross.

One of the key benefits, according to Rath, of building trust in teams is that it increases the speed and efficiency of the work being done.²⁶⁷ When two people, or a team of people, know each other as persons of integrity they can more quickly get to what is most important and get the work done.

It is necessary for the team leader to be vulnerable and authentic with their team, even if it means letting others see the leader's flaws. Vulnerability can be practiced by admitting weaknesses, asking for help, accepting questions and input, and offering or accepting apologies from one another.²⁶⁸ In this practice, the team leader must be able to create an environment where vulnerability and authenticity are not punished, but are genuine and appreciated.

²⁶⁶ Lencioni, 195.

²⁶⁷ Rath, *Strengths-Based Leadership*, 83.

²⁶⁸ Lencioni, 197.

In building trust, the competitive pastor must commit to the relationship, above that of the idea or issue on the agenda. This is generally not an easy undertaking for the ambitious leader, but in order to overcome his or her often missing relationship building strengths the leader will need to give appropriate time and focus to this principle if one wishes to be successful in leading teams well.

Promote Unity

Building trust is the most important successful team leadership principle for the competitive leader, but a very close second would be promoting unity. To build trust in teams requires vulnerability. Vulnerability is best expressed through healthy conflict. Conflict is inevitable for leaders and within team leadership, so the competitive pastor must consider how to promote unity by helping the team engage in healthy conflict.

A few questions for competitive pastors to consider in regard to this principle include: “Do team members refuse to speak up?” “Do some team members overthrow the team and always get their way?” “Do some members agree in public, but speak ill of the decision or the team and members in private?” These are all signs that there is a lack of unity and trust within the team.

Conflict within a team is inevitable, but it is imperative that team leaders are able to promote unity by allowing their teams to engage in healthy conflict. Engaging in healthy conflict requires three branches of unity. The first branch of unity for healthy conflict is that everyone on the team shares doctrinal unity.²⁶⁹ As everyone on the team recognizes that their differences in opinion or perspective on ministry are nowhere near

²⁶⁹ Larry Osborne, 28.

as important as the God they serve, healthy conflict may ensue. The second branch of unity is respect and friendship.²⁷⁰ This means that everyone gets along well enough to avoid stereotyping, miscommunication, and personality conflicts and allows everyone to engage in the topics at hand. This respect and friendship is acquired in the process of building trust, previously discussed. The third branch of unity in healthy conflict is philosophical unity.²⁷¹ This means that everyone agrees to their purpose, cause, mission, and reason for the team's existence. When these three branches of unity are practiced within a church leadership team there is more like to be healthy conflict over that of personal or social conflict.

Larry Osborne commented that Jesus predicted that the church would grow but prayed that his followers would be united.²⁷² Unity cannot be left to chance or taken for granted. Many of the pastors interviewed in this project repeatedly shared that they were careful to continually promote unity on their teams and in their churches. Success in ministry, according to many of them, is promoting unity and the competitive pastor must strive for unity in their leadership teams.

Set an Example Through One's Work Ethic

Whether the pastor wishes to admit it or not, he or she is constantly setting examples for the members of the church and team. Derek Prime and Alistair Begg write, "Whatever else a shepherd or teacher provides for God's people, he is to give them an

²⁷⁰ Larry Osborne, 30.

²⁷¹ Larry Osborne, 31.

²⁷² Larry Osborne, 24.

example to follow.”²⁷³ Ambitious team leaders will often not set examples by their relationship building strengths, as discovered in the interviews, but one area they can and should seek to set an example in, beyond character and integrity previously addressed in this project, is in the realm of one’s work ethic.

The Apostle Paul commenting on his helping of the weak wrote, “In everything I did, I showed you that by this kind of hard work we must help the weak” (Acts 20:35a). The basis for that hard work and help was “remembering the words the Lord Jesus himself said: ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive’” (Acts 20:35b). Strauch comments on this passage, “Like the life of his Lord (Mark 3:20, 21), Paul’s life was characterized by arduous, ceaseless labor. ... The elders, then, like Paul, are to be characterized by hard work.”²⁷⁴ As a competitor and due to one’s ambitious nature, this leader must set an example for the team and church to follow in working hard and diligently in service of God and others.

The ambitious leader is often driven to succeed and to bring their teams and organizations to that and higher levels of success. In order to do this, the ambitious team leader must set an example of working hard for the Lord that others will aspire to follow in their own ministry and leadership.

Create, Measure, and Celebrate Wins

The fourth and final principle of effective team leadership for the ambitious team leader is to create, measure, and celebrate wins. Along with setting an example with

²⁷³ Derek Prime and Alistair Begg, *On Being a Pastor: Understanding our Calling and Work* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2004), 36.

²⁷⁴ Strauch, 157, 158.

one's work ethic, this is another principle that will come more naturally to the ambitious team leader. As such, it is important that the competitive leader not ignore their natural strengths and remain active in helping the team to set, achieve, and celebrate their victories and goals.

The field research discovered that the majority of competitive pastors regularly set and measured their own goals for the next season of ministry and had their staff and teams do the same. This practice of setting ministry, team, church-wide, and personal goals helps the organization to stay on task and to be able to measure progress and be held accountable throughout the year.

Along with setting and measuring wins, it is important for the leader to help the team and organization to celebrate their wins, no matter how small. This helps to produce unity and build trust, but also helps the leader to show gratitude for the hard work that has been done and accomplished. Additionally, as wins are accomplished and celebrated, that allows the team and ambitious team leader to raise the bar the next time around and keep moving forward and becoming better versions than before.

Principles of Successful Team Leadership for Non-Ambitious Pastors

The focus of this project was on finding those particular principles of successful team leadership that were geared for the ambitious pastor. In order to discover these principles, it was imperative that part of the field research focus on the differences between ambitious and non-ambitious pastors. As such, this project also uncovered three key principles of successful team leadership that were found among the ambitious pastors that may not come as naturally to the non-ambitious pastor which would be beneficial in their own team leadership. This did not mean that non-ambitious pastors ignored these practices or that they had never engaged them in their practice, rather these were three

specific principles that were not found in any capacity among the non-competitive interviews conducted.

These three principles included creating, measuring, and celebrating wins, setting an example through one's work ethic, and promoting unity. Promoting unity might be assumed because of the nature of the relationships the non-competitive pastor has with his or her team members. This does not mean unity had been promoted among the team. The non-competitive pastor will no doubt have a strong work ethic, but due to the relational nature of the pastor many team members may not see it as clearly as with the competitive pastor. Finally, the non-competitive pastor may create, measure, and celebrate wins with their team but can oftentimes overlook the need for accountability in the team in order to preserve the relationships. In this way the non-competitive pastor will want to implement accountability in the goal setting and achieving.

There are other influential principles of successful team leadership for the non-competitive pastor to implement. Those principles were outside of the scope of this project and were not found during the field research of this dissertation. Pastors without the strength of competition will need to be sure to engage in this three principles, along with the shared leadership principles, in their own team leadership.

Conclusion

It is important for the ambitious team leader to see these principles as avenues of successful team leadership. Leading teams with an ambitious and competitive nature requires an extra measure of wisdom and discernment to best navigate the relationships and processes required for teams and these eight principles can aid the ambitious leader to become a more effective team leader in his or her church.

CHAPTER SEVEN: REFLECTIONS

Topics for Future Research

The research of this thesis required several limitations throughout which allows for additional topics of future research. As the researcher looked beyond the initial scope of this project he discovered five areas of future research.

Additional Data Sources

The first area of future research, which was intended in the initial proposal but was unattainable due to the nature of COVID-19 and social distancing protocols was investigating and observing the pastors' strengths of team leadership in person during meetings and regular ministry engagement. This added source of data, along with considering participation from the members of the pastors' teams, would have affirmed the findings, or perhaps contributed additional principles of effective team leadership for the ambitious team leader, that were not uncovered in the interviews of the field research.

Other Influencing Themes

A second area of further study that the researcher discovered in the process of this thesis was to see if other Influencing themes from StrengthsFinder 2.0 would produce similar or different results. The focus of this project keyed in on Competition and the ambitious nature of such a strength. Other themes of influence such as WOO, Self-Assurance, or Command could lead to similar or different results in terms of effective team leadership. Developing a clearer understanding of how the other themes within the

Influence domain impacted team leadership would add to the research and findings provided in this project.

Other Assessments

Another area of future study that could have added value to this project and would have added to the research in general would be to compare and contrast additional assessments between the two groups of participants. Assessments such as those relating to conflict management styles, Enneagram, Myers-Briggs, or Strength Deployment Inventory 2.0 (SDI 2.0) could further clarify or affirm the findings of this project. Additionally, by considering additional assessments the types of competitive pastors could have been further divided up to better understand each participant's personality and strengths on a deeper level. The researcher's own denominational district recently required all newly licensed pastors to take the SDI 2.0 assessment, which would have opened up more possibilities and participants if this project focused on that assessment instead of StrengthsFinder 2.0.

Denominational Diversity

This project did have participants from four distinct denominations, but each of these participants were part of conservative and evangelical circles in the upper Midwest of the United States of America. Future studies could be done in regard to mainline or non-protestant denominations and could be done in different areas of the country or world where ministry is practiced a bit differently due to the culture.

Strategic Thinking Themes

The least found strengths among both case studies in this project were from the Strategic Thinking domain. Of the two groups only six appearances from this category were represented by the fifty total strengths included, or just over ten percent. A final

area of future study that the researcher contemplated was to consider if there was another case study that could have been included in this study that involved those with the majority of their top five CliftonStrengths being represented by Strategic Thinking themes. The competitive pastors were represented by Influencing and Executing themes whereas the non-competitive group were most represented by Relationship-Building and Executing themes. Neither group represented the Strategic Thinking domain very well and further study of this group could add to the research completed in this project.

Personal Growth

This research project has affirmed that leading from one's strengths and leading healthy teams with those strengths are instrumental in helping churches create and grow healthy leadership teams. Though some churches and church leaders suggest that the leadership "team" is designed to serve as assistants or "yes-men and women" to the lead pastor, the research has suggested differently. This thesis has clearly revealed that team leadership and leading from one's strengths matters. As the church leadership team goes, so goes the church, which further adds to the need for pastors to activate and encourage healthy and successful leadership teams in their ministries.

When the researcher first began his journey of doctoral studies at Bethel Seminary the main idea he had for a thesis project surrounded the concept of pastoral authority. It seems in today's culture that the authority of the pastor is much more limited and diminished than in generations past. It was not unheard of for a pastor in the early 1900s to tell a family with open space in their home that they have been volunteered to host an

intern for a season or year of ministry.²⁷⁵ That would be completely unacceptable today and the researcher had anticipated exploring how pastoral authority has changed over the years and what sort of authority pastors have today.

However, upon further study and coursework in the researcher's doctoral journey, the concept and value of a fully team-based leadership structure became more real and the researcher's main direction for the thesis project evolved to become less about pastoral authority and relate more to team leadership. Additionally, while team leadership and the need for it in churches today became an early indicator of the direction for this thesis project, it was later when the researcher struggled with his own strengths not being valued or utilized in ministry that the combination of competition and ambition with team leadership became fully developed.

Once the main concept of the thesis was set the researcher assumed that finding qualified individuals to participate would be done efficiently. As the researcher began reaching out to a handful of pastors in his network, he realized that this would not be the case and the timelines and deadlines for getting this project done during the initial plan was not possible. It was shortly after this that the researcher decided to take a break from ministry as well, resigning in December 2019 and taking up a temporary one-year position in higher education administrative work. During this year, the researcher did not consider the thesis much except for when others in the Bethel University Registrar's office for the Seminary would encourage him to get back to it before too long. The

²⁷⁵ It is told that the founder of the Christian and Missionary Alliance, A.B. Simpson, had this experience as an intern in his early years of ministry in which a pastor had assigned him to stay with a family before they had been asked to consider it.

researcher appreciated Michelle's encouragement and accountability, which helped keep the project in his mind's eye.

After resigning the temporary position and deciding to focus on this project full-time in September 2020, the researcher discovered again his joy in learning and growing. The work done to engage in the biblical and theological study and literature review brought joy and a sense of purpose to the researcher again that he had ignored since the completion of his final course in the summer of 2019. The researcher's joy in personal development, growth, and maturity was rediscovered during his doctoral studies and particularly during his thesis project.

During the field research of this project, the researcher was stretched socially in areas that had long been underdeveloped. The researcher has always hated using the phone and sending unprompted emails asking for help or assistance. As the researcher discovered the need to go far above and beyond his own network to find qualified candidates he had to stretch and push past his previous limitations of social communication. He reached out to pastors with whom he had little to no connection that were both inside and outside of his denominational network. Upon only finding one qualified participant in that network, he connected with pastors and denominational leaders outside of his network and was able to find a few additional participants. Finally, he found a list of Converge and Evangelical Free Church of America churches in the area and began sending unsolicited emails to pastors who he had no idea if they qualified or not. This social networking stretched the researcher and helped him get past that obstacle to effective ministry and leadership in the church.

A final area of growth for the researcher during this thesis project and doctoral studies that has both personal and ministry ramifications is the affirmation that his strengths are valid and vital to his leadership. As noted throughout this project, competition and ambition are often view as vices and weaknesses or sins to be avoided and cast aside. How does a person with those types of strengths serve in the church when the church does not value them? That's the question that really pushed the researcher to pursue this thesis and problem statement. Upon finding that ambition is neutral and that competition is a strength and asset to team ministry, the researcher has now been better prepared to return to full-time vocational ministry and leadership, should the Lord lead in that direction in the near future.

The researcher's doctoral journey at Bethel Seminary has been a tremendous experience and joy. It has empowered and encouraged the researcher to lead the church from his strengths and prepared him to handle the conflicts and obstacles that are so prevalent in the church today. This journey has inspired the researcher back to his joy in learning and personal development, which were so instrumental to his ministry during his Master of Divinity studies and early ministry years. Finally, this journey has driven the researcher in prayer to the Lord in more ways than expected and he is grateful for the need to further learn to lean on and rely on the strength of God in these times rather than on his own limited abilities.

APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR LEADERS WITH COMPETITION

Competition Questions

Preliminaries:

Personal Initials:

Church Initials:

Position:

Years at Current Church:

Approximate Size of Church:

Top 5 CliftonStrengths:

Interview:

1. Briefly explain how each your strengths (above) are utilized in your leadership and ministry.
2. Specifically, in regard to competition, how does this strength add value to your leadership? How do you see this strength promoting higher levels of influence in your leadership team?
3. As a competitor, how do you define success in your context personally and organizationally with your team?
4. Describe the leadership team of the church (Example: elders vs. governing board; size and makeup of leadership team; team led vs. individually led; etc.).
5. Describe some intentional things you do as a high-level leader in the church to promote a healthy leadership team.
6. Through StrengthsFinder, Tom Rath identified four primary things that followers desire from their leaders above all else: Trust, Compassion, Stability, and Hope. Which of these do you think the church and leadership team receives the most through your leadership? Explain.

APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR LEADERS
WITHOUT COMPETITION

General Strengths Questions

Preliminaries:

Personal Initials:

Church Initials:

Position:

Years at Current Church:

Approximate Size of Church:

Top 5 CliftonStrengths:

Interview:

1. Briefly explain how each your strengths (above) are utilized in your leadership and ministry.
2. How do your strengths add value to your leadership? How do you see your strengths promoting higher levels of execution, influence, relationship building, or strategic thinking in your leadership team?
3. As a competitor, how do you define success in your context personally and organizationally with your team?
4. Describe the leadership team of the church (Example: elders vs. governing board; size and makeup of leadership team; team led vs. individually led; etc.).
5. Describe some intentional things you do as a high-level leader in the church to promote a healthy leadership team.
6. Through StrengthsFinder, Tom Rath identified four primary things that followers desire from their leaders above all else: Trust, Compassion, Stability, and Hope. Which of these do you think the church and leadership team receives the most through your leadership? Explain.

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