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BETHEL THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY
BETHEL UNIVERSITY

BURNOUT, TIMEOUT, AND FALLOUT: A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF WHY
PASTORS LEAVE MINISTRY

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

BY
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ST. PAUL, MINNESOTA
FEB 2022

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ABSTRACT

There is a lack of understanding of what factors are contributing to pastoral attrition in the Assemblies of God. In response to this problem, the researcher investigated the ministry and training of Moses and Paul. The researcher studied relevant literature on pastoral attrition, and then conducted quantitative and qualitative research to identify key factors that contribute to pastoral attrition. The researcher focused on the attrition rate of graduates of NCU's pastoral degree program in the years 1998-2008. This is the researcher's alma mater. The researcher interviewed three NCU professors who were training pastors during that time period, three of the researcher's former NCU classmates, and three experts in pastoral emotional health and restoration. Lastly, the researcher brought together the findings from the literature, data, and interviews to make recommendations to address pastoral attrition.

The researcher discovered that the rate of pastoral attrition across the United States is high, with four out of five pastors leaving ministry within the first five years. The researcher studied data from the Assemblies of God national office and determined that their attrition rate is much lower. However, this rate has been steadily increasing each year since 2016. One-third of AG pastors reported that they would ask for help from their District officials in a crisis. Fewer women ministers felt comfortable asking their District for help.

The key risk factors for pastoral attrition were identified as loneliness and isolation, a poor marriage, a moral failure, unresolved conflicts, low maturity and

emotional health, unrealistic expectations, and the use of negative coping mechanisms.

The researcher recommended more proactive district interventions, including implementing a conflict management team and a cohort model for their pastors. The researcher also recommended that Bible colleges add emotional health and conflict management to their pastoral training programs.

CHAPTER ONE: THE PROBLEM OF PASTORAL ATTRITION

There is a lack of understanding of what factors are contributing to pastoral attrition in the Assemblies of God. In response to this problem, the researcher investigated Scripture pertaining to pastoral ministry and training, including the calling, training, and longevity of two prominent biblical figures, Moses and Paul. The researcher studied relevant literature on pastoral attrition and pastoral risk factors, and then conducted quantitative and qualitative research to identify key factors that contribute to Assemblies of God pastoral attrition. Lastly, the researcher used the data, and interviews to make recommendations to address pastoral attrition.

The Assemblies of God (AG) is a Protestant Pentecostal denomination founded in 1914 following the Azusa Street Revivals. The AG is currently one of the fastest-growing denominations globally with over sixty-nine million members, and over three million of those members living in the United States.¹ According to the Assemblies of God official website, fifty-three percent of its church population is under thirty-five, and forty-four percent are non-white.² The AG has also ordained women and minorities since its founding, largely because the original revivals were often led by women and minorities.

¹ Assemblies of God General Council, "Statistics," modified August 2019, accessed January 14, 2021, <https://ag.org/About/Statistics>.

² Assemblies of God General Council, "Ministers by Credentials," updated August 2019, accessed January 14, 2021, <https://ag.org/About/Statistics>.

When the AG was formed in 1912, the founders were wary of denominations and ecclesiastical power, due to the fact that many of the founders had been asked to leave their original denominations following the Azuza Street Revivals. They were usually asked to leave due to their engaging in and teaching “heresies” such as allowing women to preach, gathering in mixed race church services, and beliefs about the Baptism of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, the Assemblies is structurally set up as a “fellowship of sovereign churches.” What this means is that in most cases, except for heresy or moral failure, the individual church is sovereign to make its own decisions in regards to voting in or firing pastors, changing its name, buying land or property etc. The District and General Councils usually cannot directly “interfere” in church affairs unless it is a matter of doctrine or moral failure. The researcher has seen Districts intervene in extreme cases, such as after a church split has almost emptied a church, or after a church has fired many pastors in a short period of time. In some cases, the District can revoke a church’s sovereign status for a set amount of time. That church would then be labeled “District Supervised,” until that church could meet certain requirements to again become a sovereign church.

The AG has eight Bible colleges in the United States that train Christians for various vocations, including ministry. Historically, the AG has been proactive in launching children, youth, and family ministry degrees and training programs. The AG reports having 38,197 active licensed and ordained ministers in the United States in 2019.³ The church maintains a strong emphasis on world missions and evangelism.⁴ Each

³ Assemblies of God General Council, “Ministers by Credentials.”

year the AG sets concrete goals for opening new churches and commissioning large numbers of new pastors.

In the Assemblies of God, the term “pastor” can refer to anyone employed by a local AG church, part-time or full-time, senior leader or staff leader. A local AG church can hire anyone, including someone who does not have a degree, license or ordination. However, the title “Reverend” only refers to someone who has been licensed or ordained by the district and/or General Council of the AG. Someone can retain their “Reverend” status whether or not they are currently employed by a church. The term “minister” can mean a pastor, an evangelist, a missionary or a Reverend. Often the titles “pastor” and “minister” are used interchangeably.

Delimitations and Assumptions

The research was limited to AG Bible college graduates from North Central University (NCU) located in Minneapolis, MN who entered ministry between 1998-2008. The researcher also focused exclusively on Bible college graduates that became AG pastors. Therefore, Bible college graduates that went immediately into a non-ministry-related field, as well as pastoral candidates that dropped out of Bible college before entering ministry were excluded from this study.

The research was limited to AG full-time pastors, including staff pastors such as children, youth, and staff pastors. The researcher assumed that the graduates of North

⁴ “What Is the Assemblies of God? Ten Things You Should Know,” Christianity.com, updated February 9, 2018, accessed February 5, 2021, www.christianity.com/church/denominations/what-is-the-assemblies-of-god-history-and-beliefs.html.

Central genuinely felt called by God to be a pastor. This would be evidenced by the candidates' willingness to go through the four to five years of Bible college and the subsequent process of ordination. The researcher also assumed that the pastor planned to be in full-time ministry as their life-long career at the time they took their first position.

These graduates are assumed to have had the standard AG pastoral training. The training requirements vary slightly by District, and a candidates' District must submit their name for consideration to the General Council. Most Districts require the following ministerial training: a four year Bible college degree from an approved college (any AG college, or one that the AG recognizes as having enough Bible credits). Ministerial training requirements may vary slightly from District to District. The standard ministerial credential requirement includes passing a one hundred question written Scripture and doctrine test, completing an approved, supervised internship, and passing three rounds of oral interviews with the District Presbytery Council. These pastors should also have had reasonable access to all of the resources that the District offers, including ongoing training and counseling.

Key Issues Addressed

The researcher searched Scripture for guidance pertaining to pastoral ministry and training. Specific attention was given to the calling, training, and longevity of two prominent biblical figures, Moses and Paul. The researcher then conducted a literature review, which indicated several common risk factors for pastoral attrition. The researcher examined relevant books, thesis, and studies on pastoral longevity. Then the researcher conducted quantitative research, using data provided by the General Council of the AG, to ascertain the actual rates of AG pastoral attrition.

To conduct qualitative research on the topic of pastoral attrition, the researcher created two separate research instruments. The first instrument, a survey, was sent by postal mail, email, and distributed in person at AG sectional pastors' meetings. The second research instrument was an interview guide which was used for live interviews and phone interviews.

Once the survey return date had passed, the researcher compared the survey results, the interviews, the scriptural guidance, and the relevant literature on the topic. Based on the results of this compilation, the researcher has produced recommendations to better train and support our AG pastors for longevity in ministry.

Importance of the Project

To the Researcher

The researcher is an ordained member in good standing with the Wisconsin Northern Michigan District of the Assemblies of God. The researcher's father and several other family members are ordained AG pastors. The researcher graduated from an AG Bible College, NCU in Minneapolis, MN in 2000 with a Children's Pastoral Studies degree. The researcher wants to know why pastors might leave ministry too soon and what character traits or training would help more pastors stay in ministry long term.

To Christian Ministry

A cursory look at statistical data seems to indicate that the early ministerial dropout rate is high across the United States, regardless of denomination.⁵ This pastoral

⁵ Mike Hess, "The Growing Crisis of Pastoral Shortages," *Baptist Bulletin Magazine*, updated February 15, 2019 <https://baptistbulletin.org/the-baptist-bulletin-magazine/the-growing-crisis-of-pastoral-shortages/>.

attrition may be a contributing factor to the larger issue of a nationwide shortage of pastors, with some areas using one pastor to cover several parishes.⁶ The cost of educating and training new pastors is relatively high and time-consuming only to have them last such a short time. It would be beneficial to churches, pastors, and the church as a whole to find out how to support pastoral longevity. Another possible benefit of this study could be guidance for churches on how to better care for their pastors.

To Academia

This research could be valuable in reevaluating how Bible colleges prepare pastors for vocational ministry. Since a four-year degree is a prerequisite for ordination in many denominations, it is crucial to understand exactly what training pastoral students need. There may be changes that need to be made in the scope and sequence, structure, and subject matter in Bible college pastoral studies curriculum. This study will hopefully lead to positive changes in training for pastors. This positive change starts by identifying the key risk factors that contribute to pastoral attrition. This information may prove useful in helping churches and pastors work toward pastoral longevity.

⁶ Christina Maslach, "Job Burnout: New Directions in Research and Intervention," in *Current Directions in Psychological Science* 12, no. 5 (October 2003):189–192.

CHAPTER TWO: EXAMPLES FROM SCRIPTURE

The AG clearly articulates their position in Article One of their Statement of Faith: “The Bible is our all-sufficient rule for faith and practice.”⁷ Therefore, the “practice” of vocational ministry should follow any guidance laid out in Scripture for the education and training of pastors. Scripture includes the stories of people who served in long-term vocational ministry. The researcher studied the lives of two Biblical leaders, focusing on their call to ministry, education, experience, and longevity. The researcher was looking to examine Bible heroes who exemplified a balance of both experience and education in their training. The researcher intentionally chose Moses and Paul as subjects for this study, because of their ministry training seemed to include a combination of experiences and extensive education.

Moses

The first character the researcher studied was Moses. The researcher approached the texts with the following questions: (1) What education and life experiences may have contributed to Moses’ longevity in ministry? (2) What skills may have helped Moses continue for many years? (3) What obstacles may Moses have overcome in ministry?

⁷ E.N.Bell, et al, “Statement of Faith,” Assemblies of God General Council, accessed January 14, 2021, <https://ag.org/About/Statistics>.

Education and Experience

The quality of Moses' education is a reflection of being raised in Pharaoh's household. Scholars are divided as to the date of Moses' birth. The researcher leans more toward an early date for Moses' birth based on the available Biblical and archeological evidence.⁸ There is a lot of debate as to whether the Israelites left Egypt at a later date or an earlier date. The earlier date seems to make more sense with the scriptural record, according to Kaiser,⁹ Keil and Delitzsch.¹⁰ Exodus 1 and 2 explains that Moses' parents were Jewish slaves named Amram and Jochebed. At this time, the Jewish people had been living in Egypt since Jacob and his children migrated from Canaan.

Soon after Moses' birth, Pharaoh ordered that all Jewish boys between the ages of newborn to two years must be thrown into the Nile River (Exod. 1:22). This was an attempt at population control because the Egyptian people worried that the Hebrews were becoming too numerous. Moses' mother could not kill her newborn son. When the baby could no longer be hidden, Moses was placed in a basket and floated on the Nile. The woman that found Moses is only identified as the Pharaoh's daughter (Exod. 2:1-8). The princess formally adopted Moses and named him. According to Kaiser, "Moses" is almost certainly an Egyptian name that just happens to sound like "drawn out of" in Hebrew (Exod. 2:8).¹¹

⁸ Charles R. Krahmalkov, "Exodus Itinerary Confirmed by Egyptian Evidence," *Biblical Archaeology Review* (September/October 1994): 54-62.

⁹ William C. Kaiser Jr., "Exodus," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary With the New International Version of the Holy Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publication House, 1981), 71-73.

¹⁰ Carl Friedrich Keil, and Franz Delitzsch, "Exodus," in *Commentary on the Old Testament* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2011), 538-544.

¹¹ Kaiser, "Exodus," 73.

Raised in Pharaoh's household, Moses would have had the best education in the world. Acts 7:22 tells us that Moses was "educated in all the skills of the Egyptians." Princes of Egypt started their formal education at the age of seven in the exclusive "Prince's School."¹² Moses was certainly trained in the latest math, history, astronomy, geometry, writing, speaking, medicine, and music.¹³ This early training in math and organization may have helped Moses later in managing a new nation of millions of people.

Since the whole nation of Egypt practiced the same polytheistic religion, Moses learned the Egyptian religion, integrated with all other subjects. Moses understood the significance of each plague that God sent on Egypt. Each plague was an affront to one of the Egyptian gods. For example, when Moses stretched out his staff to turn the Nile into blood, that act was a direct attack on Egypt's god of the Nile.¹⁴

It does not seem that Moses was taken seriously as a leader earlier on in his life. While still in Egypt, Moses saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew slave. Moses killed the Egyptian and hid the body, thinking no one knew what happened (Exod. 2:11-22). Jean Calvin argues that this is an early example of Moses stepping into the divine calling, being used by God as a deliverer.¹⁵ However, Augustine felt that Moses was wrong to kill

¹² Robert W. Jenson, "Gregory of Nyssa: The Life of Moses," *Theology Today* 62, no. 4 (2006): 533–537.

¹³ Lovik, Eric. "Moses' Preparation for Ministry: The Significance of His Egyptian Background." *Calvary Baptist Theological Journal*, no. 10 (Fall 1994).

¹⁴ Lovik, "Moses' Preparation for Ministry," 46.

¹⁵ "Exodus," in *Commentaries on the Four Last Books of Moses: Arranged in the Form of a Harmony*, translated by Bingham and Calvin Translation Society (Grand Rapids, MI.: Baker Books. 2009), 341.

the Egyptian because Moses had no legal authority to intervene.¹⁶ Kaiser agrees with Augustine that Moses overstepped legal authority, but Kaiser insists that God still used this experience to prepare Moses for ministry.¹⁷

A short while after killing the Egyptian, Moses tried to get in the middle of a dispute between two Jewish slaves. One of the Jews answered, “Who made you a judge over us? Will you kill me like you did the Egyptian?” This answer frightened Moses. The Jewish people did not respect Moses yet. He certainly had an education at this point. Lovik believes that Moses needed to gain more life experience, in addition to education, before Israel would respect Moses as an authority.¹⁸

It is not clear exactly when Moses realized that he was Jewish.¹⁹ Moses became distressed, realizing the horrors of slavery that his family and people were enduring (Hebrews 11:24-28). When Pharaoh heard that Moses had killed an Egyptian, Pharaoh was extremely angry (Exod. 2:15). Moses was forced to flee into the desert to escape. During exile, Moses became a shepherd. He also married and had two sons (Exod. 2:21-22).

Calling

Moses admittedly had a late start in ministry, stepping into ministry at the age of eighty. After working forty years in the desert, Moses had a transformative experience with God that was life-changing. While shepherding the flock, Moses saw a bush on fire, but the bush was not consumed. Kaiser believes that God deliberately used the humble

¹⁶ Leo Charles Daley, *The Works of St. Augustine* (New York: Monarch Press, 1965), 144.

¹⁷ Kaiser, “Exodus,” 71.

¹⁸ Lovik, “Moses' Preparation for Ministry,” 49

¹⁹ Kaiser, “Exodus,” 80.

bush to get Moses' attention instead of something more grandiose. God was revealing Himself as One Who works miraculously through everyday people and things.²⁰ God uses the miraculous to officially commission Moses. St. Gregory calls this experience a "shining radiance" and a "theophany" that served to reveal God's character and truth to Moses.²¹ Exodus 3 explains:

When the LORD saw that he had gone over to look, God called to him from within the bush, "Moses! Moses!" And Moses said, "Here I am." "Do not come any closer," God said. "Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground." Then he said, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob." At this, Moses hid his face, because he was afraid to look at God. The LORD said, "I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering. So I have come down to rescue them from the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land into a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey—the home of the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites. And now the cry of the Israelites has reached me, and I have seen the way the Egyptians are oppressing them. So now, go. I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people the Israelites out of Egypt" (Exod. 3:4-10).

Moses' calling and mission were clear. Moses was to deliver God's messages to the Israelites and to Pharaoh. Then Moses would lead the Israelites out of Egypt to the Promised Land. God had decided to rescue the Jewish people from slavery and bring them to a new land. Kaiser points out that the initiative here is all coming from God. God sees, God cares and God acts.²²

However, Moses did not readily accept this calling (Exod. 3:11-21). Right away, Moses begins arguing with God. First, Moses says, "Who am I that I should talk to

²⁰ Kaiser, "Exodus," 90.

²¹ Robert W. Jenson, "Gregory of Nyssa: The Life of Moses," *Theology Today* 62, no. 4 (2006): 533–537.

²² Kaiser, "Exodus," 89.

Pharaoh?” God answered Moses, “I will be with you.” God promised that after Moses brought the people out of slavery, the people would worship God on that same mountain.

Moses objected a second time, “What if the Israelites do not believe that You sent me? What if they ask me what Your Name is?” With great patience, God answers Moses that the elders of Israel will believe and give Moses their blessing. God reveals His Name, “Tell them that I Am Who I Am.”

Moses continued to argue with God, “What if the Israelites will not believe me?” God gave Moses three miraculous signs to prove to the Israelites that God has spoken to Moses. First, Moses could throw the staff down and the staff would become a snake. Then Moses could pick up the snake and it would become a staff again in his hand. Rabbi Abramovitz likens the language used in this chapter to God “conjoling” Moses to help deliver Israel.²³ Secondly, Moses could put his hand in a cloak and turn the hand leprous. Then he could put his hand back in the cloak to take the leprosy away. Lastly, Moses could scoop water out of the Nile and pour it out on the ground as blood. God told Moses that these three signs would prove to any doubters that God really had sent Moses. Also, God warned Moses that it would not be easy to get Pharaoh to let the Jewish people go. God was going to rain down many plagues before Pharaoh would relent.

Moses still would not give in and accept the commission. This time Moses claimed to not speak well enough to give God’s messages. Moses described himself as “slow of speech.” The translators of the LXX decided that the closest meaning of the

²³ Ismar Schorsch, and Herman Abramovitz. “The Staff of Moses.” *Jewish Theological Seminary Community Learning* 22, no. 3 (24 January, 2004).

Hebrew phrase, which means “heavy/slow of tongue,” was “stuttering.”²⁴ However, the Vulgate translated that same phrase as “not quick-witted and slow of speech,” meaning Moses had trouble speaking effectively. Kaiser believes that the Vulgate translation is more accurate.²⁵ In the New Testament, Stephen calls Moses “powerful in speech and action,” (Acts 7:22) possibly precluding Moses’ having a speech impediment.

God ultimately did not let Moses back out. God told Moses to be on his way to accomplish the mission. This may have been a way of saying, “Enough. No more excuses or discussion. Go get started.”

Moses argued on, this time more directly. “Please send someone else.” Scripture tells us that at this point, “God’s anger burned against Moses.” God did allow Moses’ older brother Aaron to go with Moses as Moses’ spokesperson to Pharaoh. Finally, Moses embraced the calling and started in ministry (Exod. 3).

Kaiser points out that Moses’ calling was unique, unlike how anyone would be called into ministry today. St. Gregory of Nyssa agrees with Kaiser that a supernatural event is not necessary today for a calling to ministry. However, St. Gregory presses back by arguing that Moses’ story is given to us for a reason. St. Gregory states that there is nothing wrong with seeking to emulate a hero of the faith.²⁶

Skills

Moses had to learn how to speak persuasively. Moses started by seeking the blessing of the Israelite elders in the Jewish community (Exod. 4:30). They were

²⁴ T. Desmond Alexander, “Slow of Speech,” in *Dictionary of the Old Testament*, ed. T. Desmond Alexander and David W. Baker (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2003), 344.

²⁵ Kaiser, “Exodus,” 140

²⁶ Jenson, “Life of Moses,” 60

convinced by Moses' answers to their questions and by the signs God gave Moses to perform. Moses also had to have the courage to confront Pharaoh with God's message, "Let My people go" (Exod. 5). Moses may have been able to gain this audience with Pharaoh due to some of his old palace contacts.²⁷ As God had warned, Pharaoh completely rejected God's message (Exod. 5:2). Pharaoh banished Moses from the palace and even threatened to kill Moses if he came back (Exod. 10:28). Yet, Moses was obedient to God in delivering God's messages to Pharaoh anyway.

Moses' ministry to the Jewish people during this time was to encourage them and remind them of God's promises. The people were discouraged in their suffering, especially when their deliverance seemed to be delayed or derailed (Exod. 5:21). God responded with incredible miracles that finally resulted in the Jewish people being set free (Exod. 14).

Moses' ministry then shifted away from giving messages of judgment to Pharaoh, to leading the people of Israel through an unknown route in the desert to the Promised Land. Moses would listen to God, and relay God's messages to the people. Kaiser believes that Moses and the Israelites spent nearly a year at Mt. Sinai, during which time Moses went up alone to receive instructions from God three to four times.²⁸

During the desert years, Moses' ministry focus needed to change several times. Moses had to be flexible in ministry, learning new skills constantly. St. Gregory of Nyssa believed that all ministers should aim to imitate Moses' flexibility in ministry. About changes in the ministry, St. Gregory states, "Everyone knows that anything placed in a

²⁷ Kaiser, "Exodus," 144.

²⁸ Kaiser, "Exodus," 144.

world of change never remains the same but is always passing from one state to another, the alteration always bringing about something better or something worse.”²⁹

Lovik argues that Moses’ most important ministry role was that of recording the Law of God in the first five books of the Bible.³⁰ Moses relayed God’s directions for all aspects of life. Kaiser breaks the book of Exodus into three logical sections- redemption, law and worship.³¹ Moses had to act as a teacher, educating the Jewish people as to the new laws about mold in the home, safety concerns for second-floor homes, dietary restrictions, ritual purity on holy days, the new calendar of holy days, feasts, fasts, criminal laws, and sexual laws. Moses also had to teach the people how to worship God, including the exact dimensions of the tabernacle, the elaborate procedure for the ordination of priests, and the schedule of holy days.

After teaching all the people, Moses then directed a large team of artisans and craftspeople to create the Tabernacle to exact specifications. Every intricate detail needed to be perfect, even the priests’ vestments and the recipe for the incense (Exodus 25-32). Moses had to rely a lot on organizational and administrative skills.³²

St. Gregory of Nissa firmly believed that Moses’ most important ministry skill was interceding with God for the people. More than once when the congregation’s complaining and rebellion had angered God, Moses pleaded with God on behalf of the congregation. On one occasion, the Israelites had rebelled in the desert and had turned to worship a golden calf. God’s patience was at the breaking point.

²⁹ Jenson, “The Life of Moses,” 12.

³⁰ Lovik, “Moses’ Preparation for Ministry,” 63.

³¹ Kaiser, “Exodus,” 76.

³² Kaiser, “Exodus,” 80.

The LORD also said to Moses, “I have seen this people, and they are indeed a stiff-necked people. Now leave Me alone, so that My anger may burn against them and consume them. Then I will make you into a great nation.” But Moses sought the favor of the LORD his God, saying, “O LORD, why does Your anger burn against Your people, whom You brought out of the land of Egypt with great power and a mighty hand? Why should the Egyptians declare, ‘He brought them out with evil intent, to kill them in the mountains and wipe them from the face of the earth’? Turn from Your fierce anger and relent from doing harm to Your people. Remember Your servants Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, to whom You swore by Your very self when You declared, ‘I will make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky, and I will give your descendants all this land that I have promised, and it shall be their inheritance forever.’ The LORD relented from the calamity He had threatened to bring on His people (Exodus 32: 9-14).

Moses reminds God of all the miracles God had done to deliver God’s chosen people. Moses argues for God’s glory and even for God’s reputation among the Egyptians. He begs God to remember the covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Somehow, Moses could plead for God’s mercy for the very people that were trying to stone him to death (Num. 14:1-19). This is reminiscent of Christ who, when nailed to the Cross, pleaded on behalf of His killers, “Father, forgive them for they know not what they do” (Luke 23:34).

Moses may have used writing skills in ministry. It is still hotly debated as to whether or not Moses wrote the first five books of the Bible, known as the “Pentateuch.” The argument from those who reject Mosaic authorship is that Moses obviously could not have written about his own death in Deuteronomy 34. Also, Moses writes about gates, domesticated camels, and “the kings of Israel,” all of which are thought to have happened after Moses’ death. The language and style also vary across the books of the Pentateuch.³³

³³ Eric Lyons, “Mosaic Authorship of the Pentateuch,” *Apologetics Press*, January 3, 2003, accessed July 26, 2021, <https://www.apologeticspress.org/apcontent.aspx?category=13&article=36>.

More conservative theologians such as Keil and Delitzsch,³⁴ and Kaiser,³⁵ still hold Mosaic authorship. The Pentateuch itself does attest to Moses' authorship of certain parts of the Pentateuch.³⁶

“Moses wrote all the words of Jehovah” (Exodus 24:4).

“Jehovah said unto Moses, ‘Write thou these words...’” (Exodus 34:27).

“Moses wrote their goings out according to their journeys by the commandment of Jehovah” (Num. 33:2).

“Moses wrote this law and delivered it unto the priests...” (Deut. 31:9).

There are other examples in the Old Testament of Moses being credited as the author of the first five books of the Bible. For example, in Joshua 8:32: “There, in the presence of the Israelites, Joshua copied on stones the law of Moses, which Moses had written.” See also 2 Chronicles 34:14, Ezra 3:2; 6:18, Nehemiah 13:1, and Malachi 4:4.

In the New Testament, the Apostle John wrote: “The law was given through Moses” (John 1:17). Luke wrote “And beginning from Moses and all the prophets, Jesus interpreted to them in all the scriptures the things concerning Himself” (Luke 24:27). The Apostle Paul pointedly states, “For Moses writes about the righteousness which is of the law” (Rom. 10:5). See

³⁴ Kiel and Delitzsch, “Exodus,” 77.

³⁵ Kaiser, “Exodus,” 223.

³⁶ T. Desmond Alexander, “Authorship of the Pentateuch,” in *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Pentateuch*, ed. T. Desmond Alexander and David W. Baker (Downer's Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2003), 66.

also Luke 16:29, John 1:45, and Mark 12:19. Perhaps most compelling, Jesus Himself stated: “For if you believed Moses, you would believe me; for he wrote of me. But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe my words?” (John 5:46-47).

The researcher believes that Moses at the very least wrote a significant portion of the first five books of the Bible. This would mean that Moses did put writing skills to good use in ministry. There was probably editing, “compiling” of the materials later after Moses’ death.

Obstacles

As a leader, Scripture indicates that Moses struggled with delegating (Exodus 18). Moses learned about delegation from his father-in-law, Jethro, after nearly burning out trying to do it all for so many people. Jethro told Moses, “It is not good that you exhaust yourself with all the people. Appoint faithful men to judge these cases” (Exodus 18:18-21). Kaiser describes Jethro as a Midianite priest and an “efficiency expert.”³⁷ Jethro advises Moses to carefully select “capable men” to assist Moses in the work. Kaiser points out Moses’ willingness to listen to and follow the advice of a non-Jew.³⁸

Moses was known as the “meekest man who ever lived,” (Num. 12:3) but even he struggled at times with anger and frustration, due to the constant complaining of the “congregation” (Exod. 15-18, Num. 11:1-20). The people complained about the lack of freshwater, the lack of meat, the lack of vegetables, and more. Even though God rained down manna from heaven daily and brought water from a rock in the wilderness, the

³⁷ Kaiser, “Exodus,” 91.

³⁸ Kaiser, “Exodus,” 93.

complaining continued, with some even suggesting that going back to slavery in Egypt was better (Num. 14:4).

Moses also endured the people rejecting his leadership. St. Gregory identified the root of these rebellions against Moses as envy.³⁹ Some of the people did not like the fact that God had chosen Moses to lead the congregation. The first rebellion against Moses' leadership resulted in some of the people attempting to elect a new leader to take the Israelites back to slavery in Egypt. In one rebellion recorded in Numbers 16, Korah, Dathan, Abiram, and their families declared that God had chosen them just as much as Moses, stating "all the people are holy and chosen of the Lord." They criticized Moses for claiming a special calling from God. They also berated Moses, calling him a liar for promising them a Promised Land they had not seen yet. They called him a killer for bringing everyone "out in the desert to die." Two hundred and fifty of Moses' appointed leaders sided with the rebellion. Moses declared to the Lord, "I have not so much as taken a donkey from any one of these men!" These three rebellious men and their split-off congregation took up censers of fire to promote themselves to "priests" on equal footing with Moses. God responded by splitting the ground open beneath the three men and their families, causing all of them to fall alive into "Sheol," or "the realm of the dead." The 250 leaders who sided with the rebellion were consumed by "the fire of the Lord." On the very next day, the congregation suggested stoning Moses for "killing the people of the Lord" (Num. 16:1-40). On several occasions, the people threatened to kill Moses. This was a difficult congregation to pastor.

³⁹ Jenson, "Life of Moses," 11.

Rabbi Herman Abramovitz disagrees with St. Gregory, stating that the rebellions against Moses' leadership were not based in envy, but were rather, "The upheaval caused by humans in their unending challenge of God's authority and moral law."⁴⁰ Abramovitz believes that the Israelites were really rejecting God's leadership, represented by Moses. This is reminiscent of when the Israelites rejected Samuel as their leader, by demanding a king. God tells Samuel, "It is not you they have rejected, but they have rejected me" (1 Samuel 8:7). Jesus also tells the disciples, "Whoever listens to you listens to me; whoever rejects you rejects me, and whoever rejects me rejects the one who sent me" (Luke 10:16). Perhaps, the people rejected Moses' leadership due to a combination of envy and rebelliousness against God's rule.

Moses also dealt with personal family conflict. One sharp argument between Moses and his first wife is recorded in Exodus 4. It is an unusual story. Although a reason is not given, God is very angry at Moses, even threatening to kill him. Moses' wife circumcised their sons right then, throwing down the bloody foreskins and saying, "You are a husband of blood to me." God then leaves Moses alone. Barnes believes that Zipporah was disgusted by the circumcision rite required by the Jewish faith.⁴¹ Moses' should have been the one to perform this rite on the infants' 8th day after birth. For unknown reasons, Moses did not fulfill the requirement. Barnes concludes that Moses and his wife are not in agreement, at least on this part of Moses' faith.⁴² Ellicott agrees but goes a step farther saying, "(Zipporah's) action was petulant and reproachful. Zipporah

⁴⁰ Ismar and Amramovitz, "The Staff of Moses," 17.

⁴¹ Albert Barnes, et al, in *Barnes' Notes* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1996), 244.

⁴² Barnes, "Exodus," 202.

regarded the bloody rites of the Jewish religion as cruel and barbarous.”⁴³ Ellicott believes that the Hebrew phrase for “Husband of Blood” is Zipporah comparing Moses to Molech, a pagan deity, both desiring the blood of children.⁴⁴ Kiel and Delitzsch agree that Zipporah was angry with Moses about the Jewish circumcision rite, thinking of it as repugnant. Keil suggests that this whole incident happened when it did, because Moses was about to lead a whole nation when his own home was not in order, and not following the Jewish faith.⁴⁵

Another family conflict occurred when Moses’ own brother and sister, Aaron and Miriam, were harshly criticizing Moses for having a Cushite (Ethiopian) wife (Num. 12:1). Their complaining about Moses’ marriage angered God, Who appears in a cloud to rebuke Aaron and Miriam and punish Miriam with leprosy. God later heals Miriam at Moses’ request (Num. 12:13).

At a crucial point in ministry, Moses experiences a major fall. This may have been due to anger and frustration at the congregation. Moses disobeys God and even takes credit for God’s miracles (Num. 20:9-11). This resulted in Moses not being permitted to lead the people into Canaan. Instead, Joshua led the people into the Promised Land. St. Gregory warned that Moses’ failure is a reminder that ministers should never try to take the glory for God’s actions.⁴⁶

⁴³ Barnes, et al, “Exodus,” 322.

⁴⁴ C.J. Ellicott, “Exodus,” in *An Old Testament Commentary for English Readers* (London, UK: Cassell and Co, 1897), 323.

⁴⁵ Kiel and Delitzsch, “Exodus,” 78.

⁴⁶ Jenson, “The Life of Moses,” 533–537.

Conclusions

Moses went on to have forty years of continuous ministry until his death. Despite setbacks, Moses stayed in a close relationship with God, vigorous in ministry for all forty years. Scripture states that when Moses died, “His eye was not dimmed, nor his vigor diminished” (Deut. 34:7).

A few of the factors that may have led to Moses’ longevity in ministry (over forty years) were continually learning new skills (delegation), maintaining a strong relationship with God, listening to wise advice, and raising up his own replacement. Moses was effective at training Joshua to seamlessly take over when Moses’ died. Moses trained Joshua by keeping him close during good times in ministry and also in tough times. Joshua later led the congregation into the Promised Land (Josh. 1).

Paul

The second character examined was Paul. The researcher studied Acts 9, 22, and 1 Corinthians 11 to better understand Paul’s education, experiences, and longevity. The researcher approached the texts with the following questions: (1) What life experiences may have contributed to Paul’s longevity in ministry? (2) What skills may have helped Paul continue in ministry for many years? (3) What obstacles may Paul have overcome in ministry?

Education and Experience

The apostle Paul had the benefit of an above-average education.⁴⁷ Paul was born around 15-30 A.C.E in the town of Tarsus in the province of Celicia (Acts 21:39). The scattered Jewish people, known as the “Diaspora” meaning “disbursed,” were living in an area that had been conquered by the Roman Empire.⁴⁸ Rome, already the most powerful empire on earth at that time, was rapidly expanding both north and east. One benefit of Rome’s expansion and the famed “Roman Roads” running throughout the empire, was that Paul was educated in a multicultural environment. One of these Roman roads is still visible in the city of Tarsus today. The city of Tarsus was a wealthy city, known for its thriving imperial cult and its merging of many cultures.

Paul could read and write and give powerful messages in Hebrew, Greek and Aramaic. This was a better education than a lot of Jewish people received at the time. For example, when Jesus taught from the Scriptures, the people marveled. “How can this man teach Scripture when He is uneducated?” (Matt. 13:54-55) When Peter and John, who were both Jewish, preached on the day of Pentecost, the audience wondered, “Where did these men learn this since they are uneducated?” (Acts 4:13)

Paul was Jewish, but also born a Roman citizen (Acts 16:37-38; 22:25-28). Paul was aware of his rights as a citizen. Paul asserted those rights to not be tortured or beaten, to a fair trial, and to appeal a court’s ruling to Caesar himself (Acts 25).

⁴⁷ D.A. Carson, Douglas J. Moo, and Andrew David Naselli, “Acts,” in *Introducing the New Testament: A Short Guide to Its History and Message* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010), chap. 12, Kindle.

⁴⁸ James Strong, “Diaspora,” in *Strong’s Expanded Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2009), 1230.

Paul grew up during a tense time in Tarsus.⁴⁹ The Jewish community was divided over how to stay distinct as a group, in the middle of the dominant Hellenistic culture. There was no consensus as to whether or not a Jewish person should interact with Gentiles and if so, to what extent.⁵⁰ One example of this tension was the Roman wrestling gymnasium located in Tarsus. Wrestling was extremely popular for young boys and men. Some Jewish parents did not allow their sons to participate in Gentile activities such as wrestling. Other Jewish parents did allow their sons to wrestle.⁵¹ The real conflict was about allegiance to God or Caesar, and about what it meant to be a Jewish person in Roman society.⁵²

The Jewish people across the province of Cilicia, where Paul grew up, were sharply divided across several ideological lines.⁵³ These Jewish sects could not agree as to whether or not, or to what extent, Jewish people should separate themselves from Gentiles and the dominant Gentile culture.

Paul received formal education as a Pharisee. The Pharisees, which made up half of the Sanhedrin (the ruling body for Jewish religious matters) were popular with the common people. A contemporary historian, Josephus, wrote that the Pharisees had the support of the public.⁵⁴ The Pharisees believed in a physical resurrection of the dead.⁵⁵

⁴⁹ Isabelle Hasselin Rous, "The Roman City of Tarsus in Cilicia and its Terracotta Figurines," Open Edition Journals, April 20, 2019, accessed May, 6 2021, <http://journals.openedition.org/acost/1258>.

⁵⁰ Jacob W. Elias, *Remember the Future :The Pastoral Theology of Paul the Apostle* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 2006), chap. 1, Kindle.

⁵¹ Elias, *Remember the Future*, chap. 1, Kindle.

⁵² Elias, *Remember the Future*, chap. 1, Kindle.

⁵³ Flavius Josephus, *The Antiquities of the Jews* (Amarillo, TX: First Rate Publishers, 2015), 21.

⁵⁴ Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, 21.

They were known for their piety and strict adherence to the Jewish Law. Pharisees would even tithe from the smallest grains of their spices (Luke 11:42). They would not eat unless they performed an elaborate washing ritual (Mark 7:3). Paul later referred to himself as “a Pharisee of Pharisees” (Phil. 3:5). Because of Paul’s education as a Pharisee, Paul was well versed in Jewish Scripture and the rabbinic writings, which were also known as the Mishnah.⁵⁶ The Mishnah included several different viewpoints of Scripture. Many rabbis would comment on verses and then comment on each other’s comments. Paul would have been familiar with many different perspectives on important biblical passages.⁵⁷

Paul learned “at the feet of Gamaliel” (Acts 22:3) which means that the famous Pharisee Gamaliel was Paul’s teacher and mentor. Paul assumes that the target audience knows who Gamaliel is.⁵⁸ Gamaliel served at the notably moderate school of Hillel. Gamaliel is best known for giving advice to the rest of the Sanhedrin as they debated what to do with Peter and John’s problematic teachings. Some of the Sanhedrin wanted to kill Peter and John. Gamaliel responded, “So now I tell you, have nothing to do with these men, and let them go. For if this endeavor or this activity is of human origin, it will destroy itself. But if it comes from God, you will not be able to destroy them; you may even find yourselves fighting against God” (Acts 5:38-39).

⁵⁵ John B. Polhill, “Acts,” in *An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture: Volume 26: The New American Commentary* (Nashville, TN, Broadman Press, 2001) 340.

⁵⁶ Frank E. Gaebelin, et al, *John and Acts*, in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary with the New International Version of the Holy Bible*, Vol. 9, edited by Frank E. Gaebelin, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981) 454.

⁵⁷ Polhill, *Acts*, 176.

⁵⁸ Richard Longenecker, *Acts* in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary with the New International Version of the Holy Bible*, edited by Tremper Longman, III and David E. Garland (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981) 795.

Paul obviously did not agree with Gamaliel's moderate stance.⁵⁹ Paul tenaciously pursued harsh punishments for the "Messiahists," including violence, murder, confiscation of their property, and imprisonment of whole families, including women and children. Paul is described as "breathing violence" while pursuing Christians (Acts 9:1). Paul obtained all the legal documents to do what he wanted to do. He even pursued Christians that fled over long distances. Paul confessed that he held the coats of those that murdered the deacon Stephen in the street, fully approving of their actions (Acts 22:20).

Calling

Most of what is known about the Apostle Paul comes from the Book of Acts in the Bible and Paul's own writings. On the journey to arrest Christian families in Damascus, Paul had a transformational experience with God (Gal. 1:12). Paul held his experiences with God in high regard, even over an impressive education (Acts 9).

Jesus appeared to Paul directly in a bright light, giving Paul instructions. From this time on, Paul was clear as to identity and mission. He calls himself an apostle of Jesus Christ (2 Tim. 1:1), a preacher to the Gentiles (Acts 22:31), and a father to the churches he founded (2 Cor. 12:14-15).

After Paul's conversion and initial rejection by the Christian churches, Paul then went into isolation in the Arabian Desert to "learn from Christ Himself" (Gal. 1:16-22). There is little information about Paul's years in the desert. Longenecker believes that Luke did not write a lot about these years of Paul's preparation in the desert because this occurred before Luke became a Christian.⁶⁰ Also, Luke was keeping the focus of the story

⁵⁹ Elias, "Remember the Future," chap. 1, Kindle.

⁶⁰ Longenecker, *Acts*, 859.

on Paul's ministry to the Gentiles. After these three years of preparation, Paul visited the other apostles, but later stated that interactions with the other apostles, "added nothing to him" (Gal. 2:6). Paul did not spend much time learning from the other apostles.⁶¹ A new friend of Paul's, Barnabas, introduced Paul to the church where he was finally accepted as a Christian brother. Paul did go on to seek and receive the official commissioning of the church elders for Paul and Barnabas' first missionary journey.⁶² This commission was signified by "the laying on of hands" (Acts 13:1-3).

Skills

Paul made use of many different skills in ministry. Often, Paul was preaching and teaching to fellow Jews in a synagogue, showing them from the Scriptures that Jesus is the Messiah (Acts 13:14). At other times, Paul was engaging Gentiles in a philosophical debate at one of their religious centers (Acts 17:23 ff). According to Ellicott, Paul made great use of debate, philosophy, logical reasoning, writing, teaching, and preaching. Ellicott describes Paul as "non-disparaging" when he interacts with non-Christians.⁶³ In fact, Paul seeks out conversations with people of different faiths, without condemning or condoning, while looking for commonalities through which Paul launches a presentation of the Christian faith.⁶⁴

Paul also had to engage in conflict resolution, confrontations, correction, and key decision-making. Paul routinely had to combat false doctrines by clearly outlining the

⁶¹ Longenecker, *Acts*, 863.

⁶² Longenecker, *Acts*, 911.

⁶³ C.J. Ellicott, "Acts," *A New Testament Commentary for English Readers* (London, UK: Cassell and Co, 1897), 322.

⁶⁴ Ellicott, "Acts," 324.

beliefs of the church. Thompson points out that Paul's explanations of true Christian doctrine have been invaluable from the foundation of Christendom to this day.⁶⁵

Paul also had to develop skills in mentoring young believers like John Mark, Timothy, and Titus. Paul raised up several young leaders that continued in ministry even after Paul was gone.

One of Paul's most important contributions in ministry was outreach to the Gentiles. Up until this point, the apostles were primarily staying clustered around Jerusalem and mainly concentrating on winning Jews to Christ. Paul began ministering cross-culturally to Gentiles. This was extremely controversial at the time. As more and more Gentiles became Christians, a massive debate ensued as to whether or not Gentile Christians should have to follow the Old Testament Law. Paul was instrumental in convincing the first church council, which included Paul, Peter, James, and John, among others, that Gentile Christians should be fully accepted into the church.⁶⁶ The importance of this council's decision cannot be overstated. According to Elias, many Jewish Christians were still refusing to eat with or go to the homes of Gentile Christians.⁶⁷ Jewish house churches and Gentile house churches were often still kept strictly separated. The council of Jerusalem met to decide once and for all if Gentile Christians would be required to follow Old Testament law. This is the scriptural record of the event.

Certain people came down from Judea to Antioch and were teaching the believers: "Unless you are circumcised, according to the custom taught by Moses, you cannot be saved." This brought Paul and Barnabas into sharp dispute and debate with them. So Paul and Barnabas were appointed, along with some

⁶⁵ James W. Thompson, *Pastoral Ministry According to Paul: A Biblical Vision* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006), 86-87.

⁶⁶ Gaebelein, et al, *John and Acts*, 454.

⁶⁷ Elias, *Remember the Future*, chap. 1, Kindle.

other believers, to go up to Jerusalem to see the apostles and elders about this question. The church sent them on their way, and as they traveled through Phoenicia and Samaria, they told how the Gentiles had been converted. This news made all the believers very glad. When they came to Jerusalem, they were welcomed by the church and the apostles and elders, to whom they reported everything God had done through them. Then some of the believers who belonged to the party of the Pharisees stood up and said, “The Gentiles must be circumcised and required to keep the law of Moses.” The apostles and elders met to consider this question... The whole assembly became silent as they listened to Barnabas and Paul telling about the signs and wonders God had done among the Gentiles through them (Acts 15:3-12).

The Jerusalem Council decisively ruled for full inclusion of all Gentile Christians. Paul used considerable ministry gifts to fight for full Gentile inclusion.⁶⁸ Luke describes the joy of Gentile Christians in Antioch when Paul and Barnabas read the council’s decision to them (Acts 15:30-35). Longenecker believes that the council’s decision encouraged Paul to reach out even more to the Gentiles.⁶⁹ Paul had an incredible ability to relate to others, despite differences in culture, nationality, race, religion, philosophy, or gender. Longenecker believes that the council’s decision directly influenced Paul’s statement: “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 of them” (1 Cor. 9:22).

Martin Luther, however, believed that there were two issues addressed by the council, one pertaining to theology and one having to do with practical processes.⁷⁰ The early church declared a theology of complete inclusion of all believers, women and men, Gentiles and Jews, slave and free. The second consideration was more practical. Gentile Christians would still be required to not eat blood, not eat meat sacrificed to idols, abstain

⁶⁸ Longenecker, *Acts*, 954-955.

⁶⁹ Longenecker, *Acts*, 955.

⁷⁰ Martin Luther, Henry Eyster Jacobs, and Adolph Spaeth, *Works of Martin Luther: With Introductions and Notes* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1982), 612.

from sexual immorality, and give to the poor (Acts 15:20). Lietzman objects that these requirements would still be a significant sacrifice for Gentile Christians.⁷¹ But Paul understood that social norms would still need to be followed to some extent to protect the reputation of the burgeoning church. Longenecker agrees with Luther, claiming that Paul was willing to make concessions in procedure, not theology, for peace within the churches.⁷² This is demonstrated by Paul's stance on eating meat sacrificed to idols.

If an unbeliever invites you to a meal and you want to go, eat whatever is put before you without raising questions of conscience. But if someone says to you, 'This has been offered in sacrifice,' then do not eat it, both for the sake of the one who told you and for the sake of conscience. I am referring to the other person's conscience, not yours. For why is my freedom being judged by another's conscience? If I take part in the meal with thankfulness, why am I denounced because of something I thank God for? So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God. Do not cause anyone to stumble, whether Jews, Greeks, or the church of God even as I try to please everyone in every way. For I am not seeking my own good, but the good of many, so that they may be saved (1 Cor. 10:27-33).

Obstacles

Paul's tenacity and commitment to ministry endured through many hardships.

Reflecting on a lifetime of ministry, Paul shares,

“I have worked much harder, been in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely, and been exposed to death again and again. Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was pelted with stones, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my fellow Jews, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false believers. I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked. Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches” (2 Cor. 9:23-28).

⁷¹ Hans Lietzmann, and Bertram Lee Woolf, *The Founding of the Church Universal- The Beginnings of the Christian Church: Volume 2* (New York, NY Charles Scribner's Sons, 1938), 652.

⁷² Longenecker, *Acts*, 949.

On top of all of these sufferings, Paul also endured frequent attacks from fellow believers. Some of these believers criticized Paul frequently, saying that Paul was “weak” “unimpressive in-person” “simple” or “unqualified” (2 Cor. 11). They also called Paul “insane” (Acts 26:24). If they could label Paul as “insane” then they could dismiss everything Paul had been teaching. Paul declared that these people were motivated by pride, wishing to be called “super-apostles” (2 Cor. 11:5). Paul’s heart was broken by how quickly churches were led astray by abusive charismatic false prophets and dangerous false doctrines (Gal. 1). Paul was passionate for unity and purity of doctrine in the churches he had founded (1 Cor. 4:15).

Conclusions

Despite suffering and setbacks, Paul continued in ministry, writing much of the New Testament. Paul continued in ministry up until his death as a martyr (2 Tim. 4:6-8).

One important ministry decision Paul made to ensure his legacy was to train a successor. Just like Gamaliel trained in Paul, Paul worked to train an apprentice as well. The first attempt did not go as planned. Barnabas, Paul’s partner in ministry, brought along his young nephew, John Mark, on their missionary journeys. However, at a crucial point in their mission, John Mark abandoned the missionary trip. The reason he left is unknown.⁷³

After some time, they prepared for their next missionary journey together. Barnabas wanted to give his nephew a second chance. He believed in John Mark, much

⁷³ Polhill, “Acts,” 296.

like he believed in a newly converted Paul.⁷⁴ Paul, however, was not willing to take a chance on this young man again. Scripture tells us that the argument between Paul and Barnabas was “so severe that they parted ways” (Acts 15:39). Barnabas then continued on the missionary journey with John Mark. Paul chose to partner with Silas, and receive a new commission from the church. Of Paul’s four missionary journeys, the first one was with Barnabas and the second, third and fourth were with Silas. At the end of Paul’s life, however, Paul wrote from prison, asking the church officials to send John Mark, emphasizing, “Because (John Mark) is useful to me in ministry” (2 Tim. 4:11). According to Longenecker, Paul ultimately decided to give John Mark another chance. John Mark, who also traveled with Peter, ended up writing the Gospel of Mark, the first gospel written.⁷⁵

Paul also mentored Timothy, even considering him a “son” (1 Tim. 1:12). He took Timothy on various missionary journeys, never shielding Timothy from the horrors of persecution. Paul pleaded with Timothy to work for peace and unity and doctrinal purity (2 Tim. 2:1-10). Timothy was trained on the job with Paul but learned Scripture from a young age from his mother Eunice and grandmother Lois (2 Tim. 1:5). Paul prepared Timothy and the rest of the Christian churches before Paul’s death. As a result, the churches kept growing and flourishing even after Paul was martyred.⁷⁶ Paul summed up his life and ministry by saying,

“For I am the least of the apostles, unfit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. ^uBut by the grace of God I am what I am, and his

⁷⁴ Polhill, “Acts,” 341.

⁷⁵ Longenecker, *Acts*, 116.

⁷⁶ George Eldon Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1974), 116.

grace toward me has not been in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them—though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me. “Whether then it was I or they, so we proclaim and so you have come to believe” (1 Cor. 15:9).

Commonalities in the Ministry Preparation of Paul and Moses

Both Moses and Paul received the best formal education that existed in their times. Both men had the very best training in reading, writing, and public speaking. They both were also exposed early to different languages and cultures. Moses and Paul both experienced dramatic, life-altering experiences with God. Their supernatural encounters changed their thinking and behavior while setting their identities and callings for the rest of their lives.

Both men spent time in the desert in relative isolation and obscurity. Moses was a shepherd up until he was eighty years old and received the call. Paul spent three years in the Arabian Desert alone preparing spiritually. This “alone time” may have helped to prepare them for ministry.

God prepared Moses and Paul through their experiences. Moses learned a lot about organization from working as a shepherd. Paul was a tentmaker that used connections in the non-Christian world to start discussions.

Both men could read and write well in more than one language. They both understood what it was to be Jewish and a minority in a foreign culture.

Neither Moses nor Paul did ministry exactly like their peers or like the ministers that had come before them. God used them in completely different ways than their contemporaries. Most of the New Testament apostles initially limited their ministry to the Jewish Diaspora. Paul was radically different in that he eventually focused on ministry to

“the Gentiles.” Moses’ ministry was so radically different that after his death Moses is given an amazing epitaph.

Since that time no prophet has risen in Israel like Moses, whom the LORD knew face to face, [none equal to him] in all the signs and wonders which the LORD sent him to perform in the land of Egypt against Pharaoh, all his servants, and all his land, and in all the mighty power and all the great and terrible deeds which Moses performed in the sight of all Israel (Deut. 34:10-12).

Both Moses and Paul did an excellent job of training in their replacements and ensuring that the ministry would go on long after their death. They ensured a legacy with an accurate written record for all further generations.

Moses and Paul continued over the long haul in ministry despite strong opposition, including death threats. Both men went through periods of sadness and extreme frustration. Both men were rejected even by God’s people at times. Nothing made them stop in their ministry up until they passed away.

Differences in Paul’s and Moses’ Preparation for Ministry

Paul was converted relatively young in life. He spent only three years in relative obscurity before entering into full-time ministry. Paul stayed in ministry up until being martyred. Moses started in ministry much later in life. Moses spent forty years in the desert herding sheep before encountering God at the burning bush.

Paul learned “at the feet of Gamaliel” (Acts 22:3). Scripture does not tell us if Moses had a mentor early in life, but Moses did seem to learn a lot from his father-in-law Jethro (Exodus 18).

There are records of several of Paul’s sermons and appeals, as well as persuasive writing. Paul was an excellent speaker. Unlike Paul, Moses did not believe that he was a

good speaker. At least at the beginning of Moses' ministry, Moses' brother Aaron did the public speaking and Moses did the writing.

Moses needed more preparation for organization and delegation than Paul. Numbers shows us that Moses managed the entire nation of Israel. Moses was setting up the laws and practices for worship, war, holidays, and family life. Paul did not need to organize on a smaller scale than Moses. Paul needed some organizational skills in mentoring John Mark and Timothy. Paul worked within a structure of deacons, elders, apostles, pastors, teachers, and house church leaders.

Crucial Pastoral Skills for Moses and Paul

Careful study of the ministries of Moses and Paul highlighted several skills that were crucial to their long-term success. First of all, both Moses and Paul had to be very flexible. Moses needed to change "careers" at eighty years old. At various points he was confronting, vision casting, teaching, writing, building, and organizing. Plans changed several times based on the obedience or rebellion of the Israelites to God's plan. Likewise, Paul showed great flexibility in ministry. Twice he planned to go on missionary journeys, but the Holy Spirit told Paul, "No." Then God gave him directions to go minister in Macedonia (Acts 16:9-10). Sometimes Paul planned to visit a church but ended up in prison. If Paul saw an unexpected opportunity to share the gospel, he would jump at the chance. He also had to change ministry partners at one point. Paul stayed flexible and sensitive to the Holy Spirit's leading.

Both Paul and Moses used writing skills in their respective ministries. Moses, at least to some extent, preserved the history of the Jewish People, as well as their ongoing covenant relationship with God. Moses wrote down all of God's Laws and instructions

for this new nation of Israel. Paul wrote to many of the churches that he had helped to found. Most of Paul's letters were written in response to a conflict or to correct a false doctrine. Paul was excellent at forming a logical argument based on Scripture and reason.

Organizational skills were key to success in both men's ministries. Moses had to learn how to delegate and how to select skilled people to put over the hundreds, thousands, and tens of thousands. The building of the tabernacle and the formation of the priesthood relied on great organization of people and resources. At God's direction, Moses even organized the Jewish week, Sabbaths, holidays, and other events.

Paul showed organizational skills more by putting together his oral and written arguments. Paul also had to support the leadership structure in each local church. The burgeoning church needed the structure of deacons, pastors, teachers, evangelists, and more. Paul called these leaders part of God's plan for the church.

Traits That Contributed to Moses' and Paul's Longevity in Ministry

There were several actions and character traits that assisted Paul and Moses to stay in ministry. Both Paul and Moses went into their ministries with realistic expectations. God told Moses from the beginning that this would be a difficult mission. Pharaoh would reject Moses' message. God would send many plagues on Egypt to break Pharaoh's stubborn will. Moses had no illusions that ministry would be easy or that everyone would like him.

After Paul's conversion experience, Christ tells Paul through Ananias, "I will show (Paul) how much he will suffer for Me" (Acts 9:16). Paul knew right away that

ministry would include pain.⁷⁷ Christ never told Paul that people would listen to him, or that he would have fast-growing churches free of conflict. Paul does not seem surprised later on when he is thrown out of synagogues or beaten. Having the right expectations from the beginning may help a person endure hardship. If Paul thought ministry was going to bring power and respect, or that others would not question his authority, Paul may have experienced crushing disappointment, making it difficult to keep going in ministry. Unmet expectations could make a minister insecure, thinking they must be doing something “wrong” when they encounter painful criticism. Moses and Paul seem to have braced themselves to minister through a lot of hurt and pain.

Paul and Moses continued having experiences and time away with God. Their conversion experiences were merely the beginning of their relationship with God and not a stand-alone event. Paul and Moses continually received direction, knowledge, strength, and encouragement from these regular times spent in prayer. They did not count “time working with God’s people” as equal to “time spent in communion with God.”

At the beginning of each man’s ministry, they sought the blessing or commissioning of the elders of the larger community of faith. Moses received the blessing of the elders of the Hebrews and Paul and Barnabas received their commission from the church elders. Even though Paul and Barnabas did not receive their calling from these elders, it was important to them to receive this blessing. They did not go out entirely on their own but instead sought the support of their fellow believers.

Both men had a clear understanding of authority and their mission. They knew that God had called them to this mission, and they derived their authority from

⁷⁷ William Maestri, *Paul’s Pastoral Vision :Pastoral Letters for a Pastoral Church Today* (New York, NY: Alba House, 1989), 67.

God.⁷⁸ Therefore, they had no reason to act on their own, or think that they had authority from their own merits. Both had crystal clear understandings of what they needed to do to fulfill their missions. Moses was called by God to deliver the Jewish people from slavery and lead them into the Promised Land. Paul was called by God to preach the good news, to the Jews and the Gentiles. Knowing exactly Who called them and what they needed to do helped them cope with a lot of difficult setbacks and pain.

To stay in ministry, both men accepted the reality of God's discipline. After Moses took credit for God's work, God told Moses that now it would be Joshua, not Moses that would bring the people into the Promised Land (Num. 20). This must have been a crushing disappointment. Moses pleaded with God to change His mind. God said "No." Moses went on the mountain and could see the whole Promised Land, but he knew he would never go in (Deut. 34). Instead of retiring from ministry or growing bitter, Moses accepted God's decision and kept working hard for many more years until death. Moses even wrote a song of worship to God right before his death (Deut. 33). He knew how to accept God's leading, even if it was painful.

Paul had some type of pain in life, which he refers to as his, "thorn in the flesh" (2 Cor. 12:7-9). Scripture tells us that on three separate occasions Paul begged God to "take it away." During this time God was using Paul extensively in divine healing. Still, God told Paul "No." God would only say, "My grace is sufficient for you." Nicoll points out that in the Greek, the phrase "My grace is sufficient," means more accurately "the abiding validity of My (God's) promise."⁷⁹ This could be God telling Paul that His

⁷⁸ Elias, "Remember the Future," chap. 1, Kindle.

⁷⁹ Robertson Nicoll, *The Expositor's Greek Testament* (London, UK: Hodder and Stoughton, 1912), 322.

promises are continuous and true despite this pain. Ellicott reasons that God did not deliver Paul from pain because “(The pain) was working out a higher perfection than was attainable without it.”⁸⁰ Ultimately, Paul had to submit to God. Paul did not grow bitter or quit. He went on doing ministry up until his death.

The Whole of Scripture

The Bible has a lot to say about the unique calling of a pastor. Moses and Paul contributed to the Church’s understanding of the position of pastor. They are both great examples of Biblical leaders, as defined by the rest of Scripture. Here is what the Bible has to say about the position of the pastor.

1. Pastors are uniquely called by God (Eph. 4:11, Gal. 1:1).
2. The purpose of the pastoral calling is to “equip the saints” for ministry. Pastors build up Christians by “preaching the Word,” rightly explaining the Bible, correcting those who are sinning (rebuke), exemplifying true servant hood, encouraging the church, refuting false doctrine and managing God’s household (Eph. 4:12, 1 Peter 5:2, Titus 1:9, 1 Tim. 3:1-13).
3. Pastors must be “blameless.” They must have a good reputation even among non-Christians (Titus 1:6-7, 1 Tim. 3:1-13).
4. A pastor must not be a new Christian. A pastor must have already proved themselves to their overseers (1 Tim. 3:13).

⁸⁰ Ellicott, “Acts,” 378.

5. A pastor must have a healthy family life. A pastor must not be unfaithful to their spouse. A pastor must take care of their own home and family well before overseeing anything for the house of God (Titus 1:6-7, 1 Tim. 3:1-13).

6. A pastor cannot be addicted to alcohol. A pastor must be gentle and self-controlled, not violent or quick-tempered. A pastor must be patient and kind (Titus 1:7-8, 1 Tim. 3:1-13).

7. Pastors should not love money or be selfish. Pastors should put the needs of others ahead of their own. Pastors should work to love their congregation like Christ does, seeking out the ones who are lost and straying. Pastors are compared to servants or shepherds caring for sheep (1 Peter 5:2, Titus 1:7-8, Ezekiel 34:1-10, 1 Tim. 3:1-3).

8. Pastors will be held accountable by God as to how they manage God's church. Pastors receive a "stricter judgment," meaning they are held to a higher standard. The people in a congregation are loved by God and are entrusted by God to that pastor (Titus 1:9, Ezekiel 34:1-10, 1 Tim. 3-13).

CHAPTER THREE: REVIEW OF LITERATURE ON PASTORAL ATTRITION

In order to discover the actual attrition rates and to identify key factors in pastoral attrition, the researcher conducted a literature review of relevant books, journal articles and university studies. The researcher found many excellent peer reviewed studies, thesis and journal articles. These resources pointed to clear trends as to the actual rate that pastors are leaving vocational ministry. These sources highlighted common risk factors for pastoral attrition. In contrast, some of the available magazine articles and websites, offered anecdotal evidence, without any factual evidence behind their claims. The researcher attempted to point out unsupported articles and claims.

Rates of Pastoral Attrition

A Duke University study found that 85 percent of seminary graduates would not make it to 5 years in ministry. Even worse, 90 percent of all pastors dropped out before retirement.⁸¹ Stewart, after research for Oakland City University, concluded that this current loss of vocational pastors is not tenable. “We (the church universal) cannot continue to survive such losses in church leadership.”⁸² Lifeway’s research affirmed these

⁸¹ Kristin Stewart, *Keeping Your Pastor: An Emerging Church Challenge* (Thesis, Oakland City University, Oakland City, IN 2009), 107.

⁸² Stewart, “Keeping Your Pastor,” 17.

statistics, finding that four out of every five pastoral graduates would not make it to their fifth year in ministry.⁸³ However, the Lifeway study does not adequately explain where they obtain their figures. Krejcir's study concurs with the peer-reviewed journals, indicating that three pastors in North America permanently leave ministry every single day.⁸⁴ According to the Alban Institute and Fuller Seminary study, fifty percent of all ministers will drop out of ministry permanently within their first five years.⁸⁵ A Duke University study found that as many as 90 percent of pastors will have dropped out of ministry before they have served 20 years.⁸⁶ All of the studies agree that the situation is dire.

In Elkington's research, pastors were surveyed who currently serve or used to serve in church ministry. The pastors in this study were from the Netherlands, Canada, the United States, France, Germany, Norway, South Africa, and the United Kingdom. Of these pastors, seventy-five percent stated they had "faced serious difficulty in their ministry."⁸⁷ Forty-eight percent reported "loneliness in the course of their ministry."⁸⁸

Bardiau-Huys describes the exodus of pastors from vocational ministry as "disturbing" "a

⁸³ Thomas Rainier, "The Dangerous Third Year of Pastoral Tenure," *Charisma Leadership*, June 14, 2014, accessed June 9, 2011, <https://www.christianpost.com/news/the-dangerous-third-year-of-pastoral-tenure.html>.

⁸⁴ Krejcir, R. J., "Statistics on Pastors: What Is Going On With Pastors in America?" Francis A. Schaeffer Institute of Church Leadership Development, January, 7 2011, accessed April 23, 2020. <http://www.intothyword.org/apps/articles/default.asp?articleid=36562>.

⁸⁵ Katheryn Rhoads Meek, et al, "Maintaining Personal Resiliency: Lessons Learned from Evangelical Protestant Clergy," *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 31, no. 4: 339–47. <https://doi.org/10.1177/009164710303100404>. 123.

⁸⁶ "Clergy Losses Are Massive," Ministering to Ministers Foundation, updated 2016, accessed September 2, 2021, North Chesterfield, VA. <https://ministeringtoministers.org/clergy-losses-are-massive/>

⁸⁷ Robert Elkington, "Adversity in Pastoral Leadership: Are Pastors Leaving the Ministry in Record Numbers, and If So, Why?" *Verbum et Ecclesia* 34. no. 1 (12 August 2013).

⁸⁸ Elkington, "Adversity in Pastoral Leadership," 7.

decimation of church leadership,” “a systemic pathology,” and a “crisis.”⁸⁹ Many survey respondents in her thesis work lamented that “there was no outlet to express the ups and downs of the job.” Bardiau-Huys also found that this high rate of pastoral attrition is a global phenomenon, crossing denominational and cultural barriers.⁹⁰

Eighty-four percent of all pastors believe they received a specific “call” to ministry from God.⁹¹ Despite this call and the significant investment in their education and training, Elkington claims a record number of pastors are leaving ministry.⁹² A few decades ago, pastors were leaving one church to do ministry at another church. However, in the last decade, more pastors are leaving not just a position, but ministry in general.⁹³ ChurchLeaders.com found that only a relatively small number of those leaving vocational ministry leave due to a moral failure. The majority are leaving due to “exhaustion “and “lack of resources.” The pastors who leave vocational ministry often feel tremendous guilt that they are “abandoning” their calling.⁹⁴

Bardiau-Huys theorizes that pastoral attrition is far higher in Pentecostal organizations than reported. She says,

Pentecostal denominations tend to hide the problem of pastoral exits. A director of an important Pentecostal denomination in France said that no pastor had ever

⁸⁹ Elkington, “Adversity in Pastoral Leadership,” 1.

⁹⁰ Lucie Bardiau-Huys, “Sustaining Pastoral Ministry: Denominations Must Assume Their Responsibilities.” *The Journal of the European Pentecostal Theological Association* 34, no. 1 (2014):72.

⁹¹ Bardiau-Huys, “Sustaining Pastoral Ministry,” 64.

⁹² Robert Elkington, “Adversity in Pastoral Leadership,” 6.

⁹³ Jesse T. Jackson, “This Is Not What I Signed up For: Unsettling Exodus of Pastors Leaving the Ministry,” *Church Leaders Magazine*. May 7, 2021, <https://churchleaders.com/news/396413-reports-of-an-unsettling-trend-of-pastors-leaving-the-ministry.html>.

⁹⁴ Bardiau-Huys, “Sustaining Pastoral Ministry,” 64.

left their movement. When I told him that I had interviewed one of them, he replied that pastors who quit had never really been pastors, they had just misunderstood God's calling! The subject of pastoral exits is more taboo among Pentecostals than other Evangelical groups: the guilt factor has a lot more weight in their decision-making processes.⁹⁵

Stewart argues that ministry as a profession is in jeopardy due to the rapid rate of pastors leaving churches.⁹⁶ One pastor in the churchleadership.com survey is quoted as saying, "As a minister struggling with whether to stay in parish ministry, I'm so hurt by all the replies that blame clergy for quitting. I've given my life to the Church, asked my family to sacrifice, and ended up with my (tail) kicked. American church is broken."⁹⁷ Since it often takes over two years for a church to find a new pastor, this leaves many North American churches drifting in a leaderless limbo for years.⁹⁸

Common Risk Factors for Pastoral Attrition

The Pastor's Personality

The pastor's own personality flaws may set them up to drop out of ministry early. The author of *The Emotionally Healthy Leader* makes the point that certain personality types are drawn to pastoral ministry.⁹⁹ An unusually high number of pastors are an

⁹⁵ Bardiau-Huys, "Sustaining Pastoral Ministry," 74.

⁹⁶ Stewart, *Keeping Your Pastor*, 107.

⁹⁷ Jackson, "This Is Not What I Signed Up For," 11.

⁹⁸ Jackson, "This Is Not What I Signed Up For," 7.

⁹⁹ Gayle Hardie, and Malcolm Lazenby, *The Emotionally Healthy Leader* (Carlton North, Vic.: Monterey Press, 2013), 29.

“ENFP” or something close to that personality type, on the Meyers Briggs Scale.¹⁰⁰

While the Meyers Briggs Scale is not scientifically verifiable, it can be helpful in understanding what draws some people to vocational ministry. “ENFP” stands for “Extroverted, Natural, Feeling, Perceiver.” This personality type often seeks out positions of leadership. Their natural charm makes them good at working with people, recruiting, and building teams.¹⁰¹ These pastors are often very caring and interested in relationships.¹⁰² Fifty percent of pastors come from dysfunctional homes, making them far more likely to be a “fixer,” who gets involved in other’s problems in an effort to “help” them.¹⁰³

A pastor must understand their dark side, or it will destroy everything that pastor has worked toward.¹⁰⁴ Every single person has a dark side that can never be removed, only better understood. Once a pastor identifies their dark tendencies, only then can they build up appropriate boundaries to defend against their weaknesses.¹⁰⁵

In the book *Overcoming the Dark Side of Leadership*, McIntosh and Rima outline five specific leadership pitfalls that must be guarded against: narcissism, passive-

¹⁰⁰ Toni Ridgeway, “Silent Suffering: Pastors and Depression,” Church Leaders Magazine, September 11, 2010, <https://churchleaders.com/pastors/pastor-articles/144651-silent-suffering-pastors-and-depression.html>.

¹⁰¹ Roy M. Oswald, and Otto Kroeger, *Personality Type and Religious Leadership* (Herndon, VA: Alban Institute Publishing, 1988), 122.

¹⁰² Hardie and Lazenby, *The Emotionally Healthy Leader*, 29-30.

¹⁰³ Gary L. McIntosh, and Samuel D. Rima, Sr., *Overcoming the Dark Side of Leadership, The Paradox of Personal Leadership* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1997): 94-137.

¹⁰⁴ Hardie and Lazenby, *The Emotionally Healthy Leader*, 9.

¹⁰⁵ McIntosh and Rima, *Overcoming the Dark Side*, 98.

aggressiveness, compulsiveness, co-dependence, and paranoia.¹⁰⁶ A narcissistic leader has a strong need for approval. They begin to see the church as an extension of themselves, believing that the church could not succeed without them. Every program of the church reflects the pastor's personality. The passive-aggressive pastor will resist any measures of success or performance due to fear of failure. They will never engage in direct confrontation, but will instead do "underhanded" things behind the scenes or use condescending, manipulative comments to get their way. The compulsive pastor has a need to control everything around them, including their family, the church staff, and the elder board. They desire order and perfection, especially in appearances. The co-dependent pastor is thrown every which way trying to please everyone and meet every demand. They have trouble ever saying no or confronting anyone. The paranoid pastor battles jealousy and suspicion. They do not trust anyone. This pastor will keep meticulous tabs on "their" staff and "their" church members' conversations and travel.¹⁰⁷

Pastors may struggle to be the same person in public that they are in private.¹⁰⁸ A pastor must place boundaries in their lives to make sure that they are not just using their congregation to have their own needs fulfilled. Many of these needs are forged in

¹⁰⁶ McIntosh and Rima, *Overcoming the Dark Side*, 101.

¹⁰⁷ McIntosh and Rima, *Overcoming the Dark Side*, 90.

¹⁰⁸ Lewis B. Smedes, *Shame & Grace: Healing the Shame We Don't Deserve* (New York, NY: Harperone, 1993), 33.

childhood and carried unconsciously into adulthood.¹⁰⁹ Only by finding out where the “fences are down” can pastors build up proper boundaries.¹¹⁰

Loneliness

Loneliness is a major factor in clergy burnout.¹¹¹ Pastors in Stewart’s study reported not having friends or support systems or anyone outside the church to talk to.¹¹² This loneliness was made worse by the high expectations of the congregation.¹¹³ These pastors expressed feeling “abandoned” by their denominational leadership, or even worse, “blamed” by their leaders.¹¹⁴ A majority of pastors in the Bardiau-Huys study believed that the denominational leaders would protect the church at all costs, over and against the pastor.¹¹⁵ Pastors expressed the desire for their leaders to step in to work for church health before there is a crisis. Denominational leaders received poor ratings for being willing to step in to mediate in difficult conflicts and power struggles.¹¹⁶

Rural pastors have a unique problem with loneliness due to depopulation of rural areas, and subsequent shrinking of their church membership as jobs move overseas.¹¹⁷

¹⁰⁹ Smedes, *Shame and Grace*, 70-76.

¹¹⁰ Greg Scott, and Rachel Lovell, “The Rural Pastors Initiative: Addressing Isolation and Burnout in Rural Ministry,” *Pastoral Psychology* 64, no. 1 (2014): 71-97.

¹¹¹ Gary L. Harbaugh, and Evan Rogers, “Pastoral Burnout: A View from the Seminary,” *Journal of Pastoral Care* 38, no. 2 (June 1984): 58, <https://doi.org/10.1177/002234098403800204>.

¹¹² Stewart, “Keeping Your Pastor,” 18.

¹¹³ Alexis D. Abernethy, et al, “The Pastors Empowerment Program: A Resilience Education Intervention to Prevent Clergy Burnout,” *Spirituality in Clinical Practice*, no. 3 (2016): 175-86.

¹¹⁴ Bardiau-Huys, “Sustaining Pastoral Ministry,” 65.

¹¹⁵ Bardiau-Huys, “Sustaining Pastoral Ministry,” 88.

¹¹⁶ Stewart, “Keeping Your Pastor,” 18.

¹¹⁷ Scott and Lovell, “The Rural Pastors Initiative,” 71-97.

Stress and Burnout

The number one reason that pastors give for leaving ministry is burnout.¹¹⁸

“Burnout” is usually the result of several different issues combined. Burnout has been defined as “emotional collapse or breakdown that can occur as a result of stress.”¹¹⁹

Unfortunately, stress can profoundly affect even those who serve the church. Ministers actually rank dangerously high on the Maslach Burnout Scale and the Francis Burnout Inventory, two psychological inventories that assess occupational burnout.¹²⁰ In fact, clergy members rank on the same stress level as other careers that serve the community, such as social workers, counselors, and nurses.¹²¹ Certain occupations, including pastoral ministry, are more inherently stressful than others.¹²² The fallout of this stress manifests in the life of pastors in various ways.

Pastors tend to be workaholics spending an average of fifty-five hours a week at the church office, but only twenty waking hours per week with their families.¹²³ This imbalance can lead to increased family dysfunction, family breakdown, and inability to cope. Once the pastor begins to “go numb” from burnout, then “depersonalization” often

¹¹⁸ Scott and Lovell, “The Rural Pastors Initiative,” 7.

¹¹⁹ Abernethy, et al, “The Pastors Empowerment Program,” 6.

¹²⁰ Maslach, Schaufeli, and Leiter, “Job Burnout,” 377.

¹²¹ Kelvin J. Randall, “Clergy Burnout: Two Different Measures,” *Pastoral Psychology* 62, no. 3 (2013): 333-41.

¹²² Janelle Warner and John D. Carter, “Loneliness, Marital Adjustment and Burnout in Pastoral and Lay Persons,” *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 12, no. 2 (1984): 125-31, doi: 10.1177/009164718401200206.

¹²³ Abernethy, et al, “The Pastors Empowerment Program,” 9.

sets in.¹²⁴ This means that the pastor stops being able to truly care for their congregation or themselves properly. This is a negative coping method characterized by withdrawing from conflict and difficult situations rather than facing them. Whether a service or a program went well or was a disaster, they no longer care.

Younger pastors are more prone to burnout, and to leaving the ministry.¹²⁵ One study found that seminarians in their senior year, when given a stress test, scored an average of 348. This is alarming since the average population generally scores between 75-150 and a score of 300 is considered dangerously high.¹²⁶ These stressed-out seminarians might be sent straight from school into a “high demand” church, without having learned coping methods for dealing with the stress.

Grosch found that job satisfaction, a feeling of having control and having choices is important to avoiding burnout.¹²⁷ Burnout can come with a feeling of powerlessness and failure. Elkington warns that ministers may struggle with job satisfaction since ninety percent of what a pastor does during the week is unseen and unknown by their congregation.¹²⁸ Ministers may struggle with ambiguous standards of “success.” Stewart agrees that burnout can ruin job satisfaction for a pastor.¹²⁹ When their ministry is going

¹²⁴ Barry Fallon, B. Rice, and S. Howie, “Factors That Precipitate and Mitigate Crisis in Ministry,” *Pastoral Psychology* 62, (2013): 27-40, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11089-012-0486-4>.

¹²⁵ Josh Haffner, “Surgeon General: 1 in 7 in USA Will Face Substance Addiction,” *USA Today*, November 17, 2016, accessed August 01, 2019, <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation-now/2016/11/17/surgeon-general-1-7-us-face-substance-addiction/93993474/>.

¹²⁶ Abernethy, et al, “The Pastors Empowerment Program,” 19.

¹²⁷ William N. Grosch, and David C. Olsen, “Clergy Burnout: An Integrative Approach,” *Journal of Clinical Psychology* 56, no. 5: (2000) 619–32, [https://doi.org/3.0.co;2-210.1002/\(sici\)1097-4679\(200005\)56:5<619::aid-jclp4>3.0.co](https://doi.org/3.0.co;2-210.1002/(sici)1097-4679(200005)56:5<619::aid-jclp4>3.0.co).

¹²⁸ Bardaiu-Huys, “Sustaining Pastoral Ministry,” 64.

¹²⁹ Bardaiu-Huys, “Sustaining Pastoral Ministry,” 65.

well, a pastor does not feel like they can take credit for it. Most congregations and district officials lay the full blame for any problems in the church on the pastor.¹³⁰ The pastor may also blame themselves for everything that goes wrong, comparing themselves to “successful” pastors.¹³¹ Ministers with strong boundaries kept an internal sense of their own goals, their calling, and their own “merits” thereby fighting off depression and burnout.¹³²

Fallon’s study identified one of the most dangerous times in a pastor’s life and ministry as when the pastor tries to counsel others through a time of tragedy that also affects the pastor personally.¹³³ This can happen when a hurricane, earthquake, or other natural disaster strikes, causing loss of life and property. This can happen when a community has suffered a devastating act of violence, such as a mass shooting. The pastor may have lost their home or a friend or family member. Feeling obligated to focus on the needs of others, the minister may ignore their own needs. Pastors are visible public figures who are expected to outwardly present a message of hope no matter what they are personally going through. This is a particularly dangerous time for clergy marriages, which can fall apart due to neglect.¹³⁴

¹³⁰ Elkington, “Adversity in Pastoral Leadership,” 18.

¹³¹ Bardiau-Huys, “Sustaining Pastoral Ministry,” 64.

¹³² Fallon, Rice, and Howie, “Crisis in Ministry,” 7.

¹³³ Carol Darling Anderson, E. Wayne Hill, and Lenore M. Mcwey, “Understanding Stress and Quality of Life for Clergy and Clergy Spouses,” *Stress and Health* 20, no. 5 (2004): 261-77.

¹³⁴ Abernethy, et al, “The Pastors Empowerment Program,” 7.

Church Conflict

One study found “conflict” to be a key reason that ministers give for leaving the ministry forever.¹³⁵ Pastors in Elkington’s study also cited “church conflict” and “high demand” churches as major stressors. This conflict can become personal and persistent in nature, affecting the home and personal life.¹³⁶ Author Dave Burchett asserts, “Disunity is the single biggest challenge facing the church universal.” He seems to be speculating, since he does not include research figures.¹³⁷ Bevere, who also does not include research findings, believes that the key to overcoming this disunity and finding greater emotional health is through better conflict management. He also believes that the pastor in large part sets the tone on how congregants will treat each other when conflict occurs.¹³⁸

According to K.W Thomas and R.H. Kilmann, leaders have one of 5 distinct conflict styles that they naturally gravitate towards.¹³⁹ However, different situations tend to call for different conflict approaches. Pastors need to realize which conflict style is the one they use the most. They may need to learn a few other approaches to handling conflict and/or surround themselves with other leaders who utilize different conflict

¹³⁵ Elkington, “Adversity in Pastoral Leadership,” 7.

¹³⁶ Jackson, “This Is Not What I Signed Up For,” 3.

¹³⁷ Dave Burchett, *When Bad Christians Happen to Good People: Where We Have Failed Each Other and How to Reverse the Damage* (Colorado Springs, CO.: Waterbrook Press, 2001), 33.

¹³⁸ John Bevere, *The Bait of Satan: Living Free from the Deadly Trap of Offense* (Lake Mary, FL: Charisma House, 2014), 33.

¹³⁹ R.Kilmann, and K. Thomas, “Developing a Forced-Choice Measure of Conflict-Handling Behavior: The Mode Instrument,” *Educational and Psychological Measurement* 37, no. 2 (1977): 309-325.

management styles. These are the five styles as related by conflict management author

J.D. Meier:¹⁴⁰

Accommodating – This is when you cooperate to a high degree, and it may be at your own expense, and actually work against your own goals, objectives, and desired outcomes. This approach is effective when the other party is the expert or has a better solution. It can also be effective for preserving future relations with the other party.

Avoiding – This is when you simply avoid the issue. You are not helping the other party reach their goals, and you are not assertively pursuing your own. This works when the issue is trivial or when you have no chance of winning. It can also be effective when the issue would be very costly. It is also very effective when the atmosphere is emotionally charged, and you need to create some space. Sometimes issues will resolve themselves, but “hope is not a strategy,” and in general, avoidance is not a good long-term strategy.

Collaborating – This is where you partner or pair up with the other party to achieve both of your goals. This is how you break free of the “win-lose” paradigm and seek the “win-win.” This can be effective for complex scenarios where you need to find a novel solution. This can also mean re-framing the challenge to create a bigger space and room for everybody’s ideas. The downside is that it requires a high degree of trust and reaching a consensus can require a lot of time and effort to get everybody on board and to synthesize all the ideas.

Competing – This is the “win-lose” approach. You act in a very assertive way to achieve your goals, without seeking to cooperate with the other party, and it may be at the expense of the other party. This approach may be appropriate for emergencies when time is of the essence, or when you need quick, decisive action, and people are aware of and support the approach.

Compromising – This is the “lose-lose” scenario where neither party really achieves what they want. This requires a moderate level of assertiveness and cooperation. It may be appropriate for scenarios where you need a temporary solution, or where both sides have equally important goals. The trap is to fall into compromising as an easy way out when collaborating would produce a better solution.”

¹⁴⁰ J.D. Meier, “The 5 Levels to Communicating More Effectively,” *Sources of Insight Magazine*, April 13, 2014, accessed August 02, 2019, <http://sourcesofinsight.com/the-5-levels-to-communicating-more-effectively/>.

Bevere urges pastors to learn better conflict management skills. They should never allow the pain that people have inflicted on them to keep them from their calling. This, Bevere adds, may only happen through the grace of God.¹⁴¹

Termination of Employment

One of the major factors in pastoral attrition is the rising rate of forced terminations. Pastoral terminations have been rising across denominations.¹⁴² Every year the number of forced terminations reaches a new high. Researchers London and Wiseman report that pastors working less than fifty hours a week are thirty-five percent more likely to be involuntarily terminated.¹⁴³ Stewart writes,

A pastor is fired or forced out every six minutes in the United States...At least one-fourth have been forced out of one or more congregations, and many more are severely stressed and vulnerable. Forty-five percent of these terminated ministers do not return to pastoral ministry ever again.¹⁴⁴

A churchleadership.com study completely disagrees that termination of pastors is a key problem in attrition, claiming that the vast majority of pastors leaving ministry are doing so of their own volition, due to persistent stress and church conflict.¹⁴⁵ Although stress and conflict do seem to be major contributors to pastoral attrition, the church leadership survey seems to be an outlier. The other studies agree that the rising rate of pastoral terminations is a major problem in pastoral attrition.

¹⁴¹ Bevere, *The Bait of Satan*, 33.

¹⁴² Jackson, "This Is Not What I Signed Up For," 3.

¹⁴³ Elkington, "Adversity in Pastoral Leadership," 15.

¹⁴⁴ Stewart, "Keeping Your Pastor," 11.

¹⁴⁵ Jackson, "This Is Not What I Signed Up For," 4.

Stewart found that most pastoral terminations are preventable and premature.¹⁴⁶ Bardiau-Huys argues that termination should be a rarity and a last resort for congregations, used only after all other options have been exhausted. Before terminating a minister, a congregation should first attempt to better define the pastoral role for their church, with input from the pastor.¹⁴⁷ Secondly, Bardiau-Huys calls on congregations to bring in conflict mediators, perhaps from their denominational leadership, to work through possible solutions other than termination. Thirdly, further training is recommended for pastors in the field, especially in business administration, volunteer recruitment, and finance management.¹⁴⁸

Lack of Boundaries

One study cautions that, for a minister, the exit from a church can feel like a death.¹⁴⁹ Ministry is like no other job on earth. Rather than a vocation, ministry can become a person's whole life. The people of that church become a pastor's extended family, a support system, counselors, and prayer partners. When a minister leaves a church for any reason, they not only lose their source of income, and their security; they also lose their place to attend church, their close friends, and their support system. They lose their entire way of life. The minister's spouse and children grieve as they say goodbye as well. There can be profound grieving at the loss of the good that was, and the loss of a future that now will not be. In a non-ministry career, if a person transitions to a

¹⁴⁶ Stewart, "Keeping Your Pastor," 9.

¹⁴⁷ Bardiau-Huys, "Sustaining Pastoral Ministry," 64.

¹⁴⁸ Bardiau-Huys, "Sustaining Pastoral Ministry," 75.

¹⁴⁹ Abernethy, et al, "The Pastors Empowerment Program," 5.

new job, their family will likely stay in the area, in their own home, with their current friends, in their usual school, with the support of their church family and friends. A pastor loses it all when their church position is gone. Many times the church will bar pastors and staff from attending that church after they resign or are let go, presumably to assure the congregation's loyalty to the new staff. During a pastoral transition, a minister and their family may have to go through all five stages of grief- shock, anger, sadness, bargaining, and finally acceptance.¹⁵⁰

Another study found that “enmeshment” is a major risk factor in pastoral attrition. Without clear boundaries, a pastor and their family suffers “boundary ambiguity” and becomes completely enmeshed in their parishioner's lives and problems.¹⁵¹ There is no life “outside of church.” This can cause pastors to feel that they cannot leave town for vacations or family get-togethers because their parishioners need them too much. On the other hand, pastors tend to uproot and move every few years, possibly due to burnout.¹⁵² Each time the minister moves, they suffer the loss of their entire “world” (enmeshed environment within the church) and must start all over.

Cloud states that the most important boundary of all for the pastor is to prioritize their time with God.¹⁵³ Regular religious disciplines of attending worship services, prayer, and Bible study are not optional. Spiritual boundaries are essential and must be

¹⁵⁰ Abernethy, et al, “The Pastors Empowerment Program,” 4.

¹⁵¹ Toni Ridgaway, “Prayer Statistics: Statistics on Prayer in the U.S.,” 3.

¹⁵² Henry Cloud, and John Sims Townsend. *Boundaries: When to Say Yes, How to Say No to Take Control of Your Life*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2017, 251.

¹⁵³ Cloud and Townsend, *Boundaries*, 249-250.

established and guarded.¹⁵⁴ It is through prayer and the study of Scripture, times of worship, that the pastor is “filled up” to minister.

An article in Christianity Today said,

The amount of time spent in prayer and personal devotions raises questions about the vitality of many pastors’ spiritual lives. While fifty-two percent report spending one to six hours in prayer each week, five percent say they spend no time at all in prayer. Furthermore, while roughly half say they spend two to five hours a week in personal devotions unrelated to teaching preparation, fourteen percent indicate they spend an hour or less in personal devotions each week. We have to question just how effective their ministry can be with numbers such as these.¹⁵⁵

Unmet Expectations

Another major contributing factor to pastoral attrition, found in the Elkington study, was clearly unrealistic expectations of both the young pastors and their congregations.¹⁵⁶ This “role dysphoria”, which happens when talents and role expectations do not line up with the actual duties of the position, can quickly lead to frustration and burnout.¹⁵⁷ There seems to be a direct correlation between pastoral burnout and unmet expectations about the duties and hours spent.¹⁵⁸ Often the pastoral role is ill-defined and varies by denomination, and geographical area.¹⁵⁹ A major mismatch of expectations is what the pastor believes their role is and what their church believes the

¹⁵⁴ Elkington, “Adversity in Pastoral Leadership,” 14.

¹⁵⁵ Ridgaway, “Prayer Statistics,” 3.

¹⁵⁶ Elkington, “Adversity in Pastoral Leadership,” 8.

¹⁵⁷ Scott and Lovell, “The Rural Pastors Initiative,” 71-97.

¹⁵⁸ Stewart, “Keeping Your Pastor,” 119.

¹⁵⁹ Michael Wiese, “Comparative Report on Six Studies of Pastoral Attrition,” (Doctoral Dissertation, Southern University), 2004.

pastor's role is.¹⁶⁰ Every pastor needs the ability to be defined by Christ, not by their “work.”

The second most common listed reason, besides burnout, for pastors to permanently leave ministry is “excessive and unrealistic expectations” of their congregants.¹⁶¹ Protestant congregations tend to treat the church more like a business and to have higher expectations for their pastors.¹⁶² Also, Protestant congregations have much different expectations for the duties of their pastors than the pastors have for their position. This can result in pastors becoming workaholics, quickly burning out trying to please everyone.¹⁶³ Pastors may leave seminary thinking they will spend the majority of their time in prayer, Bible study, sermon preparation, baptisms, funerals, and other “liturgical” duties. The reality is that most pastors spend more than 37 hours a week on administrative duties, including budgets, meetings, and phone calls.¹⁶⁴

According to Stewart's study, pastors that adhered to external criteria for success, such as congregants' expectations, tended to become frustrated and hopeless over time.¹⁶⁵ Ministers may feel that they are “being put on a pedestal,” and that they are not able to keep up with the church's expectations.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶⁰ Bardiau-Huys, “Sustaining Pastoral Ministry,” 64-65.

¹⁶¹ Elkington, “Adversity in Pastoral Leadership,” 7.

¹⁶² Bardiau-Huys, “Sustaining Pastoral Ministry,” 65.

¹⁶³ Stewart, “Keeping Your Pastor,” 11.

¹⁶⁴ Stewart, “Keeping Your Pastor,” 26.

¹⁶⁵ Stewart, “Keeping Your Pastor,” 13.

¹⁶⁶ Ray Carroll, *Fallen Pastor: Finding Restoration in a Broken World* (Folsom, CA: Civitas Press, 2011), 118.

Unrealistic expectations regarding suffering can cause some ministers to drop out of ministry entirely.¹⁶⁷ They may see suffering as a punishment from God or as a consequence for sin. When a pastor encounters great suffering in the ministry, they may believe that they have done something wrong. The truth is that suffering is an important part of the Christian life.¹⁶⁸ Western culture seems to be the most resistant to learning through suffering.¹⁶⁹ Elkington and Stewart agree that a pastor's attitude towards suffering can affect how long they stay in vocational ministry.

Bardiau-Huys concludes that pastors should not expect that a ministry call is a life-long calling. She argues that the callings of Moses and Paul, as well as other characters in Scripture, were meant to be descriptive, not prescriptive. Ministers could be spared a lot of suffering if they did not expect to be in ministry for life. Pastors may feel too much pressure from their church, their denomination, and their own views of Scripture, and this pressure may lead to burnout. Pastors that feel "called of God" to life-long vocational ministry may suffer more pain and guilt because they feel that they have failed God and their congregants. If the pastor adjusts their expectations and plans to minister "for a season," they can prevent unnecessary guilt and suffering.¹⁷⁰

Stewart completely disagrees with Bardiau-Huys. Stewart's study found that pastors who were convinced of a supernatural, life-long call of God were much more likely to stay in ministry for life than their peers who viewed ministry as "filling a

¹⁶⁷ Elkington, "Adversity in Pastoral Leadership," 7.

¹⁶⁸ Dan Herod, *Suffer Well: Walking Victoriously through Your Valleys* (Waupaca, WI, Amazon, 2018), 76.

¹⁶⁹ Wiese, "Comparative Report on Six Studies of Pastoral Attrition," 8.

¹⁷⁰ Bardiau-Huys, "Sustaining Pastoral Ministry," 66.

position” for a season. Stewart recommends emphasizing the uniqueness of the pastoral role, and training pastors to expect and grow from adversity and suffering.¹⁷¹

Insufficient Seminary Training

Of the key reasons that churches give for terminating their pastors, all are areas that pastors are not adequately trained for in seminary.¹⁷² Pastors are usually trained to interpret Scripture, to teach Scripture, and to study the nature of God. Modern congregations are often looking for an administrative leader, who can recruit and organize a large number of volunteers, and manage finances well. The modern pastor is more of a CEO of a small corporation. Bardiau-Huys found that fifty to seventy percent of a pastor’s workweek is spent on administrative duties.¹⁷³ Ninety percent of all forcibly terminated pastors in Stewart’s research were missing an essential skill set.¹⁷⁴ Butler found that pastors performed better and were more effective if they received some business and administrative training.¹⁷⁵

Carol Childress says, “At the five-year point, seminary grads understand that the subjects they were taught in seminary, while valuable for creating sermons, exegeting Scripture and so forth...have not equipped them to deal with leadership and the issues facing pastors.”¹⁷⁶

¹⁷¹ Stewart, “Keeping Your Pastor,” 122.

¹⁷² Stewart, “Keeping Your Pastor,” 28.

¹⁷³ Bardiau-Huys, “Sustaining Pastoral Ministry,” 64.

¹⁷⁴ Stewart, “Keeping Your Pastor,” 29.

¹⁷⁵ D. Martin Butler, and Robert D. Herman, “Effective Ministerial Leadership,” *Journal of Nonprofit Management and Leadership* (1999): 229-239.

¹⁷⁶ Stewart, “Keeping Your Pastor,” 12.

Elkington recommends more training on the seminary level on perseverance, learning through suffering, and positive coping methods.¹⁷⁷ Seminaries must invest time and resources towards more practical training for their students on how to do administrative duties, manage conflicts, and other more modern church leadership duties.¹⁷⁸

Bardiau-Huys concludes, “While the academic level of theological knowledge has been increased, the preparation for the practical aspects of being a pastor have for a long time been insufficient, especially in the areas of self-assessment and peer interaction...These skills are essential for teamwork, for avoiding professional fatigue and burnout. Yet, these skills still have to be introduced into many theological schools.”¹⁷⁹

Elkington and Stewart also agree that seminaries need to reevaluate their curriculum, adding training in the more practical duties of a pastor. This would include coursework on leadership, finance management, recruitment, managing volunteers, conflict management, time management, and delegation.

Family Dissolution

One of the worst casualties of pastoral attrition is the pastor’s family.¹⁸⁰ Pastors rank third for divorces among professionals. When asked why they are leaving the ministry, one-third of ministers in Ridgaway’s study cited “family reasons.” This family stress is cyclical, in that ministerial stress exacerbates family stress, which in turn

¹⁷⁷ Elkington, “Adversity in Pastoral Leadership,” 11.

¹⁷⁸ Elkington, “Adversity in Pastoral Leadership,” 12.

¹⁷⁹ Bardiau-Huys, “Sustaining Pastoral Ministry,” 66.

¹⁸⁰ Ridgaway, “Silent Suffering: Pastors and Depression,” 13.

contributes to worsening loneliness and burnout.¹⁸¹ The pastor/spouse divorce rate is even higher when the couple is trying to minister through personal or community tragedy, such as natural disasters, criminal behavior, prolonged personal illness, or acts of violence. Pastor's spouses report feeling more loneliness and having fewer spiritual resources than the clergy person had.¹⁸²

Mental or Physical Health Issues

Ninety percent of pastors in Lee's national study reported chronic fatigue. The same study found that fifty percent of pastors are overweight and twenty-three percent are obese. The majority say that they have no time to eat well, exercise, or sleep adequately. The human body is not designed to stay in this state of high stress for a long time. Eventually, high levels of stress do terrible damage to a pastor's heart, arteries, stomach, and more.¹⁸³

The leader without strong boundaries will not be as effective because there will not be enough mental, emotional, or physical resources left to give to anyone else.¹⁸⁴ Miner's study found that seventy-five percent of pastors report high stress and depression.¹⁸⁵ One-third report daily frustration and fatigue at even the thought of going

¹⁸¹ Cameron Lee, "Dispositional Resiliency and Adjustment in Protestant Pastors: A Pilot Study," *Pastoral Psychology* 59, no. 5 (2010): 631-645.

¹⁸² Scott and Lovell, "The Rural Pastors Initiative," 71-97.

¹⁸³ Archibald D. Hart, *Adrenaline and Stress* (Nashville, TN: W Publishing Group, 2003), 23.

¹⁸⁴ Cloud and Townsend, *Boundaries*, 110.

¹⁸⁵ Maureen H. Miner, "Changes in Burnout over the First 12 Months in Ministry: Links with Stress and Orientation to Ministry," *Mental Health, Religion and Culture* 10, no. 1 (2007): 9-16.

into the church office.¹⁸⁶ Two-fifths of pastors in one survey reported being totally drained by their duties.¹⁸⁷

Depression can become a major problem for pastors. “The likelihood is that one out of every four pastors is depressed,” said Matthew Stanford.¹⁸⁸ Ridgeway found that anxiety and depression have gone up markedly in the last five years.¹⁸⁹ Nearly two out of three depressed people do not seek treatment, according to studies by the Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance.¹⁹⁰ Counselors say even fewer depressed ministers get treated because of career fears, social stigma, and spiritual taboo. “Clergy do not talk about it because it violates their understanding of their faith,” said Stanford. “They believe they are not supposed to have those kinds of thoughts.” Stanford, a neuroscientist who studies how the Christian community deals with mental illness, said,

Depression in Christian culture carries ‘a double stigmatization.’ Society still places a stigma on mental illness, but Christians make it worse, by ‘over spiritualizing’ depression and other disorders—dismissing them as a lack of faith or a sign of weakness.¹⁹¹

Another mental health risk for pastors is a condition called “Secondary Post Traumatic Stress Disorder.”¹⁹² This happens when a pastor experiences increased anxiety and sadness, caused by the trauma and stress of walking through horrific circumstances

¹⁸⁶ Miner, “Changes in Burnout,” 10.

¹⁸⁷ Christopher J. Adams, et al, “Clergy Burnout: A Comparison Study with Other Helping Professions,” *Pastoral Psychology* 66, no. 2 (2016): 147-75.

¹⁸⁸ Ridgeway, “Silent Suffering: Pastors and Depression,” 15.

¹⁸⁹ Ridgeway, “Silent Suffering: Pastors and Depression,” 22.

¹⁹⁰ Haffner, “Substance Addiction,” 7.

¹⁹¹ Ridgeway, “Silent Suffering: Pastors and Depression,” 14.

¹⁹² Peter Scazzero, and Warren Bird, *The Emotionally Healthy Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2015), 65.

with others.¹⁹³ Pastors often help parishioners learn to cope with divorces, child abuse, crimes, tragedies, natural disasters, and more. An older minister that the researcher interviewed for this paper related his experience of counseling a congregant who is a Vietnam War veteran. The congregant relived episodes of horrific violence and torture. The veteran was struggling with tremendous guilt knowing how many people he had killed. When the pastor finally got home after one of these counseling sessions, he was at times so disturbed that he was silent at dinner, sick to his stomach, and began having nightmares.

Benner warns pastors about the dangers of pastors counseling parishioners.¹⁹⁴ Professional counselors are careful to “compartmentalize” and maintain solid boundaries between counseling and their own emotions. The thought is to empathize with the pain of others, to listen, and to reflect what you are hearing, without “owning” the other person’s pain and dark experiences. This is why professional counselors are not to have any type of personal relationship with a client outside of the counseling relationship. Professional counselors do not eat dinner or go shopping with clients. This boundary line gets blurred in pastoral counseling.¹⁹⁵ Pastor and parishioner may be “friends” outside of church. The pastor and those they counsel will have to interact at church services. This adds a whole new challenge to pastoral counseling, underscoring the need for boundaries.¹⁹⁶

¹⁹³ Hart, *Adrenaline and Stress*, 114.

¹⁹⁴ David G. Benner, *Strategic Pastoral Counseling: A Short-term Structured Model* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2004), 22.

¹⁹⁵ Benner, “Strategic Pastoral Counseling,” 22.

¹⁹⁶ Hardie and Lazenby, *The Emotionally Healthy Leader*, 23.

Moral Failure

One big reason that pastors may leave ministry, voluntarily or involuntarily, is if the pastor has a major moral failure, including adultery, pornography, embezzling church funds, alcoholism, etc.¹⁹⁷ Whether or not a pastor returns to vocational ministry depends quite a bit on their denomination's pastoral restoration policy, and the individual pastor's attitude toward the process of restoration.

Undoubtedly, pastoral failure has plagued the church from the beginning. However, the data does seem to show a steady breakdown of conduct among pastors in the modern age. A 1988 poll by Leadership Magazine revealed that 23 percent of pastors admitted that after entering ministry they had done something sexually inappropriate with someone who was not their spouse.¹⁹⁸ Almost 12 percent of pastors reported having committed adultery. According to the Fuller Institute of Church Growth, "Thirty-seven percent of ministers have been involved in inappropriate behavior with someone who works in the church."¹⁹⁹ The increase in pastoral moral failure seems to be affecting small and large churches across the United States regardless of denomination or affiliation.²⁰⁰

Armstrong makes the case that sexual sin is more destructive to a pastor and congregation than just about any other sin. It is so destructive because the physical sex act is merely the culmination of many other sins that have spiraled out of control.²⁰¹ For

¹⁹⁷ Harbaugh and Rogers, "Pastoral Burnout: A View from the Seminary," 58

¹⁹⁸ John H. Armstrong, *Can a Fallen Pastor Be Restored?* (Moody Publishing: Chicago, IL, 1995), 19.

¹⁹⁹ Harry W. Schaumburg, *False Intimacy* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 1992), 180.

²⁰⁰ Armstrong, *Can a Fallen Pastor Be Restored?* 20.

²⁰¹ Armstrong, *Can a Fallen Pastor Be Restored?* 147-150.

example, a pastor typically does not confess after one adulterous sexual encounter. Usually, there are months of lying, sneaking around and marital neglect before the minister's sin finds them out. This is why trust can be irrevocably broken with that particular congregation or community. It can be difficult or impossible to trust what a pastor is saying, or to submit to their authority, when they have been lying constantly for months or perhaps years.²⁰²

Additionally, after a pastor has a sexual fall, the church may rightly question their ability to lead, when that person has shown terrible personal judgment. The overwhelming majority of pastors who have been caught having an affair, admit that they secretly had a poor marriage and poor devotional life for some time before the affair.²⁰³

Author Ray Carroll suggests that when a minister has an affair, usually this new lover is not their first "mistress."²⁰⁴ The author is referring to a pastor's tendency toward workaholicism, making the church work itself their "first mistress." When the pastor spends upwards of eighty hours a week "doing the Lord's work," gone weeknights, weekends, and most holidays, the marriage begins to suffer from neglect.²⁰⁵ The spouse feels like a single parent. Nearly all of the minister's emotional energy is going into the church, not their family. The pastor is then wide open and vulnerable for a moral failure.²⁰⁶

²⁰² Carroll, *Fallen Pastor*, 42.

²⁰³ Carroll, *Fallen Pastor*, 83.

²⁰⁴ Carroll, *Fallen Pastor*, 168.

²⁰⁵ Robert Firestone and Joyce Catlett, *Fear of Intimacy*, (American Psychological Association: Washington, D.C., 2013), chap. 2, Kindle.

²⁰⁶ Carroll, *Fallen Pastor*, 26.

Addiction

Between 17 percent and 30 percent of pastors admit to engaging in dangerous coping methods such as alcohol or other “substances” to manage ministry stress.²⁰⁷ The DSM5 (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Volume 5) defines substance dependency as: “Addiction, or dependence, is present in an individual who demonstrates any combination of three or more of the following symptoms (paraphrased for simplicity), occurring at any time in the same 12-month period:

- Preoccupation with use of the chemical between periods of use.
- Using more of the chemical than had been anticipated.
- The development of tolerance to the chemical in question.
- A characteristic withdrawal syndrome from the chemical.
- Use of the chemical to avoid or control withdrawal symptoms.
- Repeated efforts to cut back or stop the drug use.
- Intoxication at inappropriate times (such as work), or when withdrawal interferes with daily functioning (such as when a hangover makes a person too sick to go to work).
- A reduction in social, occupational, or recreational activities in favor of further substance use.
- Continued substance use despite the individual having suffered social, emotional, or physical problems related to drug use.²⁰⁸

In other words, addiction is a habit or practice that you become so completely dependent on, that it begins to interfere with your everyday life, and you have a decreased ability to function without it.²⁰⁹ What comes to mind when thinking of the stereotypical “addict” is an alcoholic or someone dependent on an illegal drug. Alternatively, there are other negative coping methods for the stress of ministry, such as social withdrawal, overeating, viewing pornography, gambling, shopping, sex, television,

²⁰⁷ Harbaugh and Rogers, “Pastoral Burnout: A View from the Seminary,” 88

²⁰⁸ American Psychiatric Association, *Desk Reference to the Diagnostic Criteria from DSM-5 (R)* (Arlington, TX: American Psychiatric Association Publishing, 2013), 334.

²⁰⁹ Gerald G. May, *Addiction and Grace: Love and Spirituality in the Healing of Addictions* (San Francisco, CA: Harperone, 2006), 119.

or prescription drug abuse.²¹⁰ Of course, these coping methods can have devastating consequences for the pastor, their family, and the church.

Consumerism and Post-Modernity

In a modern church, congregants may be expecting the church and the pastor to serve them, instead of asking themselves how they should be serving Christ, the church, and others. This reflects a growing culture of consumerism, secularism, and post-modernity. A pastor should not assume respect, when respect for clergy is waning.²¹¹

Author Valeri, an executive with AWANA International and author of the book *Resilient*, argues that what the church is really facing is a clash of worldviews.²¹² The worldview of Christians is that all people are sinners in need of a Savior. People of faith believe that God has revealed Himself through the Bible. The worldview of our modern age is that all humans are basically good (humanism) and that all humans if given the right education and the right circumstances, will always make a good choice. The church's message of repentance, forgiveness, interdependence, and obedience is in complete contrast to our society's values of individualism, materialism, and innate goodness. It is counter-cultural to willingly submit to authority, work as a team and operate in accountability. This involves speaking the truth in love. It is impossible to truly serve others effectively if you do not love them.²¹³

²¹⁰ May, *Addiction and Grace*, 122.

²¹¹ Stewart, "Keeping Your Pastor," 11.

²¹² Valerie Bell, Chris Marchand, Matt Markins, and Mike Handler, *Resilient: Child Discipleship and the Fearless Future of the Church* (Marceline, MO: Walworth Publishing, 2018), 30-35.

²¹³ Bell et. al., *Resilient*, 112.

Culturally, pastors are not viewed with the same respect as they once were. Pastors will not be given honor solely based on their title.²¹⁴ Pastors must understand that western culture is now more “post-Christian.”²¹⁵ Younger generations of Americans may be ignorant of Christian history and doctrine, or even hostile towards it. One pastor is anonymously quoted in Elkington’s research saying, “The ruling paradigm for ministry simply does not work in a chaotic and post-Christian world where most of your enemies are sitting in the pew.”²¹⁶

Interventions in Pastoral Attrition

Conflict Mediation

Pastors in Bardiau-Huys’ survey lamented having no one to talk with or to mediate in high-stress conflict situations. They wished they had a better relationship with and more support from their District leadership.²¹⁷ Stewart’s research and Elkington’s research agree that pastors are longing for better conflict mediation from their district supervisors. This could include working to solve conflict between church members or factions or between the board and the pastor, or the pastor and congregation members.²¹⁸

Elkington insists that denominations are relying too much on “on the job training” to teach new pastors how to handle conflict.²¹⁹ Brand new seminary graduates are immediately thrown into intense conflicts without adequate training or peer support.

²¹⁴ Stewart, “Keeping Your Pastor,” 11.

²¹⁵ Bell et al., *Resilient*, 9.

²¹⁶ Elkington, “Adversity in Pastoral Leadership,” 7.

²¹⁷ Bardiau-Huys, “Sustaining Pastoral Ministry,” 64.

²¹⁸ Meek, et al, “Maintaining Personal Resiliency,” 337.

²¹⁹ Elkington, “Adversity in Pastoral Leadership,” 14.

Many Christian congregations have no idea how to handle conflict in a Biblical manner. Pastors may need to teach and model Biblical conflict resolution. Aiken agrees that the denominational leadership must do a better job training its leaders to handle conflict. He says, “A church is far more than the women and men who serve as pastors. These individuals need a committed, well-educated, trained and supported leadership for the church and its members to grow.”²²⁰

Accountability

There are steps that churches and pastors can take to try to prevent a church scandal and to keep the pastor’s reputation safer from false accusations. Accountability is important for every pastor, whether or not they have had a prior moral failure.²²¹ However, accountability is essential if the pastor is being restored after a failure. It is a major red flag if a pastor resists all attempts from others in leadership to hold them accountable for past or future actions.²²²

Pastors should be accountable to their district and national leadership and the board of their church. Some churches have policies that forbid any two individuals from being alone together on church property or church-sanctioned trips. Other churches require at least two signers, preferably three, whenever church money is being spent. Keeping careful records, including receipts, is crucial. A church may require a pastor to

²²⁰ Kevin M. Aiken, “Investigating Restorative Processes for Pastors of Urban Churches in the Pennsylvania Eastern Keystone Baptist Association,” (Doctoral Diss., Capital Seminary and Graduate School, Greenbelt, MA 2017), 277, ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Global.

²²¹ James Dobson, *Pastoral Restoration Workbook*, Colorado Springs, CO: Focus on the Family, (2007 and 2019 editions), media.focusonthefamily.com/pastoral/pdf/PAS_PastoralRestoration.pdf.

²²² Armstrong, *Can a Fallen Pastor Be Restored?* 112.

meet with an “accountability partner” regularly. Regardless of what methods the church and denomination use, accountability protects the church and the pastor.²²³

Systemic Model of Ministry

Bardiau-Huys suggests a complete change in the way churches approach the pastoral role in western culture.²²⁴ Currently, too many pastors and churches believe that the church hires the pastor to “do it all,” to be the “professional Christian.” Pastors may last longer in ministry if there is a paradigm shift to the pastor training up the congregation to do the work of the ministry.²²⁵ The pastor must refocus their energy on working through ministry teams. Letting go of the need to control, and mentoring others to minister is difficult for some leaders.

In Scripture, Jesus preached to crowds of thousands. However, Jesus spent most of His time pouring into the team of three, then the team of twelve, and finally the team of seventy. In fact, it can be argued that the bulk of a minister’s time should be spent in raising new leaders to take on the work of the ministry. “Burnout” is often the result of poor team building and lack of delegation.

Friedman, in the book *Generation to Generation*, explores and recommends comparing the church congregation to a family.²²⁶ Psychologists have known for years that it is much less effective to treat one person’s symptoms in isolation True lasting

²²³ Kevin Konklin, “Pastors and Accountability,” Focus on the Family, November 2020, accessed December 12, 2020, <https://www.focusonthefamily.com/church/the-pastor-and-accountability/>.

²²⁴ Bardiau-Huys, “Sustaining Pastoral Ministry,” 68.

²²⁵ Meek, et al, “Maintaining Personal Resiliency,” 4.

²²⁶ Edwin H. Friedman, *Generation to Generation: Family Process in Church and Synagogue* (New York: Guilford Press, 2011), 44.

change comes from examining and engaging with the patient's "system."²²⁷ This is called "systems theory." Likewise, to keep pastors in ministry over the long haul, it is not nearly as effective to just work with the pastor to change their behavior. What is more effective is to look at that pastor's local church system. It may take time and work to discover and treat the maladaptive behaviors that are causing unhealth in the pastor. Usually the members of an unhealthy system cannot see the problems within that system, or their role in the unhealth, without outside help.²²⁸

Steinke writes, "Straight line thinking is appropriate for the world of mechanics and physical objects. But we often mistake what happens in the world of objects, for what happens in the world of living things."²²⁹ He explains that any community of humans, including church congregations, form a system that will interact and influence each other in countless ways. Since humans repeat behaviors habitually and resist change, church leadership must understand the system in order to effect lasting changes.²³⁰

Strong Boundaries and Self-Care

Pastors who have managed to stay effective in ministry long-term, were only able to do so because they developed effective coping methods for managing stress and solid, healthy boundaries.²³¹ Negative coping methods could include alcohol abuse,

²²⁷ Friedman, *Generation to Generation*, 222.

²²⁸ Peter L. Steinke, *How Your Church Family Works: Understanding Congregations as Emotional Systems* (Herndon, VA.: Alban Institute, 2006), 17.

²²⁹ Steinke, *How Your Church Family Works*, 18.

²³⁰ Steinke, *How Your Church Family Works*, 67.

²³¹ Hardie and Lazenby, *The Emotionally Healthy Leader*, 23.

pornography, drugs, workaholism, food addiction, and more.²³² Positive coping methods could include exercise (when not taken to extremes), keeping a regular day off, taking vacations, practicing a Sabbath, journaling, gardening, and more. Pastors need to prioritize their own health. Taking care of the self is not selfish.²³³ It is good stewardship of the resources God has given.

Ministers need a strong commitment to physical and mental health, exercise, healthy eating, seeing the doctor regularly, sleeping, and taking vacations.²³⁴ Self-care needs to become a habit. Bardiau recommends taking sabbaticals, going to counseling and practicing strategies to reflect and recover.²³⁵

The relentless pace of ministry also makes it difficult to maintain relationships outside the church body.²³⁶ It is essential to make time to nurture these “outside your current ministry” friendships. These “safe people” should be more mature spiritually and be able to keep confidences. The minister needs these people to encourage when it is needed most, but also to tell the truth in love when the minister may not want to hear it. These relationships are especially valuable when the minister is navigating church conflict or a ministry transition.²³⁷ Boyles reflected on his own tough ministry transition, “Thankfully, I had friendships with other church leaders in the community. These

²³² May, *Addiction and Grace*, 255.

²³³ Cloud and Townsend, *Boundaries*, 244.

²³⁴ Cloud and Townsend, *Boundaries*, 234.

²³⁵ Bardiau-Huys, “Sustaining Pastoral Ministry,” 76.

²³⁶ Scazzero and Bird, *The Emotionally Healthy Church*, 212.

²³⁷ Hardie and Lazenby, *The Emotionally Healthy Leader*, 201.

relationships outside my congregation were vital to my personal and spiritual growth—and they gave me a soft place to land when I needed counsel.

I’m convinced that many ministers who left out of frustration and disappointment could have been salvaged if the jaded, burned-out leader had spent time with a solid, faithful, experienced leader from another congregation.”²³⁸

Outcomes in Interventions in Pastoral Attrition

Wholistic District Interventions

Preventative clergy support programs seem to have a lot more success than programs that try to restore a fallen pastor. Some Assembly of God Districts have launched pastoral peer programs, free counseling for pastors, and conflict mediation. These programs are new, but overall are seeing a lot of success.

One of the earliest AG Districts to implement a strategic program to create healthier pastors and churches was the Washington District. Don Detrick, who has been with the program since its inception had this to say about the outcomes they are seeing: “Well, we have had great results, I believe. Out of 1,440 pastors, we only have had to intervene in a disciplinary manner for one of our pastors in 0.02 percent of cases. Our church conflict cases and church splits have gone way down. By focusing on the emotional and mental health of our district’s pastors, their families, and our church members, we have found a key to lasting pastoral ministries and healthy churches.

²³⁸ Brian Bowles, “Why Church Leaders Need Ministry Friends Outside Their Congregation,” Lifeway Research, May 21, 2019, accessed July 13, 2021, <https://lifewayresearch.com/2019/03/21/why-church-leaders-need-ministry-friends-outside-their-congregation>.

It is so much easier and wiser to intervene early and cultivate health than to step in later, after so much damage has already been done. Corporations have already learned this lesson. Interpersonal relations, conflict management, the ability to work as a team- all of this is emotional health-related. Emotional health is every bit as important as physical, spiritual, and mental health.”

Restoration of Fallen Pastors

Programs to restore fallen ministers have not reported great success.²³⁹ The researcher was surprised to find multiple position papers, programs, and methods for addressing the problem of fallen pastors. A church may opt to quickly restore a fallen pastor to their position, to never restore a fallen pastor to a ministry position, or to advocate a structured program to rehabilitate the pastor, without a guarantee of a future ministry position. Each has its proponents and detractors.

Those that advocate for a program of rapid renewal believe in forgiveness of the pastor’s sin, and a continuation of, or quick return to, the leadership position. The argument is usually, “If they do not get back to work quickly they may not be restored at all.”²⁴⁰ Chuck Smith, the pastor of the mega-church Calvary Chapel, defended his decision to hire David Hocking, weeks after Hocking was fired for having a moral failure. “This man is a gifted Bible teacher, and if he doesn’t resume his teaching, I’m afraid he’ll be literally and totally destroyed.”²⁴¹ Hantzer laments, “I know of fallen leaders who long to return to the kind of spiritual ministry they previously enjoyed, but no evangelical

²³⁹ Carroll, *Fallen Pastor*, 13.

²⁴⁰ Armstrong, *Can a Fallen Pastor Be Restored?* 322.

²⁴¹ Armstrong, *Can a Fallen Pastor Be Restored?* 312.

congregations will accept them. Their gifts of leadership are permanently lost to the church.”²⁴²The emphasis of the rapid restoration approach is getting the pastor back to work as fast as possible.

Another argument given for keeping the pastor in their leadership position after a fall is that if a pastor has sinned greatly, that pastor will be more compassionate toward and more effective at ministering to broken human beings. This has been called the “wounded healer” view of ministry.²⁴³ It is thought that the fallen pastor will be more appealing to non-Christians and struggling Christians because the fallen pastor knows how struggling people feel.

Hantzer argues that pastors who have had a moral failure and are restored are better pastors overall. He states, “God sometimes permits us to fall into sin for our own growth and sanctification and ministry...I submit that he (David) was a much better candidate after Bathsheba, as was Peter after the agonizing over his denials of Christ. People who have failed have often received an inoculation that gives a future immunity.” Hantzer goes on to say, “With true remorse the guilty person will have learned from his fall and be the stronger for it.”²⁴⁴ He argues that David’s sexual failure was worse than most because David also murdered his lover’s husband. Still, God forgave and restored David. Peter betrayed and denied Christ. Yet, Christ forgave Peter and immediately restored Peter to a leadership position (John 21).

²⁴² Kenneth Hantzer, “The Road to Restoration,” *Christianity Today*, November 20, 1987, 5.

²⁴³ Henri J. M. Nouwen, *The Wounded Healer* (New York, NY, Doubleday, 1979), 232.

²⁴⁴ Hantzer, “The Road to Restoration,” 11.

Those who are opposed to the quick recovery approach, such as Lenski, point out that David was not a pastor, but instead was a king, the political head of a nation.²⁴⁵ However, this is a hard position to defend since it seems that David was in many ways a spiritual leader of the nation as well, “a man after God’s own heart,” who wrote most of the Psalms. (1 Sam. 15:23) God worked through David even after David’s massive failure, to write part of God’s inspired Word.²⁴⁶

Immediate continuation of leadership does not allow time to do the inner work of discovering why the pastor fell in the first place. If the real cause of the failure is not dealt with, there is a high chance of reoccurrence.²⁴⁷ Wilson, although he is ultimately in favor of pastoral restoration after a fall, points out that quickly moving past a pastor’s moral failure minimizes both the seriousness of the failure and the terrible pain that the minister caused to themselves, their marriage and family, and the church.²⁴⁸

The “one and done” approach is the exact opposite of “rapid renewal.” The focus is on removing the fallen pastor from ministry immediately, and then quietly getting the pastor and their family out of the public eye. There is no possibility of restoration to pastoral ministry. At times, there is an offer of counseling for the pastor and their family. A best-case scenario includes paid training for the pastor on a brand new career since most pastors do not have viable skills outside of ministry to support their families. There may also be a possibility for a fallen pastor to take a position at a church, but only in a

²⁴⁵ R.C.H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of 1st and 2nd Corinthians* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Press, 1937), 267-68.

²⁴⁶ Carroll, *Fallen Pastor*, 27.

²⁴⁷ McIntosh and Rima, *Overcoming the Dark Side of Leadership*, 222.

²⁴⁸ Earl Wilson, et al, *Restoring the Fallen : A Team Approach to Caring, Confronting & Reconciling* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1997), 25-27.

non-lead pastor role, such as the business administrator. Armstrong argues for permanent disqualification of fallen pastors from ministry because the fallen pastor can never again be “without blame,” or “beyond approach,” which are requirements in Scripture for being a leader in the church (1 Tim. 3:10).²⁴⁹ Armstrong interprets verses such as Galatians 6:1 as referring to restoring the errant pastor to God and their family, not to a position of leadership. The thought is that forgiveness is not the same as reinstatement to ministry. He further avers, “The church would be much stronger without its fallen leaders back in positions of authority.” Charles Swindoll agrees with Armstrong, concluding that sexual sin has unique consequences, including permanent scarring of the fallen pastor’s personality.²⁵⁰ Swindoll also rejects the thought of pastors being restored to ministry after a fall because “It is a matter of the (former pastor’s) character lacking the substance which is required for that office.”²⁵¹ MacArthur concurs saying, “Where did we get the idea that a year’s leave of absence can restore integrity to a man who has squandered his reputation and destroyed the people’s trust? Not from the Bible!...The ability to lead by example is gone forever.”²⁵²

Opponents to the “One and Done” view, such as Tim LaHaye, point out that there is not a precedent in Scripture of someone who was truly repentant of sin, but who could not be restored to leadership.²⁵³ There are many examples in Scripture of leaders who

²⁴⁹ Armstrong, *Can a Fallen Pastor Be Restored?* 132.

²⁵⁰ Armstrong, *Can a Fallen Pastor Be Restored?* 133.

²⁵¹ Charles Swindoll, Donald Njaa, and Eugene Peterson, “How Pure Must a Pastor Be?” *Leadership Magazine*, (April 1988) 4.

²⁵² Armstrong, *Can a Fallen Pastor Be Restored?* 134.

²⁵³ Timothy LaHaye, *If Ministers Fall, Can They Be Restored?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1990), 144.

sinned and were forgiven and restored to leadership. LaHaye concludes, “If only perfect vessels or those whose entire ministries are ‘above reproach’ were allowed to continue preaching, there wouldn’t be enough qualified ministers to fill all the churches in one state-much less the fifty states and the rest of the world.”²⁵⁴ LaHaye appears to be speculating in that statement. Carroll agrees saying, “The grace of the gospel that churches preach applies to all human beings, including pastors. Grace that does not apply to pastors is not grace at all.”²⁵⁵ Wilson makes the case that the Greek word for “restore” that Paul uses in Galatians 6:1 is *katarizo*, which means to “make whole again.” The connotation is of a broken arm being repaired to full use.²⁵⁶ He argues that a broken arm is not really restored until it is being used like it was before.

Perhaps between the methods of “one and done” and “rapid restoration” would be a program of supervised incremental restoration. The National Association of Evangelicals attests that 80 percent of evangelical churches in the United States adhere to some form of belief in a regimented pastoral restoration program.²⁵⁷ Armstrong describes this “consensus” view of restoration as “The minister should lose credentials immediately, and step down from their ministry position. Then the denomination begins the restoration process to decide when or if that pastor can be restored to ministry.”²⁵⁸

²⁵⁴ LaHaye, *If Ministers Fall*, 145.

²⁵⁵ Ray Carroll, *Fallen Pastor*, 23.

²⁵⁶ Wilson, et al, *Restoring the Fallen*, 164.

²⁵⁷ Wilson, et al, *Restoring the Fallen*, 44.

²⁵⁸ Armstrong, *Can a Fallen Pastor Be Restored?* 44.

This approach does include the hope of eventual reinstatement to position. The plan is for discipline to be done in love. The overall goal is restoring the person, not the position.²⁵⁹

Earl Wilson is adamant that the most effective program of pastoral restoration is a regimented, long-term team approach. He suggests that this team include a member of the elder board, a psychologist, perhaps a marriage counselor, and a representative of the denomination.²⁶⁰ The pastoral restoration team should meet with the fallen leader once a week for the first year and then once a month during the second year. Then the team either approves the minister for reinstatement to position or declares that the minister needs more time with the restoration team.²⁶¹ Dobson also advocates for a clearly outlined, team approach to pastoral restoration. Dobson adds, “Restoration in position, especially in the same church should never be guaranteed.”²⁶²

For a regimented plan of pastoral restoration to be effective, there must be submission and true repentance on the part of the fallen pastor. Martin Luther famously said, “The only thing louder than a man’s sin should be the sound of his true repentance.”²⁶³ In reality, it seems not many make it to full restoration.²⁶⁴ If the pastor is completely unrepentant, the church should still show love, offer counseling and walk

²⁵⁹ Armstrong, *Can a Fallen Pastor Be Restored?* 51.

²⁶⁰ Wilson, et al, *Restoring the Fallen*, 38-39.

²⁶¹ Wilson, et al, *Restoring the Fallen*, 168.

²⁶² Dobson, *Pastoral Restoration Workbook*, 7.

²⁶³ Armstrong, *Can a Fallen Pastor Be Restored?* 14.

²⁶⁴ Dobson, *Pastoral Restoration Workbook*, 7.

alongside the pastor and their family until the pastor shows signs of being ready for restoration.²⁶⁵

Another roadblock to restoration is if the fallen pastor is still refusing to accept blame, offering excuses, and blaming others. Minimizing the sin and living in denial are major roadblocks to healing. Pastors who are ready for restoration are not keeping secrets, being dishonest, or trying to rush through any part of the restoration process.²⁶⁶

The AG has a standard procedure for fallen pastors, which follows the regimented team approach. In their process, the pastor is immediately removed from their ministry position. Then the pastor must submit to two years (minimum) of counseling and supervision by the AG governing bodies. In this restoration process, return to vocational ministry is not guaranteed, but rather is considered after the pastor completes two years of the program.

²⁶⁵ Wilson, et al, *Restoring the Fallen*, 57.

²⁶⁶ Wilson, et al, *Restoring the Fallen*, 61.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESEARCH METHODOLOGIES

Review of Project Research

This began as a purely qualitative case study project, and the researcher ended up using mixed methods. According to Creswell, qualitative research can be described as, “The collection of data in a natural setting sensitive to the people and places under study, and data analysis that is both inductive and deductive and establishes patterns or themes.”²⁶⁷ The researcher used qualitative research to collect data about pastoral attrition. This data was then used to establish patterns or themes in pastoral attrition.

Quantitative research is defined as “A research strategy that focuses on quantifying the collection and analysis of data. It is formed from a deductive approach where emphasis is placed on the testing of theory, shaped by empiricist and positivist philosophies.”²⁶⁸ The researcher did not plan on utilizing any quantitative research. However, when the researcher began to chart how many of the 2000 NCU pastoral graduates were still in ministry today, it soon became apparent that quantitative research tools would be needed. Also, some of the numerical data that the researcher obtained from the AG district and national offices necessitated the use of quantitative research.

²⁶⁷ John Creswell, *Research Design* 2nd ed. (Los Angeles: Sage Publications, 2009), 44.

²⁶⁸ Alan Bryman, *Social Research Methods*, 4th ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 313.

Grounded theory research was the main model employed. Corbin and Strauss point out that grounded research is characterized by movement. Grounded theory moves beyond a description to development of a “unified theoretical explanation.”²⁶⁹ According to Creswell and Poth, “Grounded research is a qualitative research design in which the inquirer generates a general explanation (a theory) of a process, an action, or an interaction shaped by the views of a large number of participants.”²⁷⁰ Therefore, the researcher’s goal was to generate a theory of pastoral attrition based on surveys and interviews with a large number of pastors.

Grounded theory typically identifies a smaller sample to study within a larger population. The larger and smaller groups should have a “common thread” such as a shared experience, shared background or shared vocation.²⁷¹ The researcher chose “More recent Bible college graduates” as the broader group. The researcher studied a smaller sample of this population, namely the more recent graduates from the Assemblies of God’s NCU in Minneapolis, Minnesota. The researcher used the data collected through surveys, personal interviews, and literature review to propose a substantive-level theory on the causes of pastoral attrition.

²⁶⁹ J. Corbin and A. Strauss, *Basics of Qualitative Research: Techniques and Procedures, Canons, and Evaluative Criteria: Qualitative Sociology* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2007), 107.

²⁷⁰ Creswell, “Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design,” 82.

²⁷¹ Creswell, “Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design,” 84.

Research Methods

Primary data included personal interviews with experts in the area of pastoral attrition, and surveys conducted through email and mail to recent Bible college graduates.

The researcher developed and then sent out two surveys through email and social media to gather data from recent Bible graduates. The researcher then established interview questions and used those questions in personal interviews with pastoral attrition experts.

The researcher looked for common pastoral risk factors found through many resources, including interviews, the Bible, historical sources, scholarly studies and surveys. Acceptable data had to be common to more than one source. For example, if one pastor stated that they left ministry because of needing to care for an ailing, elderly parent, but that pastor's scenario was not repeated in any of the other surveys or interviews or studies, then that pastor's reason for leaving the ministry was not included as a key risk factor. If several pastors indicated that they left vocational ministry due to overwhelming student debt, then that risk factor was investigated further to see if student debt was a key risk factor in pastoral attrition. The last step was to make recommendations based on research for addressing risk factors and pastoral attrition.

The researcher looked at examples of excellent interview guides and scholarly surveys. The researcher studied standards for quality surveys that would collect relevant information. Based on these findings, the researcher designed interview and survey questions. The goal was to collect honest and relevant information. These guides and

surveys needed to be brief enough to encourage participation, but long enough to obtain the needed information. Each question had to clearly correspond to a goal of the study.

The researcher followed up by phone and email to get the completed surveys returned. Acceptable interview and survey data was at seventy percent completed and legible.

Qualitative Research

Surveys 1 and 2

The researcher found scholarly examples of surveys and then worked with Bethel's research instrument coordinator to create a questionnaire. The goal was to obtain honest and relevant data pertaining to pastoral attrition. This survey was handed out at some of our AG local pastoral meetings and trainings. The researcher collected 23 completed surveys in this manner. Pastors were given time to complete the survey, and it was immediately collected before they left the meeting. The survey was also emailed out to pastors who graduated in the research time frame. The researcher received 21 completed email surveys. The total number of completed surveys was 44.

A second survey was designed and sent out over social media. Two hundred and thirty eight pastors and church leaders responded to that survey. The respondents were from 11 different states in the United States, as well as several from Canada, Botswana, Great Britain, South Africa, Thailand and Spain. The questions in this survey were regarding the pastor or leader's perception of conflict in the church, their connectedness or relationships within the congregation, and their perception of the emotional health of their church.

The Interviews

The researcher located the potential interviewees and carried out one on one interviews. The first three interviewees were pastoral majors in the researcher's graduating class at NCU, Minneapolis, MN, Class of 2000. The fourth interview was with a national expert in pastoral moral failure and restoration, with over 20 years of experience. The fifth interview was with an expert in church and pastoral crisis mitigation. The sixth interview was with a pastoral restoration counselor that specializes in substance and sexual addiction. The seventh, eighth and ninth interviews were with NCU professors who served in the pastoral department during the target research timeframe of 1996-2006.

The researcher preferred to carry out these interviews in person when possible. However, several were done over the phone due to distance, time and travel constraints. The researcher sent the interviewee some of the questions about one week before the interview, so the interviewee had time to reflect on them before answering. This was balanced out with a few spontaneous questions, depending on where the conversation led. These interviews averaged between thirty-five minutes to an hour.

The researcher obtained informed consent forms from all three former NCU student interviewees (See Appendix C). Member checks were conducted with the graduates and with all three professors interviewed (Interviews 1- 3, and 7- 9). This means that the researcher allowed the participants who were interviewed to preview their comments exactly as written, and all gave their approval in writing. Pseudonyms were used for interview participants to assure confidentiality as per research protocol.

Quantitative Research

In order to obtain more accurate data on the actual rate of pastoral attrition, the researcher worked to track down fellow pastoral major graduates from NCU, class of 2000. The goal was simply to see if they were still in ministry or not. The researcher still counted the graduate as being “in ministry” if they merely switched to a different form of ministry. For example, some of these graduates started as senior pastors and are now on the mission field. Others were in youth ministry and are now launching a church in a movie theater for little or no pay. Some of these pastors worked a different job in order to pay their bills, but their primary focus was still ministry.

The researcher considered the NCU graduate as having “left ministry” if they were no longer pursuing ministry as their primary vocation. For example, if a graduate was a children’s pastor, but now has shifted to full-time public school teaching, and teaching is now their goal for the foreseeable future, that graduate was marked as having left the ministry, even if they still teach Sunday school on a rotation. The researcher split the graduates into two groups, based on whether or not they stayed in pastoral ministry. Some of the researcher’s former classmates shared why they left ministry and some would not.

One of the limitations of this research however, was that the researcher was not able to track down all of the year 2000 pastoral graduates of NCU. It is possible that some of these graduates that left ministry may not want to be found or interviewed. It is possible that the researcher was better able to find the ones who did stay in ministry, through our ministerial registries and mutual friends. The ones who did stay in ministry may have been more open to respond.

The researcher also engaged in quantitative research by contacting the Assemblies of God National Office in Springfield, Missouri and the AG District Office in Minnesota. The researcher obtained information on rates of pastoral attrition in the denomination as a whole, as well as for Minnesota. This data was limited to AG ministers within the last decade (2010-2019). Also, the data was limited by focusing on the pastoral attrition rates nationally and in Minnesota. Therefore, the pastoral attrition rate could be vastly different in another region of the United States, in another country, or in another denomination. The researcher searched this data, comparing and contrasting the local rates to the national rate of attrition. The researcher also searched the data for trends over the last decade to determine whether pastoral attrition rates are stable, declining or increasing.

After the researcher gathered data through surveys and interviews, the researcher compared the results of this study to the information found through the literature review. The researcher searched for commonalities and differences, analyzing the relationship of this data to existing literature.

The researcher brought the qualitative and quantitative data together by comparing and contrasting the results. The researcher gave more weight to the interviews with experts than to the survey data, because the experts were sharing decades of relevant experience and training, and the surveys were one individual's experience gathered in a snapshot. The researcher also gave more credence to the pastoral attrition data gathered from the AG National Headquarters, than the survey data. The survey data includes a lot of subjective feelings from individual pastors. The objective numbers from the General Council office are carefully researched and compiled each year. The objective numbers were valuable in understanding the actual rates of attrition, terminations and divorces.

The surveys were valuable at understanding pastoral attrition and transitions from the perspective of pastors that have stayed in ministry.

Finally, the researcher compiled the findings into a summarized theory of pastoral attrition. The researcher identified key risk factors in pastoral attrition, and proposed strategies to slow the rate of pastoral attrition.

CHAPTER FIVE: THOSE WHO STAYED AND THOSE WHO LEFT

The Quantitative Data

Assemblies of God National Database

The researcher attempted to discover the actual rate of pastoral attrition within the AG nationally and in the Minnesota District of the Assemblies of God. North Central University is located in the Minnesota District. The researcher contacted the national Assemblies of God office in Springfield, Missouri, and the state office in Minneapolis, Minnesota and requested any data they had on pastoral attrition. The researcher was surprised to find that the AG has kept detailed records since 1930 of how many of their pastors leave the denomination each year. The reasons for the departure are categorized as “deceased”, “transferred to another denomination”, “dismissed” or “lapsed.” The raw data was sent over from the national office, and the researcher made graphs from that data.

Ministers in the AG are required to renew their credentials with their district and the national office every December, paying their ministerial dues and signing a statement reaffirming their agreement with the AG’s Statement of Fundamental Truths. Pastors that do not return the signed statement, with their required dues, by December 31st of each year are considered “lapsed,” regardless of the minister’s reasons. If the minister wishes to be reinstated after lapsing, there is a process for their reinstatement, including signing

the statement and paying any back dues and late fees. Ministers who were terminated are labeled as “dismissed.” In the Assemblies, a minister can usually only be terminated by the national office if they have a moral failure or are proven to be teaching doctrines that are not in line with the Assemblies of God. To formulate their rate of attrition every year, the national office starts with the number of existing ministers, adds in the number of new ministers and then subtracts all ministers that have died, lapsed, transferred out or were dismissed. The remaining number is their “rate of attrition.”

The data shows that the AG’s national rate of attrition does not match the national pastoral attrition rate. In the following graph, there are years showing a net loss of ministers, or a higher than average number of pastors leaving. However, there does not seem to be a distinct downward trend until 2016. In the years, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019, the numbers of ministers consistently drops.

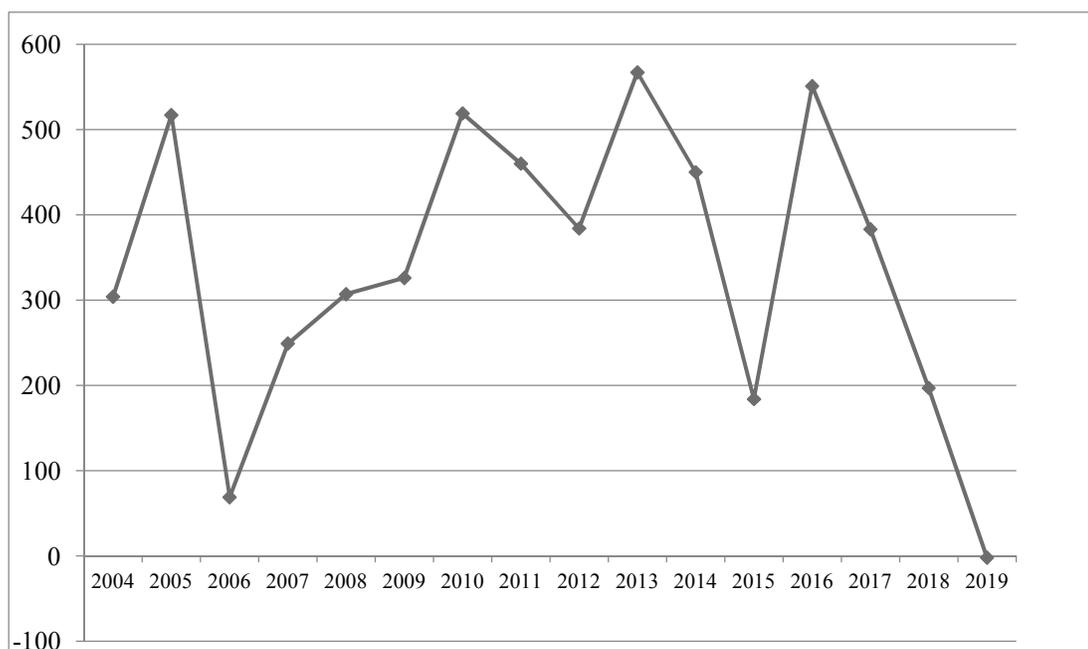


Figure 1 Total Assemblies of God Pastors Added or Subtracted by Year

The results were different when the researcher zeroed in on pastoral attrition in the Minnesota District of the Assembly of God. The data from the last decade shows that the number of ministers in the Minnesota District has been steadily going up, not down.

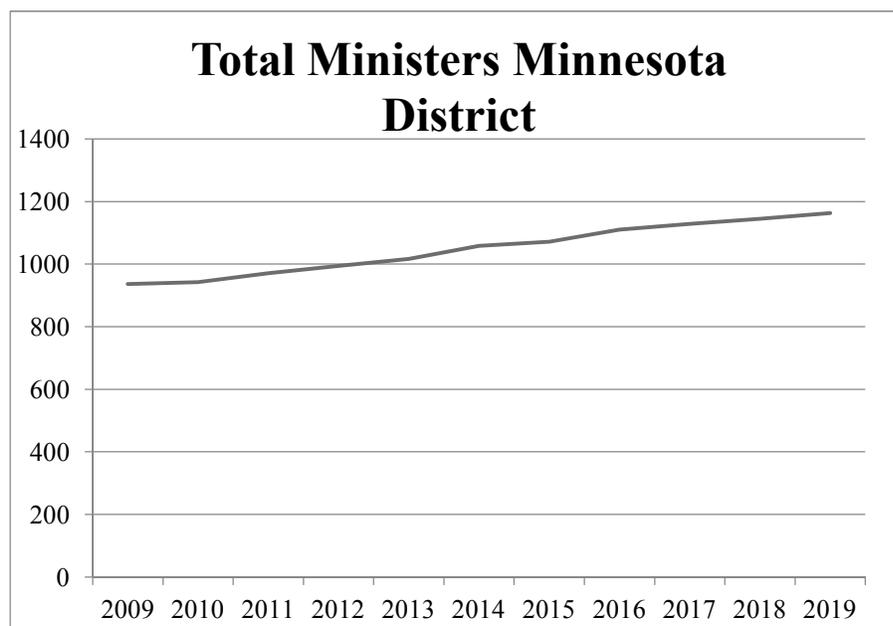


Figure 2 Total Pastor in the MN District by Year

Although the AG rate of pastoral attrition in the last five years is still not as drastic as the national average, the researcher investigated further to find reasons for the decline in the past 5 years. The researcher suspected a correlation between the drop in AG ministers and a similar drop in student enrollment and graduations from AG Bible colleges. The AG relies heavily on its colleges and universities to train pastors. A prerequisite for being ordained with the AG is a four year degree from one of its colleges or an approved equivalent. The researcher was only able to find enrollment data for the Assemblies of God colleges and Universities up until 2016. The General Council office published the enrollment data for all of its schools until 2016, when the record keeping was stopped. It is unknown to the researcher why the General Council abruptly stopped

keeping all records of its Bible college and seminary enrollment. Curiously, 2016 is also the year that the numbers of AG ministers began to noticeably decline.

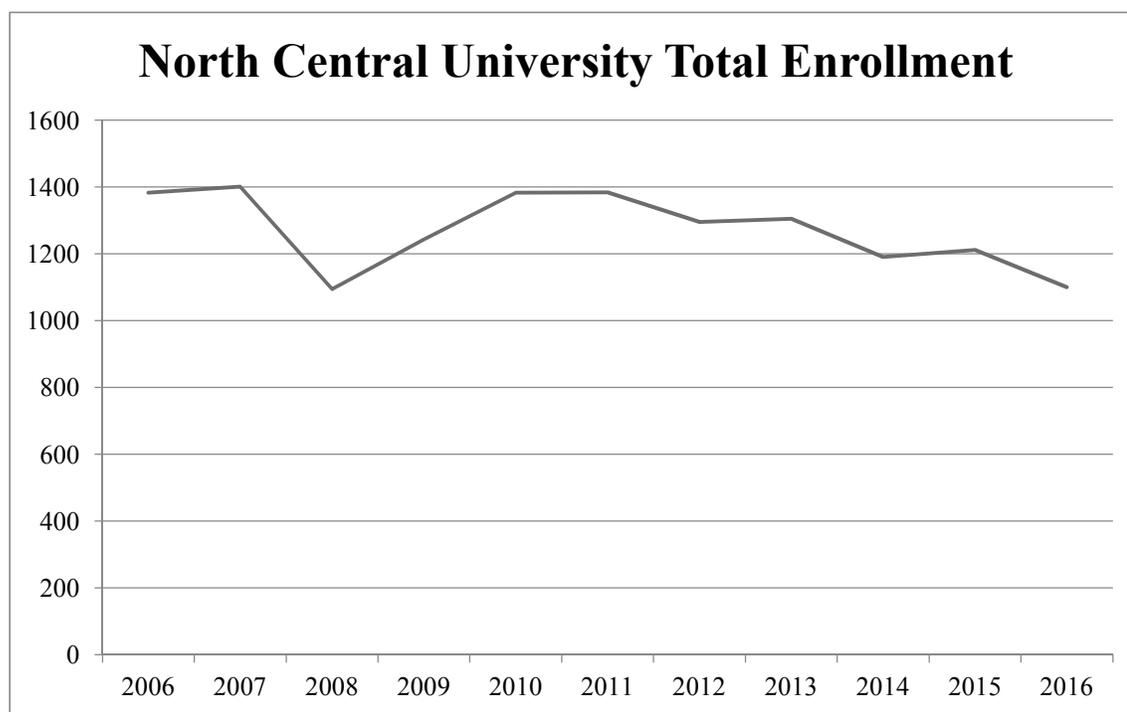


Figure 3 Total North Central University Enrollment by Year

The researcher discovered that in 1999, the AG purchased the online Berean University and Global University, combining them into a fully accredited online Bible College. Global University now boasts 4,132 students across 152 countries. It offers four-year and graduate degrees in most pastoral studies. The researcher concluded that lack of online pastoral degrees does not seem to be contributing factor in pastoral attrition in the Assemblies of God. Since the AG is not publishing any enrollment numbers of its Bible colleges since 2016, it is unknown if lower Bible college enrollment is a contributing factor in pastoral attrition.

The researcher also attempted to discover if the AG had an increase in recent years of pastoral terminations. The literature in chapter 3 indicated a sharp increase in

pastoral terminations nationwide. In the AG, the rate of pastors being fired from individual churches was difficult to ascertain. The General Council office and the district offices usually do not keep records of firings from individual churches (except in cases of a ministerial moral failure). The General and District Councils do, however, keep records of how many ministers they “dismiss,” meaning that they revoke that pastor’s license to preach and ordination. The researcher tracked ministerial dismissals over the past 20 years and did not see much of a variation from year to year.

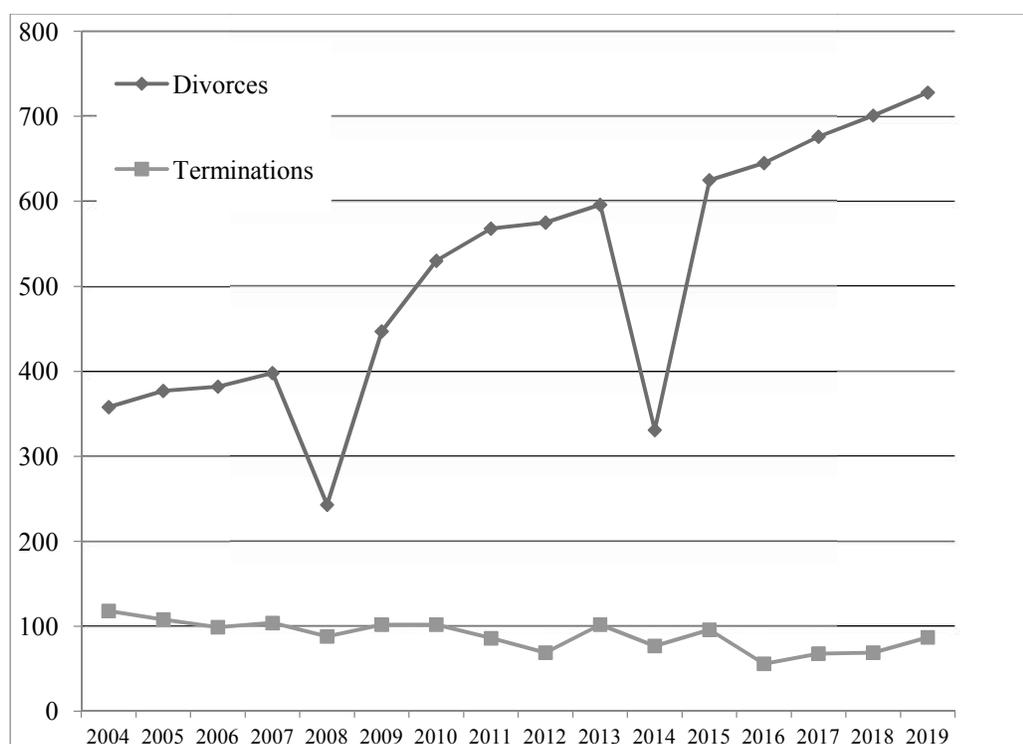


Figure 4 Minnesota Pastoral Divorces and Terminations by Year

The Assemblies of God’s national office keeps careful records of how many of their pastors get divorced. One non-denominational study found that ministers in the United States rank third among professionals for divorces. However, the AG’s pastoral rate of divorce has remained fairly constant at 0.5- 1.0 percent. There is a slight increase

in the percent of pastors in the AG that have been divorced, from an average 1.6 percent in 2010 to 1.9 percent in 2020. The Minnesota District averages a pastoral divorce rate of 1-2 percent.

North Central University's Pastoral Graduates of 2000

When the researcher tracked down the graduates from NCU's pastoral class of 2000, most of them were still serving in ministry. Out of 60 graduates that year in the pastoral studies department, around 50 of them were tracked down. Forty-five of those graduates were still active in vocational ministry.

Five of the fifty had dropped out of ministry entirely. Only three of the total graduates had gotten divorced, and all three were among those that dropped out of ministry.

The rate of attrition for the pastoral graduates of NCU 2000 is consistent with the AG's national average rate of pastoral attrition. The rate of divorces and dismissals also matches the national numbers.

Forty-five of the fifty graduates contacted were still active in ministry. Eight graduates changed their ministry focus, for example, from evangelism to a senior pastorate. Nine graduates worked non-ministry jobs to fund their ministry ventures. None of the graduates that stayed had gotten divorced or divorced and remarried.

Mixed Methods: Qualitative and Quantitative Data

The Surveys

Survey 1

The researcher passed out surveys at various teaching sessions, at the Children's Pastor's Conference, the Minnesota Assemblies of God Children's Pastor's sectional

meeting, The Children's Ministry Connect Conference, The Outbreak Leader Training, and The Rise and Go Conference in central WI. (See Appendix B) Here is a breakdown of the results by question. There were forty-four returned surveys. If questions allowed the respondent to "check all that apply," the answers may not add up to forty-four. The responses are listed directly under each question and are marked with an asterisk.

1. How long have you been in vocational ministry (serving every or almost every Sunday or midweek, leading a ministry), either paid or unpaid? (Choose one)

- A. Less than 5 years
- B. 5-15 years
- C. More than 15 years

Of the pastors who responded, most were new to ministry. That makes sense since most ministers do not make it beyond that point. This did make many of the other questions on the survey moot. Four had been in ministry 5-15 years. Of the 44 surveys returned, 24 said that they had been in ministry less than 5 years. Fifteen said they had been in vocational ministry over 15 years.

2. Are you currently: (Choose one)

- A. A full time staff member?
- B. A part time staff member?
- C. An unpaid ministry leader?
- D. Not currently in ministry?

Twenty of the respondents said that they were full time staff members. Nineteen pastors identified themselves as unpaid. This means that they must be supporting themselves through a separate job. Five ministers were no longer in ministry at all.

3. How many different ministry positions have you held during your lifetime, paid or unpaid, even if they were within the same church? (Choose one)

- A. Only 1 position
- B. 2 – 5 positions
- C. 6 or more positions

Eleven pastors said that they had only had one ministry in their lifetime. Twenty pastors said they had 2-5 positions. Thirteen pastors had ministered through 6 or more positions.

4. Are you male, female or prefer not to answer? _____

No one chose to leave this blank or not answer. Twenty-seven respondents identified as male, and seventeen as female.

5. Thinking about your most recent ministry departure: which of these scenarios BEST describes your story of decision to leave that position? (Choose all that apply)

- A. Amicable, smooth transition agreed upon by the church and myself
- B. Not my decision
- C. A somewhat difficult transition
- D. A traumatic experience

Twenty-two pastors said that they had an amicable last transition in ministry. Seven pastors admitted to being let go from their last ministry position. Two ministers indicated that their last ministry position change was somewhat difficult. Twelve ministers indicated that their last ministry position change was traumatic.

6. If you have voluntarily left one or more ministry positions, what was your MOST compelling reason to resign/leave? (Choose all that apply)

- A. Financial reasons. The ministry position did not pay enough to support me or my family. The benefits and/or retirement was unsatisfactory
- B. I felt unsatisfied and unchallenged
- C. I wanted a position that better fit my strengths, talents
- D. I no longer felt called to ministry
- E. I disliked certain parts of being a pastor: (i.e., preaching, teaching, recruiting etc.)
- F. Personal or family challenges, such as depression, illness or family crisis
- G. Stressful and/or painful interactions with staff, board members, parents and/or my supervisor
- H. Not applicable (have never left a position)

Seven pastors left because they felt unchallenged. Seven pastors wanted a position that would better suit their talents. Only one pastor did not feel called to ministry anymore. Only one pastor indicated that they disliked the duties of a pastor. Twelve pastors left their ministry positions due to a personal or family crisis. Nine pastors chose “G,” indicating painful conflict in their previous position. Six pastors had never left a position. They are still serving in their first position.

7. Indicate how influential the following components were in your decision to voluntarily leave or resign from a position.					
Put an "X" by what BEST describes how much each factor influenced your decision to leave your position:	Extremely Influential	Moderately Influential	Somewhat Influential	Slightly Influential	Not at All
A. Financial reasons. The ministry position did not pay enough to support me or my family. The benefits and/or retirement was unsatisfactory.			1		7
B. I felt unsatisfied and unchallenged		1	1		6
C. I wanted a position that better fit my strengths, talents		1		2	4
D. I no longer felt called to ministry			2	1	5
E. I disliked certain parts of being a pastor: (e.g., preaching, teaching, recruiting, etc.)		2			5
F. Personal challenges such as burnout, depression or illness	4	1	2		2
G. Family challenges or crisis	3		1		4
H. Stressful and/or painful interactions with staff, board members, parents and/or my supervisor	2		1		4
Additional Comments:					

Only one respondent listed “financial reasons” as being a reason that they left a pastoral position in the past. One other pastor listed finances as “somewhat important” to their decision to leave a ministry position. All of the other surveyed pastors, financial considerations ranked last as an influence for staying at or leaving a position. A limitation of this part of the survey is that the pastors who have left ministry were not in attendance

at these training events. Finances may have been a factor for pastors who decided to leave ministry permanently.

Only one respondent said that they left a ministry position because they were not sure if they were called to ministry anymore. All other respondents indicated that when they left their last position they still felt called to full-time ministry. They did not leave because they disliked pastoral duties such as preaching, teaching, visitation etc.

8. In the past 6 months, have you seriously considered leaving your current vocational ministry? (Choose one)

- A. I did not seriously consider leaving my ministry position.
- B. Once in a while. But in all, I'm happy in my position.
- C. I sometimes consider leaving my current ministry position. I don't think this is where I will be in five years.
- D. I think about leaving my current position several times a week.
- E. I have decided to leave my current position of ministry.
- F. I am planning to leave vocational ministry entirely.
- G. I have already left ministry.

Eighteen pastors did not consider leaving their position. Four pastors chose "B". No pastors chose C. Five pastors thought about leaving several times a week. No one chose E. Fifteen pastors said that they are planning to leave ministry entirely. Two pastors had left vocational ministry and are only volunteering now.

9. At your last ministry position, if you left voluntarily, at what point did you alert your church, supervisor of your intent to leave that position? (Choose one)

- A. Six months to a year ahead of time, so we could prepare for the transition

- B. I gave one month's notice
- C. I gave 10-14 days' notice that I was leaving.
- D. I left without notice.
- E. N/A

Three pastors gave six months' notice that they intended to leave their position. Four pastors gave one month's notice. Many of pastors surveyed, 17, gave 2 weeks' notice when they left. No pastors responded that they left without notice. No pastors chose D. Eighteen pastors said this was not applicable, because they had not yet left a position.

10. Which answer best represents your mood in the weeks, months following your departure from your ministry position? (Choose all that apply)

- A. Relief that it was over.
- B. Excited to move on to the next chapter.
- C. Exhausted and in need of rest and recovery
- D. Grieving over the loss. Perhaps experiencing depression, confusion and withdrawal
- E. N/A
- F. Other _____

Six pastors expressed relief that their transition was over. Twelve pastors felt excited to move on. Two pastors admitted feeling exhausted and in need of rest. Nine pastors grieved over the loss of their former position. Fifteen pastors said that this was not applicable to them. None of the pastors chose F.

One former pastor that struggled with deep grief left this comment about his experience leaving ministry: “Many friends that I had once had in the ministry, now called me a backslider, and a sinner doomed for hell. My former friends demanded my return to the ministry. One minister called me a coward for leaving the ministry, saying that I owed my life to the church. Their behavior and conduct only hardened my heart against the church and Christians.”

11. How would you describe the work environment when you left your last position? (Choose all that apply _____)

- A. Healthy, stable place to work.
- B. Detached. Our staff did not argue, but we also rarely interacted.
- C. Toxic. Gossip, arguing, power plays, mostly negative interactions
- D. Highly Stressful. Stress that was nearly constant.
- E. Other

Sixteen pastors felt that their ministry position was a healthy place to work. Only one pastor indicated that their last work environment was detached. Only one pastor described his previous work environment as toxic. Fifteen pastors said that their work environment had been extremely stressful. Eleven pastors chose “E,” saying that none of the above situations described their previous church ministry environment.

12. How has your current ministry affected you personally? (Choose one)

- A. No effect, really
- B. Serving in ministry has benefitted my physical and mental health.
- C. Serving in ministry has negatively affected my physical and mental health.

D. Other: _____

Twenty-one pastors did not believe that their ministry has affected them personally. Ten pastors said that being in ministry has benefitted their health. Thirteen pastors said that their ministry has negatively affected their health. Only one pastor chose "D" meaning "other." They did not explain why.

13. How has serving in vocational ministry affected your family? (Choose all that apply)

- A. No effect, really.
- B. Our family has benefitted from my serving in ministry.
- C. My spouse has been negatively affected by my occupation.
- D. My children have been negatively affected by my occupation.

Twenty pastors said ministry had no effect on their family. Seven pastors claimed that ministry has benefitted our family. Five pastors said that their spouses have been negatively affected by the pastor being in ministry. Twelve pastors indicated that their children have been negatively affected by the pastor serving in ministry.

14. On a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being not stressed at all and 10 being unbearable stress, what would you rate your ministry stress level? _____

Eight pastors answered "3." Ten pastors answered "5," and four pastors answered "6." Fourteen pastors answered "9." Eight pastors left this question blank.

15. If you were to encounter difficulty in ministry, which of the following strategies would you try? (Choose all that apply)

- A. Professional Counseling
- B. Exercise
- C. Sabbatical
- D. Further education/training
- E. Vacation
- F. Asking for help from denominational leadership

Seven pastors have/would try counseling. Five pastors have/would try exercise. Four pastors have/would try taking a Sabbatical. Six pastors have/would try taking a vacation. Three pastors have/would try furthering their education.

Only two pastors indicated that they would seek help from their denominational leadership. Both of these pastors were male. None of the female respondents said that they would go to their denominational leadership for help. One of the male pastors wrote, "I would not contact my District officials. The District officials are there to preserve the church, not the pastor. They usually cannot help you except perhaps to help you leave." However, a different pastor commented, "I am in ministry today because of the call of God and the fact that district leaders believed in my ministry. I am thankful for them!"

16. Do you feel supported by the lead pastor, board and staff in your current ministry?

- A. Definitely Yes
- B. Probably Yes
- C. Uncertain
- D. Probably Not
- E. Definitely Not

F. N/A

Twelve pastors said that they definitely feel supported by the leadership of their church. Four pastors are fairly sure that their leadership supports them. None of the pastors indicated that their church leadership definitely does not support them. Five pastors were unsure if their leadership supports them. Four pastors feel that their church leadership is probably not supportive of them. Six pastors said that this question did not apply to them.

17. Do you believe high pastor turnover is a real problem, and if so, why?

Some of the respondents left this section blank. Here are the answers of those who chose to respond:

“Yes, right now in the conference our church is part of, just in one leaders area of 250 churches there are 100 pastors currently looking for new churches- or new jobs outside of the church. Churches and pastors are an important part of our communities.”

“Yes, because it’s hard to have a great impact and a long-lasting effect if we’re in churches and roles for a short amount of time.”

“Yes – I feel many people enter ministry with unrealistic expectations. I feel that some are not truly called, and treat it as a job rather than a calling so when problems surface, it is difficult for them to navigate.”

"Yes, because pastors are not committing to a church for the long haul."

18. What do you think the church could do better to support their pastors, leaders?

Some of the respondents left this section blank. Here are the answers of those who chose to respond:

“We pastors need Sabbaticals, regular counseling, and good accountability for staff.”

“We definitely need some kind of rejuvenation program for our pastors, put together by someone with experience.”

“For me, I would say nothing, but then again, I have changed my perspective to serving and taking care of others, rather than expecting people to take care of me. I try to keep the mindset that I get to serve, not have to serve. This is something I picked up when working with Tommy Barnett, and it was a game changer for me. I don’t expect to have special treatment from anyone.”

“There could be better communication between all workers and pastors and leaders and appreciation for what they do.”

“Make a purposeful space for women, and an accompanying support system (with clear, transparent accountability and discipline for those who violate the theological norms around this).”

“Church members need to pray and volunteer to serve.”

“Honoring them and blessing them with time off, finances, allowing them to be human too.”

“We should be taking care of one another in our churches. Staff should be given tools and training to help them grow and be effective. They should be supported both professionally and personally.

“Be clear and realistic with expectations. Key leadership should ‘have their back’ when there are complaints. Complaints and suggestions need to be taken into consideration, but help to weed out what is truly important is necessary. Pastors may need help with this. They often take things very personally, as being a pastor is a very relational job.

“Even if money is in short supply, time off and personal/professional development should be factored into the budget- even if it’s in small ways (reading books as a staff or leadership team, etc.)”

19. Are there any additional comments you would like to make regarding your experience with leaving a ministry position?

Some of the respondents left this section blank. Here are the answers of those who chose to respond:

“Several of the church board members and leaders requested my resignation after three years and a successful church remodeling program. They brought it to an

unsuccessful all church vote with their 6 votes being the only ones against me. They then left the church. However it changed the church and it changed me. I left one year later and never returned to ministry except on a volunteer basis. Usually I assist my wife or my children or the pastor but never taking a leadership role by choice. My family and I definitely benefitted from my departure from full-time ministry. I am not sure if pastoral attrition is a problem or not.”

“I’ve left 5 churches. All have been smooth except one. That pastor was a narcissist. It started out good then went south but so has every departure on that team. After 8 years the relationship was restored today 15 years later we are friends because I fought for it. I did go to counseling with a therapist who specialized in helping people who worked for a narcissist. I could not change others but I could fix me. I have spent my life telling boys and girls that forgiveness works and I am determined to model that. I will not quit.”

“I was very professionally happy at that job, but not personally so. Life was very lonely. It was a very transient population, and it hurt to make good friends, then for them to move away in a year or two.”

“Thankfully all my transitions have been very good and I still have a good relationship with former pastors.”

“After years of working on staff, I didn’t feel part of a team. Rather I felt like I was on an island trying to figure out my area of ministry on my own. I had several wonderful and committed volunteer leaders, but they all had other jobs and responsibilities. I felt the weight of the ministry on my shoulders. There were difficult staff dynamics, and my relationships with those staff members were important to me.”

“I’ve honestly never seen a church do this well. Either things were shrouded in secrecy (when a pastor did something inappropriate), or the truth is bent/broken (when the church wrongly terminates someone’s employment). The church needs to get MUCH BETTER at handling conflict, and being transparent but respectful through it.”

“When I left, it would have been nice to have someone to turn to- leaders or District- to help me regroup from my hurt state. We could have used someone to bring healing and support so we could have turned around faster into another ministry.”

Survey 2

The researcher designed a second survey, this one through social media, asking ministers about the health of their church (See Appendix D). Over two hundred ministers, some senior pastors and some staff pastors, responded from all over the United States.



Figure 5 Survey Two, Participants Locations

Roughly 3.8 percent of respondents said that their church was definitely emotionally unhealthy. About 4 percent said that they did not feel that their church leadership was listening to them. Nine percent said that they would not feel safe to tell anything personal to someone at their church.

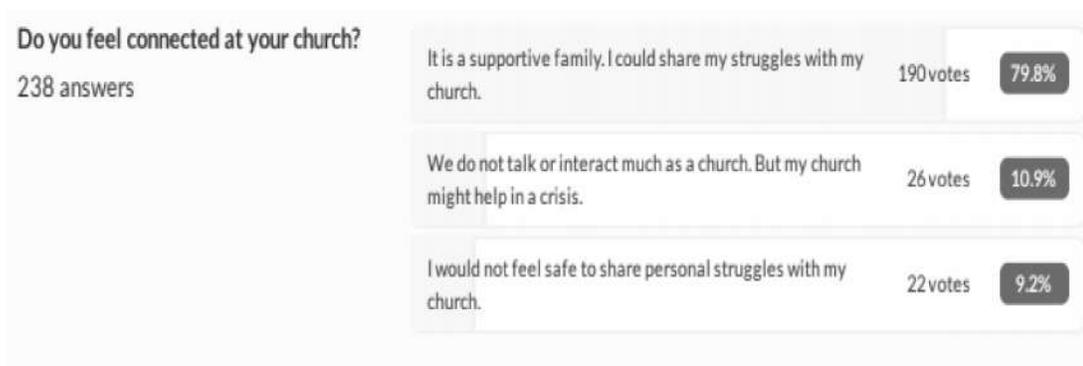


Figure 6 Do Pastors Feel Connected at Their Church?

Almost 7 percent of respondents felt that there was too much conflict in their church and that the conflict was not always handled well. Forty-three and a half percent of respondents said that their church is interested in and is actively working towards being more emotionally healthy, but they are not quite “there” yet.

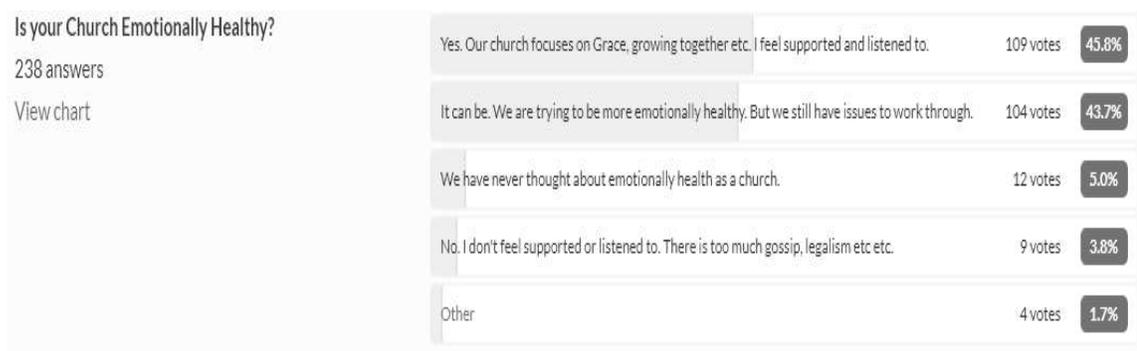


Figure 7 How Pastors View the Emotional Health of Their Churches

In the survey for this project, 19 percent of respondents said that their church was emotionally unhealthy. That is almost one-fifth of churches. When a church becomes emotionally unhealthy, it can take congregants time, work and even counseling to get past the damage that has been done. Sustained time in an emotionally unhealthy church

environment can cause lasting depression, loss of self-esteem and even self-destructive thoughts.²⁷²

Qualitative Data

Interview #1

The researcher interviewed a former classmate from North Central's pastoral studies department. The interviewee will be referred to as "Student 1." Student 1 saw a lot of success in ministry initially and was a sought-after speaker for many district and national events.

Researcher: How long have you been in vocational ministry? What helped you stay in ministry?

Student 1: I stayed in ministry full-time for 23 years. My commitment and desire to serve the Lord was a huge factor in staying in ministry. But also, this is all I was ever trained for. And leaving ministry to do something else, scared the crud out of me. So lack of ability in other areas kept me in ministry for probably too long. (Sad, I know)

Researcher: Tell me about some of the challenges you faced in the course of your ministry?

Student 1: The biggest hardship I faced was family/ministry balance. When I worked hard enough to succeed big time in ministry, my family suffered. When I worked at family enough to make it succeed well, ministry suffered. The other was.... my personal walk with God. Because I was studying scripture regularly to teach, I neglected Scripture study to simply grow in my walk with God. Now that I'm out of vocational ministry (volunteering).... My ability to find balance in family is easier and my walk with God better. Keep in mind, had my walk with God been stronger, my family/ministry balance would have been stronger as well.

Researcher: Did you ever experience a major crisis in your ministry? If so, did you try to reach out to your District leadership for help?

Student 1: So I did have a crisis in ministry. Well.... Actually a crisis in family that effected ministry. In 2020, my wife informed me that she had been having an affair. My 3rd call was to my district. They were very supportive in the first few weeks. The

²⁷² Dave Burchett, *When Bad Christians Happen to Good People: Where We Have Failed Each Other and How to Reverse the Damage* (Colorado Springs, CO: WaterBrook Press, 2011), 31-33.

divorce took place over the next 3 months. And I heard nothing for months. Until it was time to have an interview to determine if I could keep my credentials. They allowed me to keep them. But I never really felt support from the district. But they didn't hurt me either. They just basically ignored me. I found my own counseling. I found my own accountability. I found a new church. And got involved. Actually... I had one person in the district talk to me semi-regularly. But we didn't talk about my personal life much. So would I go to my District officials in a crisis now? I may inform them, but I wouldn't count on them for help and support. They are too busy dealing with district ministry issues, they don't have time to deal with a single minister. If I remarry, I will have to have another interview and paperwork process to keep my credentials.

Researcher: Are you in ministry now?

Student 1: I am not in vocational ministry now. I work a "secular job," which I enjoy, and I volunteer quite a bit in ministry. It took me awhile to learn new skills in order to support myself. But I am still passionate about the ministry that I do.

Interview #2

The researcher contacted a former classmate, from the NCU graduating class of 2000. Student 2, who will be referred to by the pseudonym "Milo," graduated full of excitement and eager to jump into a lifelong career as a pastor. He immediately took on a full-time ministry position. Unfortunately, Milo dropped out of ministry permanently after only 4 years. Milo explained to the researcher that he was verbally and mentally abused by his senior leader. Milo described his former senior leader as "duplicitous, narcissistic, controlling and manipulative." Milo did not tell his wife, or anyone else, the truth about what was happening. Milo's depression worsened until he was fighting suicidal impulses. What Milo had to say was disturbing, but the researcher felt it was important to include Milo's experience. These are Milo's own words on why he left pastoral ministry.

Researcher: Why did you decide not to kill yourself?

Milo: There is no way I am going to allow this man to steal my children's father from them! I decided that the next time he tore into me, I'd just quit. Without fail, he did the next day, and I firmly resigned without hesitation or remorse. I had nowhere to go, but it didn't matter. I'd rather be penniless and homeless, but free rather than spend one more moment in that position.

Researcher: Did you try to go to your District overseers for help?

Milo: I did call my District denominational overseer. I truly thought that this happened because no one knew. If someone knew the truth, there would be accountability. My overseer did not seem to be listening to what I said...He quickly dismissed my concerns and then refused to talk to me anymore about the situation...That was the moment. That was the precise moment when I vowed to never return to the ministry. I would never give my time, talents or my energy to anything as corrupt and dirty as the church ever again! I yelled, I screamed, I sobbed until I had no more tears.

Researcher: How did your marriage fare during this experience?

Milo: It just about ended my marriage. When I came home defeated, exhausted and angry, my wife would begin to relentlessly interrogate me as to what went on at the office. Even though the division lasted only 3 weeks it drove a massive wedge into our marriage...It would be 5 years before we were able to finally let it go and start to forgive.

Researcher: With enough counseling, or down the road, would you consider going back into ministry?

Milo: Never. I am too broken to do ministry now and nothing will ever fix me.

Researcher: Can you describe your relationship with God right now?

Milo: A few years ago, I finally poured out my anger and rage at God for letting all this happen to me. God and I are on a lot better terms now. My wife and I are even volunteering at our church. As a result of her prayers I came back around to God and Christ. Through gritted teeth I began to forgive, and little by little I began to heal and let go. God began redeeming things in my life. God opened my eyes to how He WAS there with me through it all. God DID see what was going on, and He cared. I am now in a good place in every sense of the word.

Interview #3

The researcher's third interview was with a former classmate from NCU's pastoral department. To preserve her anonymity, the researcher refers to her as "Student 3." Student 3 graduated from NCU, ending up in Africa as a missionary.

Researcher: What has helped you to stay in ministry for such a long time?

Student 3: I'm not really sure I could really pin down how long I've been "in ministry." Ministry has simply always been a part of my life. I started helping and even teaching in preschool classes as soon as I was old enough to babysit (age 11). In high school, I volunteered in the after school programs and continued teaching younger than me. I was never planning to be in "full time" vocational ministry. I planned to teach and volunteer in whatever church God led me to. When I left NCU to pursue classes in special education, I was hired as a children's church director (part-time). Somewhere in that time, I started realizing that I would much rather do children's ministry than elementary education. From there, I was hired as an assistant children's pastor. I didn't realize that the pastor who hired me was fine with me being an assistant but truly had no intention of having a woman, especially a single woman, in a pastoral position. I wasn't allowed to talk about my termination within the church for 2 weeks while the pastor went on vacation, which gave me a lot of time to think and pray. At this point in the story, I believe, comes one of the crucial choices that has helped me stay in ministry. My ministry mentors reminded me that honor is to be given to the office of a leader regardless of whether the specific leader in that office as "earned" or "deserves" the honor due him. I spoke respectfully of the pastor regardless of whether the person listening knew him or the situation, and 6 months later I was fully funded and on a plane to begin a 2-year term as a missionary associate. I truly believe that the way I chose to leave that position set the tone for many of years of ministry and allowed me to walk in favor on both continents. I met my husband in Africa. We have been in ministry in Africa together for nearly 13 years, and have 2 children who were both born here. We can't imagine ministry anywhere else.

My short answer is that I have stayed in ministry because of great family support, Godly mentors, choosing to stay humble, honoring authority, discipling others and choosing a great spouse. I firmly believe that your spouse can make or break your (family) ministry. My husband and I were each called to missions in South Africa before we met and married each other. Although we have different roles in the work of the ministry, it is OUR calling and we work it as a team. Ministry, for me, has always been more about who I am than what I do or whom I work with.

2. Researcher: What hardships have you encountered in the course of your ministry?

Student 3: I feel a little weird talking about this one because I tend to remember how God intervened or what came of the hardship more than the actual hardships, but as I think about the word hardship, several things come to mind. It feels like a complaint list, but in reality is a list of ways God has made Himself known to me and helped me to trust Him more with each new season.

A. I have struggled more with internal battles such as whether it was “okay” for me, as a single woman, to be in full time ministry (conquered) Internal battles with insecurity and worthiness.

B. I have struggled with being a woman in ministry. I was actually fired by a pastor who didn’t want a single woman in pastoral ministry. This only made my internal battles worse. Once I was hired as my husband’s administrative assistant (he was hired as the children’s pastor) when I had years of children’s ministry experience, and he had none. On paper, I was the administrative assistant. However, in practicality, my husband and I simply ran the ministry together. The children referred to both of us as “Pastor,” and we treated each other as such as well.

C. As a missionary, I frequently battle culture shock, loneliness, learning to live on another continent in other cultures. Like many other missionaries, I battle not having a lot of local friends at times. There really isn’t much separation between ministry and life though. I struggle with living and ministering in a country that looks “first world” but functions “third world.” Every day I am teaching, preaching, discipling, training, hiring, firing, working with, loving, and serving people in a completely different culture and language.

D. I worked at one point for a pastor who seemed to be easy to work with but was alternately distant and micromanaging depending on the week or mood. This pastor was the son of the late founding pastor whose somewhat overbearing though very sweet founding mother was still very much in the picture and influencing his decisions and leadership style.

3. Researcher: If you had a ministry crisis right now, would you go to your District leadership for help?

Student 3: This one doesn’t really apply to me since I’m no longer a part of the AG District authority structure. We are missionaries under a different organization now. However, I/we do seek advice and counsel from our Board of Directors, mentors, family, and friends/peers in ministry. I believe it is crucial to honor those that God has placed around you and to be intentional about engaging with others in ministry who have more experience and/or wisdom in your field as well as those who have experience and/or wisdom outside of your specific field. I believe it is crucial to remain humble enough to ask for counsel and, at the same

time, creative and independent enough to come up with a few solutions on your own to discuss with those from whom you are seeking counsel.

Key Findings From Interviews 1-3, With NCU Pastoral Graduates

1. Ministry can be very stressful for the minister and their family. Ministry can cause a terrible strain on the minister's marriage. All three interviewees agreed that a pastor's home life is a crucial indicator of ministry longevity.
2. Students 1 and 2 did reach out to their district for help in a crisis. Each one was not satisfied with their district's response. Student 3 could not find a "good fit" within the Assemblies of God and became an independent missionary.
3. Student 1 felt that he stayed in ministry "too long" because he did not have skills for any other career. He had to learn an entirely different trade in order to "take a break" from vocational ministry.
4. Students 1 and 2 benefitted from professional counseling.
5. Students 1 and 2 expressed regret for overworking and becoming enmeshed with their ministry environment. Student 1 noted that if he did not work excessive hours his ministry "suffered." Student 3 lamented that there is no boundary between "ministry" and home life.
6. Students 1 and 2 said that their relationship with God suffered due to their overworking and the stress of ministry.

Interview #4

The researcher interviewed a professional counselor who serves with both Focus on the Family and the Rocky Mountain District Restoration Team in restoring fallen pastors. The researcher will refer to the counselor by the pseudonym "Smith" for anonymity. Smith has been active in restoring fallen ministers for decades.

Researcher: Thank you so much for being willing to meet with me. Do you get a lot of calls to restore fallen pastors?

Smith: Oh yes. We have hundreds and hundreds of calls all the time. We get calls from pastors, churches, spouses... We stay very busy.

Researcher: What resources would you recommend for pastors or churches that are looking into pastoral restoration after a fall?

Smith- Great question. Of course, I highly recommend the latest Focus on the Family pamphlet on restoring a fallen pastor. The newest version with all the latest resources it provides came out in late 2019. I actually designed the progressive restoration plan that is used in the pamphlet. Some other great resources we recommend are Can Fallen Pastors Be Restored by John H. Armstrong, Restoration Manual: A Workbook for Restoring Fallen Ministers and Religious Leaders by Thomas L. Pedigo and the official Assemblies of God position paper/plan on restoring fallen ministers. Of all the restoration papers of the churches out there, the Assemblies of God plan is the most comprehensive and the best we have seen. It includes a lot of detail.

Researcher: Thank you so much. What percentage of the pastors you work with would you say are successfully restored?

Smith: The numbers are not good. No matter which restoration program is used, the chances of a pastor being restored to full time ministry are not good.

Researcher: Why do you think that is? Why are more pastors not restored to ministry?

Smith: The biggest problem is the fallen pastor's attitude. In almost every situation, the pastor is forced into the restoration program by the spouse or the church, because they got caught in a moral failure. So many times the pastor's ego and pride are completely out of control. Every day we have pastors tell us, "Well, yeah, my wife has forgiven me, or she will soon. I prayed, and I'm sure God forgave me. So I'm back preaching on Sunday, right?" The overwhelming majority of pastors we work with will not accept stepping down from ministry for the two years that our program requires. Even when their credentials are taken away from them, the pastor usually "goes independent" and starts their own church. These pastors resist any form of submission or accountability, especially ongoing accountability. They want a quick fix. They are in such a hurry to "get this over with" that they do not fix the problems in their heart. You know how the Apostle Paul talks about how godly sorrow leads to repentance but worldly sorrow leads only to death? What I deal with day after day is "worldly sorrow." This is the sadness that the pastor got caught. This is a shallow, non-effective grief. True repentance does not grasp for positions. True repentance is truly sad because they are starting to see the level of pain and damage they have caused their spouse, their family and their church. The reason that too many pastoral restoration programs fail is that the minister will not submit to the restoration process, will not take a break from ministry to work on themselves and their marriage, and will not listen to the wisdom of the restoration team.

Researcher: I have heard you mention a "team" working on the restoration of a fallen minister. So you use a team approach to restoration?

Smith: Absolutely. I have never seen a pastoral restoration be successful without a team. A team is crucial to success. On that team, I highly recommend having both sexes represented, one therapist, one fellow pastor and a psychologist. Your team should be well rounded. Also there needs to be at least one person on that team that is there for the spouse and the family. People tend to forget about them. The spouse and kids deal with so much shame and isolation after the minister's fall. They need help and compassion too.

Researcher: You said that your process takes two years. Why do you have a two year program as opposed to a different time frame?

Smith: In my private practice, I work with marital couples who are trying to stay together after an affair. I always tell them upfront that it takes about two years to work through a sexual failure. It does not always take two years of just counseling, but it takes two years to completely heal. The two year restoration plan is something that works for psychologists and counselors, and it seems to work best for pastoral restoration as well. I cannot stress enough that this process takes time. This hard work cannot be done in a day, a week, or a few months.

Researcher: What warning signs have you seen that someone may have a moral failure?

Smith: Oh, most of the pastors we work with have been battling isolation and loneliness for some time. Also, almost all pastors who have affairs admit that their marriage was in bad shape before the affair. In the restoration process, I usually have to do a lot of work on the marriage right up front which has been in terrible shape perhaps for many years. No one wakes up one morning and randomly has an affair. There are always underlying issues that must be worked through.

Interview #5

The researcher interviewed Dr. Donald Detrick, professor at Northwest University in Washington and Associate Network Leader for the Northwest Ministry Network of the Assemblies of God, which covers Washington state and North Idaho. This district launched a strategically focused church health initiative for its churches and pastors several years ago. Detrick has devoted the past 18 years working with NW Ministry Network churches, pastors, pastoral care, and emotional health. His doctoral dissertation has greatly influenced this network's best practices in pastoral care. The researcher

conducted a member check with Dr. Detrick, which he approved. Dr. Detrick declined the use of a pseudonym, asking instead to be identified by his real name. Here is what Detrick had to say about the outcome of their structured church health initiatives in the NW Ministry Network:

Researcher: Thank you for taking the time to meet with me. Why did you decide to focus on the health of pastors and churches?

Detrick: Well, the short answer is that I spent more than 25 years as a full-time pastor. It felt that almost immediately I was thrown into environments that were emotionally charged and even unhealthy. I became a district presbyter very young, in my late 20's. I pastored a small district-affiliated church at the age of 22. I also pastored larger churches and supervised a lot of staff. I was surprised at how many times I was called upon, as a presbyter, to try to salvage churches torn apart by conflict and power struggles. These experiences led me to pursue my master's degree in psychology. I realized, as many secular businesses have realized as well, that most of the conflict issues, dysfunction and scandals all boil down to emotional intelligence. I noticed that during the 1990's and 2000's, the Assemblies of God was emphasizing church growth, at the expense of emotional health. The result was that we as district leaders were being called upon to "put out fires," all the time, meaning, we were trying to clean up the mess and damage left behind by emotionally unhealthy or dysfunctional churches and pastors. I wanted to find a way to stop the milk from spilling, so to speak, instead of just trying to put the spilled milk back in the glass. This meant we were going to have to be a lot more proactive. Our Bible Colleges were not really aware of emotional intelligence. We were training our pastors in theology and church law, but launching these leaders without any training in how to deal with personal conflict and emotional health. Reading and learning about emotional health changed all that for me as I studied Emotional Intelligence at AGTS in the D.Min. program. I realized that the reason we were seeing conflicts and church splits was because of a lack of emotional intelligence. Pastors were sabotaging their own churches and their own ministries due to their complete lack of self-awareness and relational skills. Most emotionally unhealthy churches suffer in the area of interpersonal relationships. That all comes down to Emotional Intelligence in its basic four components: Self-Awareness, Self-Management, Social Awareness, and Relationship Management.

Researcher: How did your district approach implementing training and support for individual pastors and churches?

Detrick: I gained experience while pastoring by promoting small group discipleship, parent support groups, divorce care support groups, twelve step programs and more in the local church I pastored (Bethel Church, Chehalis, WA). The NWMN launched a cohort model of church and personal revitalization in the

early 2000's with Dr. Mel Ming. The goal being for each one of our pastors to be a part of a "cohort," or a group of supportive pastors in their area, and lead their staff in this process. The cohort system has gone well here, with pastors reporting that they feel less alone and more supported. We realized that to really change the emotional health of a church, there had to be buy-in from more than one or two key leaders. The culture of the church had to change. This of course starts with emotional support for the lead pastor and the board. Usually an emotionally unhealthy church has an emotionally unhealthy leader, who is very insecure, using power grabs and manipulation to get their needs met. This emotional unhealthiness seeps into the congregation as a whole. The changes need to happen from the top down as unhealthy leaders tend to reproduce other unhealthy leaders. Our district started an "elder program in the 1990's when Dr. Warren Bullock was superintendent." This program involved recruiting "elders," usually husband and wife teams, with one or both of them having counseling degrees. Pastors in our district can go to them for help in complete confidentiality without being reported to the District. The elders may refer the pastor to one of their network of professional counselors. Each of our over 1300 ministers now has a professional counselor within driving distance miles of their home. The District will pay for four counseling sessions for the minister, their spouse and their children. We have also implemented a program using "conflict mediators." We started with just one, but now we have many trained mediators. When a pastor in our district is facing intense conflict in their church, the conflict mediators go in to try to diffuse the situation and come to a win-win solution. That of course is not always possible. One of the most important safeguards we have implemented for our district is a "Code of Ethics" for our pastors and for each church. This is all about how we will treat one another. The elders and the conflict mediators make sure that the code of ethics is being followed (See Appendix). An important part of each church's training includes teaching on sexual harassment. In the age of "Me Too," the church should be operating beyond reproach, and setting the example for how humans should be training each other.

Researcher: What results have you seen in your district churches over the past 4 years after implementing your programs for emotional health?

Detrick: Well, we have had great results, I believe. Out of more than 1300 ministers, we only have to intervene in a disciplinary manner for a small percentage of our pastors. That really means that the data shows that 0.02 percent of our ministers are involved in a moral failure leading to formal discipline and restoration. Our church conflict cases and church splits have also decreased over the past decade, at least before Covid changed some of that, exacerbating tensions and conflict. By focusing on the health of our district's pastors, their families and our church members, we have found a key to lasting healthy churches, even through Covid.

Researcher: What is the most important lesson you have learned so far about pastors and church health?

Detrick: It is so much easier and wiser to intervene early and cultivate health than to step in later, after so much damage has been done. The best analogy I can think of is that it is so much easier to try to prevent the milk from spilling than to try to put the milk back in the glass after it has spilled. Corporations have already learned this lesson. Interpersonal relations, conflict management, the ability to work as a team- all of this is emotional health related. Emotional health is every bit as important as physical, spiritual and mental health. We have also found that churches with poor emotional health do not grow very well, because of the way that Generation Y, Generation Z and Millennials operate. These generations of young people function most often through relationships, collaboration and consensus. Emotional health is vital for reaching the younger generations.

Researcher: When you are called in to help a church that is very emotionally unhealthy already, when the “milk has already been spilled” so to speak, what steps do you take initially to start that church back on the path to emotional health?

Detrick: This has happened. It is a triage situation. The first thing to do is to call in the conflict mediators to begin working through conflict. The district officials may need to assess the overall viability of the church. Can this church lose half or more of its people in a church split and still be able to function? The district has to discern if there needs to be a leadership change or not, sometimes in the board, sometimes in pastoral staff. The best solution is for hearts and behaviors to change. These things can be painful, but we must act for the good of the pastor and their family, the congregation and for “the Church” universal. Too many of these unhealthy situations are caused by leadership putting up with and refusing to confront emotionally unhealthy behavior. For the conflict mediators, it will be important for them to discover what we call, “Crucial Conversations.” Crucial conversations are (based upon the best-selling book by the same title) discussions where the emotions are running high, the stakes are high, and the opinions involved are diverse. These crucial conversations must be managed well for the church to have any chance of emotional recovery. Our conflict managers engage these crucial conversations with the strategy of pause, pray and wait. Many times, when both sides have been heard, it is important to pause and think before any responses are given. Secondly, a time of prayer before decisions are made can change the whole feel of the room. Thirdly, we may decide to wait a little while before a second meeting or a final decision. That time of waiting can help everyone to have a chance to calm down and process their strong emotions. Finally, no emotionally healthy church can operate without trust. It is important to assess how badly the trust has been broken and if that trust is repairable with work and time. Sometimes that trust is just not repairable and that takes wisdom to discern. If trust has been irrevocably broken, that congregation will more than likely need a leadership change in order to begin healing and moving forward.

Interview #6

The next interview was with a pastoral restoration counselor from the Clergy Recovery Network in Montana. The researcher will refer to the counselor by the pseudonym “Daniels.”

Researcher: Thank you so much for agreeing to meet with me. What do you think is the biggest mistake that pastors and churches make after a pastor’s moral failure?

Daniels: Oh, most churches don’t handle it well at all. I highly recommend that a church gets professional help from a source outside of its own denomination. Someone from that church or denomination will most certainly have some form of bias for or against that pastor. Also, most churches do not have anyone qualified to do that kind of restoration. Also, everyone forgets about the spouse and kids. They need help too!

Researcher: What kind of success rates does your network have in restoring pastors and why?

Daniels: That is hard to say. Most pastors drop out shortly after joining. They want it to be over as fast as possible. At first they are sorry, crying and compliant. But very quickly, they just want life to be what it was. It all depends on that pastor’s willingness to do the hard work of finding out why it happened and getting better. That means different approaches and different therapists. Most would rather quit, go get a different wife and start over at a new church. If they don’t deal with what caused it, it can happen again. And so much of sexual sin is kept quiet anyway. Pastors deal with layers and layers of shame from being up on that pedestal. This shame keeps them from getting help sooner. That shame also makes them try to rush the process. If it is real repentance, they start to understand how badly they hurt the church and their family. The real question needs to be not “How quickly can I get this over with?” Instead they should be asking, “How long can I get help?”

Researcher: Do you think there is a double standard sometimes, with megachurch pastors getting quick “restorations” and small church pastors just being defrocked?

Daniels- Without question. That is why the church or pastor needs to get help from outside their own church and denomination.

Researcher: What is the biggest sign that a pastor may have a moral failure?

Daniels- Almost always, the marriage has been bad for a while. The wife is living her own life. Both are living in isolation. This is a very common red flag.

Key Findings From Interviews 4-6 with Pastoral Failure and Restoration Experts

1. There are many pastors having moral failures, including having affairs, embezzling church funds or becoming addicted to substances or pornography. Sometimes these moral failures begin as negative coping mechanisms to deal with the stress of ministry.
2. The experts seem to agree that a key risk factor for pastors having an affair is that the marriage is distant and unhealthy for a while before the affair.
3. Accountability is crucial for pastors. Lack of appropriate accountability can be a contributing factor to a pastor's moral failure. If a pastor is resisting accountability, this is a danger sign.
4. Although many pastors are having moral failures, the success rate for rehabilitating these fallen pastors is poor. Fallen pastors are not often fully returned to full-time ministry because of the pastor's resistance to temporarily stepping away from ministry, refusal to submit to accountability measures and insistence on hurrying through the restoration process.
5. Restoration to position should never be guaranteed for a fallen pastor. Restoration of the pastor's marriage and their relationship to God should be the priority.

6. A team approach to pastoral restoration is the most effective. It also helps if the church elders can include help from someone outside their church body such as District officials, a psychologist or a pastoral restoration specialist.

7. District interventions can be greatly successful, especially before a pastor has had a moral failure or has left ministry. Districts have had success decreasing pastoral attrition and moral failures by incorporating a cohort system and implementing trainings on conflict management. Districts can also assist pastors and churches by having a trained team to intervene and mediate in high conflict situations. Measures to prevent a pastoral moral failure are much more successful than attempts to restore a pastor after a moral failure has already occurred.

Interviews #7-9

In order to better understand the problem of pastoral attrition, the researcher interviewed three professors that taught at North Central University in the pastoral department when the researcher graduated in 2000. The researcher had several classes with all three professors. "Professor One" taught Spiritual Formation and Systematic Theology. "Professor Two" taught Hermeneutics and Isaiah. "Professor Three" taught Hebrews and Homiletics. The researcher interviewed each professor separately, but asked each one the same questions. After each question below, the each professor's answers are recorded.

Researcher: I wanted to ask you your thoughts on pastoral attrition? Do you believe that attrition rates are rising and if so, why?

Professor One: I do think that a lot of the problem is related to generational differences. I believe we should be making another big shift in how we do church, but this isn't happening as quickly as it should. On a whole other note,

though, I think we have always had people start out in ministry who did not make it. In fact, I would be interested in seeing some long-term stats. It seems to me that the Lord allows for some tough tests early on in ministry to see who is going to stand and fulfill their call.

Professor Two: Here's my take on ministry drop out: Ministry (clergy) has a lot in common with other care-giving professions (teacher, nurse, etc.). It attracts people who have suffered childhood trauma and pain, who look for a career that will enable them to help others deal with the same sort of pain. Many will go into that career saying something like, "I just want to love/care for people." Buried in this statement is the assumption "...so they will love/care for me. Yep, that's right. People often enter care giving professions as a way of meeting needs in their own lives, particularly the lack of care or love. Sad to say, it doesn't work that way. All of those jobs are high stress. They are emotionally and spiritually draining. If someone is still dealing with their own pain and now has to deal with the pain of all those around them, the job can become overwhelming. People simply wind up drowning in their own despair. Of all the caregiving professions, ministry typically pays the least. That adds another factor in, known as status-tension, because ministers are expected to dress well and mingle with community leaders who make many times their salaries.

Professor Three: Why do so many pastors quit? Too many brand new pastors leave seminary with only three years' worth of sermons. When these sermons "run out," they simply move to another location. This may mean a lot of moving. I also believe a lot of the ones that drop out were not really called. Another reason that I believe pastors quit the ministry is that our American concept of pastoral ministry is fundamentally wrong. We "hire" a professional Christian, the pastor, to do the work of the ministry for the congregation. We hire one "green beret" to fight our Christian battles for us. What we should be doing is hiring a pastor to train the congregation to do the work on the ministry. A team of Green Beret Christians. If they are really called to long term pastoral ministry, the pastor's gifts should reflect that. There are a variety of gifts and callings and not all are intended by God for pastoral ministry.

Researcher: What do you wish colleges and seminaries would add/subtract to a pastor's training?

Professor One: I am not sure Bible colleges/seminaries have done well at transmitting a theology of suffering. We need to do a better job of teaching how to conform to the concept of "picking up our cross daily and following him."

Professor Two: I wish we did more vocational discernment and counseling in our colleges. Many of those headed for ministry are not emotionally qualified—and we do not tell them in advance that they aren't or even describe the rigors of the job. Seminaries typically handle this better, but AGTS (The Assemblies of God Theological Seminary) lags behind even here. One of the ways seminaries prepare people for ministry is requiring a certain number of units of clinical experience, called CPE (Clinical Pastoral Experience). It is ministry in a therapeutic

environment. The student ministers to others (hospitals, prisons, nursing homes, etc.), then writes up reports called verbatims. These reports are circulated and discussed within the learning group led by a certified CPE supervisor. They often expose a candidates vulnerabilities, giving that person a chance to deal with them. The experience also includes individual conversations with the CPE supervisor. In short, it is a guided ministry experience with built in counseling. We need to add this to our programs desperately, in my opinion. And we need to make sure we have certified CPE instructors, preferably from people outside our own denomination (so denominational politics won't play a part either for or against a candidate.) There are lots of ways to serve God other than formal/vocational ministry. We need to say that louder as a denomination. We need to explain what ministry is and what the options are.

Professor Three: There is far too much pressure on most Bible Colleges to bring in ANY student to the pastoral program, regardless of their SAT score, if they remotely feel a calling. I feel that is especially true in the Assemblies of God. I believe that the pastors who have had moral failures fell because they rejected accountability, and perhaps were ill prepared by their seminary for the job. Their expectations of ministry did not at all match the reality. I have a theory that so many pastors are choosing "non-denominational" rather than traditional church positions because they do not want to be held accountable to district and national leadership. I much prefer the processes I have seen in the Methodist and Episcopal denominations. They utilize a lot of discernment and character development when training pastors. Rather than assume that anyone who says "I feel a call" is really called, Methodists and Episcopalians and (maybe others) have a long process of congregational and higher level discernment involving bishops or superintendents, to see whether others recognize that both the call and a fitness for pastoral ministry. Mentorship is also key. One of the best school programs I have seen for preparing pastors is at Denver Seminary. Theirs is a longer process, a journey, working to develop the whole person.

Key Findings From Interviews 6-9, With NCU Pastoral Department Professors

1. Bible Colleges could do a better job training prospective pastors to expect suffering in their ministries. Pastoral candidates need realistic expectations about vocational ministry.
2. There should be a more intensive process, perhaps involving mental health checks and "discernment" by district leadership to ascertain if a candidate is actually called to pastoral ministry. A candidate should be made aware of other ministry options, such as

hospital chaplain or military chaplain, rather than only training candidates for a senior leader position.

3. Accountability is essential initially as the pastor prepares to enter ministry. Ongoing accountability is equally important to prevent pastoral moral failures.

CHAPTER SIX: ANALYSIS, EVALUATION, AND CONCLUSIONS

The researcher compared the findings from Scripture research, literature review, and qualitative and quantitative research. The researcher looked for common findings, risk factors and areas of dissonance. Based on the conclusions of the study, the researcher made recommendations to address the problem of AG pastoral attrition. The researcher also identified areas that would benefit from further research.

Key Findings From Research

Finding #1- The national rate of pastoral attrition is rising. Four out of five new pastors will drop out before their fifth year of ministry. Three pastors leave ministry in North America every day. This rising pastoral dropout rate is being described as "alarming" and a "crisis."

Finding #2- The AG rate of pastoral attrition is not as pronounced as the national average across denominations. The reasons for this are undetermined. However, the total number of AG pastors did start to steadily drop in 2016. The Minnesota District of the AG is actually increasing in its number of pastors. The researcher theorizes that the Minnesota District benefits from having North Central University in the state, continually graduating new pastors, many of whom stay in their district.

Finding #3- The number of pastors being “dismissed” in the AG has not risen significantly in the past twenty years. The rate of pastors being fired from local AG churches is undetermined. Across denominations, the rate of pastors being fired from their church positions is rising. The reasons for the increase in pastors being terminated include the pastor’s lack of administrative skills, the pastor’s moral failure, or a mismatch between the expectations of the church and the expectations of the pastor for the position.

Finding #4- In the AG, the rate of pastors who are divorced each year has risen slightly from an average 1.2 to 1.6. One of the reasons for this increase could be that in 2008, the AG began allowing divorced pastors to continue in ministry if they met certain criteria. The researcher is unsure why the AG ministerial divorce rate seems to be lower than the national ministerial divorce rate. One factor could be the Assemblies of God’s strict conservative views regarding marriage and divorce. The AG holds to the position that marriage is for life and that divorce, except in rare cases of adultery, is a sin. Only recently has the AG begun to allow remarried ministers to remain in ministry, but only in cases when their former spouse (not the minister) committed adultery. Before this landmark decision at the General Council Assembly of 2008, any divorced minister had to remain single and celibate for life in order to stay ordained. Nationally, across denominations, pastors rank third for divorces among professionals in the United States.

Finding #5- The number of students attending AG Bible colleges and seminaries has dropped in the last five years. The reasons for this are unknown. It is possible that more students are seeking online options, and most AG colleges encourage on campus learning. These lower college enrollment numbers could be a contributing factor to AG

pastoral attrition, since most AG pastors are hired from its Bible colleges. Some AG pastors are hired internally by their local church. Staff pastors that were hired from within may have had no formal ministry training. The benefits for a church hiring from within their own congregation instead of from a Bible college are many. An “insider” staff person understands the culture and inner workings of that church. They may already know the volunteer teams. Also, someone who already lives locally may be less likely to move away.

However, the drawbacks of a church hiring from within are worth considering. First of all, a local AG church can hire any staff minister they wish, including someone with no degree or training. Secondly, it does happen that these untrained and unordained ministers may make it up into the senior pastor position. This lack of training may raise that pastor’s risk of quitting vocational ministry if they do not have the knowledge or skills to handle conflict, counsel families in crisis, or teach Scripture and doctrine. Several AG Districts have responded to this possibility by offering a certification through the District, to “fast track” a pastor towards licensing or ordination and train pastors “on the job.” This helps to connect ministers to the resources that the district offers, and to train the pastor in Scripture, AG doctrine and district policies. Because more churches are hiring untrained staff from within, AG districts are continually expanding these trainings. Not all districts currently offer this option.

Finding #6- When an AG pastor makes the decision to leave one ministry position for another, financial concerns have little impact on that decision. The researcher thought that perhaps the weight of seminary student loans, combined with the low average salary of a pastor, might cause some pastors to leave vocational ministry. A significant factor in

an AG pastor's decision to leave a church ministry for another church ministry is the pastor's desire to find a "better fit" for their talents. Most AG pastors want more to do in their area of gifting, not less. One-fourth of pastors surveyed experienced grief and trauma when they left one pastorate to go to another. Three-fourths of pastors did not report grief and trauma when they leave a church. The researcher was most surprised by the findings of the section "What describes your feelings about leaving your last position?" The researcher expected to see many more respondents choose the answer, "Grieving a loss." Instead the vast majority of respondents chose, "Excited for what was next."

Finding #7- The majority of AG ministers in the surveys did not see their denominational District leadership as a resource if they were experiencing burnout or severe conflict. Only two of the male ministers said that they would reach out to their denominational leadership in a crisis. Not one of the seventeen women leaders who responded to the survey said that they would contact their District leadership for help in a personal or church ministry crisis.

Finding #8- One-fifth of pastors surveyed said that their church was "definitely emotionally unhealthy." Nearly 20 percent of pastors did not feel comfortable sharing any personal struggles with their congregations. The experts agreed in the interviews that emotional health and maturity are essential to longevity in ministry. They also believed that emotional health is often not a common consideration in pastoral training.

A pastor's lack of emotional health and maturity can do great damage to their church and their coworkers. Emotionally unhealthy pastors can lead their church

members towards being emotionally unhealthy. Emotionally unhealthy pastors resist accountability, because of their need to be in control.

Finding #9- Bible colleges and seminaries may not be teaching realistic expectations for the modern pastoral role. Pastors may not be properly equipped with necessary business and conflict management skills or a Biblical perspective on suffering. The examples of Paul and Moses show that suffering is to be expected in our Christian walk as well as in ministry. The experts interviewed for this study felt that Bible college students need more training on mental and emotional health and boundaries.

Finding #10- It is crucial for a pastor's marriage to be healthy. If the pastor's marriage becomes distant, that pastor will be at higher risk for a moral failure. If a moral failure occurs, that pastor's spouse and children will need help and support. The literature in chapter 3 and the experts interviewed in chapter 5 fully agreed on the importance of a pastor's healthy marriage and family to a pastor's longevity in ministry. It should be noted that there are still not many active Assemblies of God pastors that have been divorced, and even fewer pastors that have been divorced and remarried. Just because a pastor has stayed married, does not automatically mean that the marriage is healthy.

Finding #11- Full-time ministry can be highly stressful. Both Moses and Paul endured enormous stress during the courses of their ministries. Moses endured conflict within his own family, jealousy, and rejection of his leadership. Paul wrote several of his letters trying to lead churches through doctrinal disputes and power struggles. The research reviewed in chapter 3 found that pastors are at the same high stress level as other helping professions, such as social work, nursing, and trauma counseling. "Professor 3"

affirmed this finding in the interview in chapter 5 adding, “Pastors are under enormous stress, as much as other professionals.” Ministers in the survey for this study rated their stress level as quite high, when working in full-time ministry. At times, conflicts can be poorly handled. One-third of pastors surveyed for this study listed persistent conflict as a major stressor. Pastors can become traumatized and depressed from the stress and conflicts in ministry. Pastors may need professional help and support to recover from these experiences. Pastors are at risk of using negative coping mechanisms such as substances or risky behaviors to manage stress.

Finding #12-Pastors that leave ministry entirely may feel tremendous guilt. One respondent to the surveys in chapter 5 endured condemnation from fellow ministers when he left vocational ministry. Bardiau’s research in chapter 3 found that Pentecostal pastors were much more likely to feel tremendous guilt and shame if they left ministry. Pentecostal pastors, such as AG pastors, are more likely to feel a divine “calling” to ministry, and therefore suffer “significantly more pain” when leaving ministry. These pastors may feel that they failed and betrayed God. Peer attitudes can reinforce these feeling of guilt and failure.

Finding #13- There are several skills that are beneficial to a pastor in ministry. Paul and Moses both show the importance of a quality education, preaching and teaching skills, conflict management strategies, organizational abilities, an endurance mindset and mentorship. These skills are also recommended by the experts and the literature for contemporary ministers.

Risk Factors in Pastoral Attrition

Risk Factor #1- One of the biggest risk factors for pastoral attrition is the minister's own lack of emotional health and immaturity. A pastor that does not understand their own weaknesses, needs, and "dark side" is at higher risk of leaving the ministry. A pastor's lack of emotional health can "trickle down" affecting the emotional and spiritual well-being of the entire church body. Pastors with poor emotional health tend to also have poor intrapersonal skills. These pastors may try to use the church to have their own needs met. This usually leads to conflict, frustration, and possibly the end of that pastor's ministry.

Risk Factor #2- Some of the experts and several pastors interviewed for this project identified loneliness and isolation as being key risk factors for pastoral attrition. The research and literature from chapter 3 agree with this finding. Pastors report having no one that can understand what they are going through. Many ministers do not feel that they can go to their denominational leadership for help. Isolation leads to feelings of burnout. Isolated pastors lack the resources that can be gained through a denominational network and by working with a group of peers.

Risk Factor #3- Ministers increase their risk of dropping out of ministry if they engage in negative coping mechanisms to manage stress. These negative coping mechanisms can include alcohol, legal or illegal drugs, pornography, over-eating, and sexual activity outside of their marriage. These risks can be mitigated through

accountability and learning to manage stress in more positive ways, such as exercise, healthy relationships, professional counseling or planned time away.

Risk Factor #4- Lack of accountability increases the risk that the pastor will drop out of ministry. Every minister needs to be held accountable as to the health of their marriage, their family life, their coping mechanisms, their management of church finances and their close relationships. Any minister that exhibits a strong resistance to accountability, or habitually engages in secretive “sneaking” behaviors, or often tells “mistruths” or partial truths is at higher risk of having a moral failure. Pastors that have a moral failure usually leave ministry. They also have a low chance of being rehabilitated and returned to ministry. The experts in this study agree that prevention is much more effective than restoration.

Risk Factor #5- Both pastoral restoration specialists, as well as the studies in chapter 3 identified a poor marriage as a risk factor in pastoral attrition. In almost every case of a pastor having a sexual affair, “the marriage was already in tough shape.” A pastor is at risk of dropping out of ministry if the pastor and their spouse are each “living different lives.” This marital distance is marked by lack of communication, such as in interview 3, when Milo decided not to tell his wife the truth about the verbal abuse in the church office. A minister can also harm their marriage by having no boundaries between church and home, refusing to take days off or go on vacations. The marriage may also fail due to neglect of the spouse and children, engaging in secretive behavior, lack of accountability or engaging in negative coping mechanisms to manage stress. If the

marriage fails, most ministers will not continue on in ministry, whether voluntarily or involuntarily.

Risk Factor #6- Moral failure is a key factor in pastoral attrition. In chapter four of this thesis, one study reported that, “Almost 12 percent of pastors reported having committed adultery...twenty-three percent of pastors admitted that after entering ministry they had done something sexually inappropriate with someone who was not their spouse.”²⁷³ Another study found that, “Thirty-seven percent of ministers have been involved in inappropriate behavior with someone who works in the church.”²⁷⁴ In the interview with pastoral restoration expert “Smith” in chapter 5, the researcher asked him if he got a lot of calls to restore fallen pastors. He answered, “Oh yes. We have hundreds and hundreds of calls all the time. We get calls from pastors, churches, spouses... We stay very busy.” He also stated that the number of pastors being restored after a moral failure was minimal. Restoration specialist “Daniels” agreed that most pastors do not make it back into vocational ministry. This is because of the pastor’s refusal to accept responsibility for what they have done, or to submit to ongoing accountability. Most fallen pastors also resist putting in the necessary hard work on their own character and marriage over time. The work of restoration cannot be rushed. Restoration of the pastor to God and their spouse is much more important than the restoration of the pastor to a position. The AG keeps no official records on how many pastors are dismissed for having a moral failure. The record simply says “dismissed,” which could be for a moral

²⁷³ Armstrong, *Can a Fallen Pastor Be Restored?* 19.

²⁷⁴ Schaumburg, *False Intimacy*, 180.

failure or for “heretical” teaching. The researcher was only able to find two AG pastors in the United States that were restored to full-time ministry after a public moral failure.

Risk Factor #7- Inadequate training from Bible colleges and seminaries increases the risk that a pastor will drop out of ministry. The experts interviewed for this project indicated that poor training of prospective pastors creates unrealistic expectations. Studies in this project show that pastors are not receiving training for emotional health, conflict resolution, or boundaries. Also, pastors are usually unprepared to deal with the business side of managing a congregation, which can be compared to overseeing a company (managing finances, purchases, hiring and firing, volunteer organization and training and more). Pastoral candidates need a combination of education and experiences. Mentorship is also key to success. Pastors should be mentored and also mentor someone else, as seen in the examples of Paul and Moses. Paul was mentored by Gamaliel and mentored Timothy. Moses learned delegation from his father-in-law, and trained in Joshua as his replacement.

Risk Factor #8- Pastors that have been involuntarily terminated are at risk of leaving ministry. Bardiau’s study found that there is an increase in pastors being fired from their church positions. The majority of these pastors did not continue on in vocational ministry. The number of pastors being fired yearly from individual churches in the AG is not known.

Recommendations

Recommendation #1- Ministers and churches would benefit from more targeted and proactive interventions from their denominational leadership. The researcher advises

implementing a cohort model, much like the one pioneered in the Washington District of the AG. Pastors need the support of their peers and supervisors through regular cohort meetings. The District leaders should implement ongoing emotional and mental health training for their ministers. These interventions directly counteract the pastoral attrition risk factors of loneliness, isolation, lack of emotional health, and lack of accountability. Districts should also have a qualified team of conflict arbitrators who can negotiate for the pastors and churches through rough periods. These arbitrators can demonstrate and teach conflict management skills which may be lacking for the pastor or the church leaders. In the interview with Detrick, he states, “One of the most important safeguards we have implemented for our district is a Code of Ethics for our pastors and for each church. This is all about how we will treat one another. The elders and the conflict mediators make sure that the code of ethics is being followed.” The researcher recommends that each district look into implementing a code of ethics between pastors and their churches.

These interventions by the District may help to change the perception, especially by women ministers, that the District is not available, willing, or effective as a resource for struggling ministers. Assemblies of God Districts must seek to understand how their ministers view their District leaders. Districts must also help their ministers understand all of the resources that are available to them.

Recommendation #2- The researcher recommends changes to AG Bible college and seminary training. In addition to the standard courses on preaching, Bible study and theology, training is needed in business administration, volunteer recruitment and management, conflict resolution, boundaries, and emotional health. The researcher

recommends including a psychological evaluation process for prospective pastors similar to what is currently done in other denominational seminaries. The researcher would like to observe the process at Denver Seminary. Assemblies of God Bible colleges and seminaries also need a more defined process to identify each student's gifts and interests. Students need to be aware of all the ways that they could serve the church other than pastoral ministry. One of the most important changes could be assigning a mentor to each student. This mentor could help the student foster a more realistic picture of everyday life as a minister. Both Moses and Paul learned ministry through a balance of education and experience. A pastoral candidate should have a well-rounded training that includes academics and experience. The goal would be for new ministers to enter the field with more realistic expectations.

Recommendation #3- The church and the pastor need to have strong boundaries and accountability in place before any scandals or accusations occur, as part of their normal operating structure. This would include background checks for all potential pastors, and doing due diligence in best practices for pastoral counseling, and workplace conduct. The church should support the pastor's home life, marriage and outside hobbies. The church should have accountability measures in place to watch for danger signs in their pastor such as habitual overworking, sudden behavior or personality changes, too much time spent in isolation, inappropriate behavior towards someone of the opposite sex, sneaking around or "stretching" the truth. The church should be clear on the rules and open to confronting one another in love.

Recommendation #4- Based on the research compiled for this project, it is possible to restore a fallen pastor. The researcher advises churches and denominations to have a procedure in place to restore fallen pastors. The researcher leans heavily towards the consensus “Supervised Restoration” approach, as explained in chapter 3. There does not seem to be a solid Biblical precedent for “no hope of restoration to position” if we look at the case studies of David, Abraham and John Mark. Therefore, the “Supervised Restoration,” approach, which boasts a minimal success rating, is still the best of any current option available.

Recommendation #5- Since involuntary termination is a key risk factor in pastoral attrition, Bardiau’s study greatly encouraged churches to try any available strategies before considering firing their pastor. The church could try to further the pastor’s education, allow for specific trainings, send the pastor to conferences or help their pastor find a mentor. Terminating a pastor should be the church’s last resort after all other options are exhausted.

Recommendation #6- Developing strong, healthy boundaries is absolutely essential for pastors hoping to stay in ministry long term. Every pastor needs to be well aware of and honor their own limits, physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually. Pastors must prioritize their relationship with Christ, their marriage, their family, their health, the spiritual disciplines, and observing Sabbath rest. Guards must be up against manipulation, bitterness, unforgiveness, workaholism, unhealthy coping mechanisms, and marriage neglect. Professional counseling can be a great help to ministers in understanding proper boundaries. Identity, purpose and direction must come from the

Father, not the demands of congregants or the position title. A minister can and should be driven by God's purpose for their lives, not controlled by others' expectations.

Denominations and congregations need to implement more holistic training on healthy boundaries at the seminary level. Interventions can also be done when a pastor is in the middle of a ministry crisis. Pastors also need ongoing training and support long after seminary. The key is to intervene with a variety of methods, not an either/or. It is possible to implement boundaries and make a positive change no matter what age the minister is or how long they have been in ministry.

Limitations of the Study

The researcher chose not to include any of the data from 2020-2021. Due to the Covid-19 epidemic, the 2020-2021 pastoral attrition rates and Bible college enrollment numbers may be aberrant. The researcher felt that the data was not representative of a trend and would skew the results. The researcher worked with the data up to and through the year 2019.

Most of the pastors interviewed and surveyed for this paper were in full time vocational ministry. Therefore, the researcher discovered risk factors for why a minister would *consider* leaving the ministry, as opposed to why they already left. Risk factors were uncovered as to why a minister might leave one pastoral position for another, rather than why a pastor would choose to leave ministry as a whole. It would have been helpful to interview more pastors that left ministry entirely, to understand their reasons for leaving.

The research was also limited to only one denomination, and focused on one Bible college, in one region, in one span of time. It is possible that the results would be much different at a different AG Bible college at another time.

For Further Study

It is unknown if pastoral attrition is greater in cities versus rural areas. Further study could be done on which regions of the country have the highest pastoral attrition rates. The researcher does not know how the pastoral attrition rate in the United States compares to that of other countries.

One of the AG professors who was interviewed for this project mentioned that he preferred the training methods for new pastors that are being done in Methodist and Episcopalian seminaries. He especially recommended Denver Seminary as an example of a seminary that is training its pastors well. What this professor liked about these other schools' approach to training ministers was their focus on mental and emotional health, including psychological screenings, gifts assessments, and conflict management training. More research could be done on what other denominations are doing in their colleges and seminaries to train their pastors.

Lucy Bardiau theorized that Pentecostal denominations have higher rates of pastoral attrition, and that these denominations hide this attrition. This does not seem to be the case for the Assemblies of God in the United States. More research needs to be done as to why the AG rate of pastoral attrition seems to be lower than the national average.

CHAPTER SEVEN: PERSONAL REFLECTIONS

Insights Gained From Research

Insight #1- There is hope for restoring fallen pastors. Going into this project, the researcher favored a more “one and done” approach to pastoral restoration. The researcher believed that it was not possible or Biblical to restore a fallen pastor to any area of ministry. Surprisingly, the researcher has changed their opinion, mainly based on reflection and study of the Scriptures. The situations vary greatly from pastor to pastor and from case to case. The researcher was not able to “explain away” the powerful restorations of Peter, John Mark, David and Abraham. The researcher has concluded that each ministerial failure should be viewed on a case by case basis, with restoration of the person or persons involved as the chief goal. Based on the Scriptures, there is no basis to automatically and categorically forbid a “restored” pastor from returning to pastoral ministry. It is incredibly difficult for a fallen pastor to regain trust and respect, but it is not impossible.

Insight #2- Emotional health is extremely important to pastoral longevity. Emotional health and personal maturity are crucial, perhaps even more important than a pastor’s talent. Emotional health relies on the work of the Holy Spirit to take each pastor from where they are to where they need to be. This tough work cannot be “skipped,” nor

is emotional maturity automatic when someone becomes a Christian or a pastor. Emotional health takes time, hard work, and cooperation with the Holy Spirit. Too many pastors find the work of emotional health to be so difficult and even painful, that they give up before reaching emotional maturity. A pastor's level of personal maturity may be one of the most accurate predictors of pastoral longevity.

Insight #3- The researcher had incorrectly theorized that the AG pastoral attrition rates would mirror the national averages. In fact, AG pastoral attrition rates are far lower than the national average. Furthermore, the researcher discovered that the AG has been doing well at launching fully online education for prospective pastors. The NCU pastoral class of 2000 did far better than the national average, with at least 45 out of 60 (75 percent) still active in ministry after 20 years.

The problem of pastoral attrition, pastoral mental and physical health has been important to the researcher for a long time. The researcher's parents, grandparents and great-grandparents were pastors. The researcher saw firsthand some of the difficulties that pastors face, such as persistent conflict, loneliness, stress, lack of support, and enmeshment. The researcher may have gone into this project with a more cynical attitude towards trends in pastoral attrition. This whole journey has given the researcher hope that better pastoral longevity, training and support are possible, and in some districts, great strides are already being made. In short, some things are being done well. The situation of pastoral attrition is challenging, but not impossible.

Strengths and Weaknesses of the Project Design and Implementation

The two Bible characters, Moses and Paul, provided a wealth of information on risk factors, the needed balance between experience and education, and the importance of mentorship. Another strength of this research was the abundance of solid information available for the literature review. The researcher was able to find numerous studies and statistics on pastoral attrition, pastoral moral failure and risk factors for pastoral attrition. Another strength was the amount of readily accessible raw data provided by the General Council of the AG. This careful tracking provided a clear picture of the situation in the AG, for pastoral attrition, divorce, dismissals and college enrollment. The strengths of the surveys were anonymity, a lot of options to choose from, and space to write about that person's unique experience.

The strongest part of this study was the interviews. The researcher gathered a wealth of information, much of it new to the researcher. The interviews with Bible college professors highlighted what may be missing in pastoral training and programming. The pastoral counselors made clear the enormity of the problem of pastoral moral failure, as well as the difficulties in restoring fallen ministers. The interview with the Washington District emotional health specialist introduced the researcher to new methods of supporting pastors. There are successful strategies that Districts can implement such as pastoral cohorts, conflict intervention teams and emotional training for pastors. The researcher learned the most from interviewing the experts for this project.

There were definite weaknesses in the research design and implementation. The researcher found it somewhat difficult to find the pastors that left ministry. The

Assemblies of God keeps careful records of all of its active ministers, but does not keep any contact information for ministers who have left the AG. The pastors that came to the sectional meetings and conferences were all actively employed in ministry. The researcher's former classmates from NCU that dropped out of ministry were tough to track down. This may be because these former pastors no longer share the same friends and interests as the researcher. It could also be that these former pastors were not interested in being found or interviewed. Many more pastors who stayed in ministry responded. The researcher would have liked to have had a much larger sample to survey and interview of former pastors that left ministry.

Another weakness of the study was the fact that a lot of the surveys were passed out at pastoral trainings and District events. Although the surveys were completely anonymous, perhaps the pastors who filled them out at conferences and trainings still felt pressure to "keep it positive" and not share the darker details because they were at a District event or because of who was sitting next to them. It is possible that pastors that filled out the survey in the privacy of their own home were able to be more honest. Also the pastors who filled out the surveys at home had more time to think about their responses before mailing the survey back to the researcher. The surveys were immediately collected at each of the conferences giving no time for deeper thought.

Although the researcher read materials on pastoral restoration, it would have been helpful for the researcher to interview one of the 2000 NCU graduates or another AG minister that had a moral failure and yet was restored to active ministry. The interviews and literature relied heavily on the perspective of the restoration counselors, not the fallen

pastors. Hearing about the restoration process first-hand from a restored pastor would have been helpful.

Suggested Modifications for Improvement

First of all, the researcher would like to garner more information from former pastors that have left ministry. In order to do this, the researcher would need to locate these former pastors. One idea would be to look for a “Former Pastors” Facebook site, “Reddit” forum or other social media page. If none already exists, then one would need to be created. Anonymous surveys on a Reddit site would probably bring in many more surveys from former pastors than ministerial training events or mass emails.

Secondly, more research should be done as to why women ministers were less likely to go to denominational leadership for help or to see their leaders as effective in conflict management. The women ministers in this study did not seem to feel as supported by their District and church leadership as their male counterparts. A survey could be specifically designed for women ministers. The researcher wants to hear the unique perspective of these women and learn what support they would like to receive from their district leadership.

Thirdly, the researcher would like to hear from older pastors about what factors or traits may have contributed to their longevity in ministry. What are their perceived reasons for staying in vocational ministry so long? What were their reasons that they did not quit?

Lastly, the researcher is curious as to what specific strategies and curriculum that Denver Seminary is using in their ministry training program. How effective have these

ministerial programs been? What could be done by the AG to increase their seminary enrollment?

Spiritual Formation

This whole project has fostered a new perspective on the restorative, gracious and faithful nature of God. This brings incredible hope to understand that God's grace and compassion are available for pastors too. In chapter two, Barnabas took a chance on a newly converted Paul, after Paul's terrible history of persecuting Christians. When Paul was nearing the end of his life, Paul decided to give John Mark a second chance. The quote found in chapter 3 said it well, "Grace that does not include pastors isn't really grace at all." Not only does God forgive and restore, the best days of ministry may yet be ahead, not in the past. Throughout this project, the researcher has gained a better understanding of the grace and the faithfulness of God.

Academic Growth

Even though the researcher had been passionate about pastoral mental and emotional health for quite some time, the researcher was overwhelmed at the beginning of this project, having never undertaken a research paper of this size before. It helped that the project was broken into smaller pieces and deadlines. With each new section, the researcher's confidence grew a bit. Passion is wonderful, but passion with knowledge and confidence is better. The researcher's academic advisor was also very encouraging. The researcher learned a lot about the study of Scripture, about finding credible sources, and about the importance of excellence and thoroughness in research. Along the way, the academic pursuit itself became an act of worship.

Conclusion

The researcher was deeply affected by the interview with former classmate “Milo,” (Student 2). Milo had been at the top of the class for preaching and teaching. He and his wife were outgoing and excited to graduate and begin in ministry. Milo was always gifted, optimistic and confident. It was shocking to see him so different. The hurt and pain in his voice made his story hard to listen to.

The researcher wonders how Milo’s story could have been different. What if Milo had had training in Bible college on successful conflict management? What if Milo could have had a cohort to talk to, like the ministerial support cohorts in the Washington District? If Milo had been trained in emotional health, would he have spotted the signs of an unhealthy church and a narcissist senior pastor? Could Milo have left that position sooner and avoided having a nervous breakdown? What if Milo’s District officials had been more open to listening to his concerns? What if there had been a conflict management team from Milo’s district that could have gone in to intervene and negotiate a solution? What if Milo’s senior pastor had been subject to accountability from the District or from the church’s elder board that would have noticed the warning signs that the pastor was engaging in narcissistic abuse of staff members and embezzlement of church funds? If Milo had been able to receive immediate counseling and District support after leaving that church, would he and his wife still be in ministry today? The researcher believes that what happened to Milo could have been prevented or at least mitigated if some of the above steps had been taken. How many more “Milo’s” are on the edge of leaving ministry permanently? The researcher does not believe that all of the pastors who

leave ministry do so because they were never “called” to ministry. The researcher also believes that a great portion of pastoral attrition is preventable.

Milo is a human being. He was not a disposable commodity. He, and all other pastors serving in our churches need support, respect, as well as the proper resources and training. Pastors matter to Christ and therefore, pastors must matter to the church. Churches, Bible colleges and District officials should do all that it in their power, should employ any available strategies, to support their pastors. Cohort support and emotional health training are working to encourage pastoral longevity in the Washington District. Programs of teaching business strategies and conflict management skills to pastors seem to be effective in helping pastors thrive in today’s pastoral roles. It is an obligation to do our best to take care of pastors. Pastors are gifts to the church from God. Let us be good stewards of this gift.

APPENDIX A: NORTHWEST DISTRICT OF THE ASSEMBLY OF GOD
CODE OF ETHICS

NW Ministry Network Code of Ethics:

As a committed follower of Jesus Christ and a credentialed Assemblies of God minister, I pledge to live by the following principles in my relationships:

1. **With God:** The most important pursuit in my life is knowing God and living in a manner that pleases Him. I will diligently follow the disciplines necessary for spiritual health and growth. I commit myself to live according to God's purposes in my worship, discipleship, fellowship, service and evangelism.
2. **With Myself:** I will be true to my calling and be honest with myself. I will make myself accountable to others and submit to the authorities over me. I will devote myself to the faithful proclamation of God's Word. With God's help, I will never bring reproach upon the Name of Christ or His church because of improper relationships or impure motives. To the best of my ability I will keep myself morally pure, ethically clean, spiritually whole, intellectually stimulated and physically healthy.
3. **With My Family:** I will make my family's health a priority. I will serve my family, realizing that they are the most important people in my life. I will intentionally give them my best attention and time. I will not use my family as a dumping ground for my frustrations or cause them to think less of people because of what I tell them. To the best of my ability, I will set a good example of marriage and family life for my congregation and community.
4. **With My Church:** I will serve as a faithful shepherd in my area of ministry, providing spiritual care and biblical instruction. I will always speak the truth in love. I will lead as a servant of Christ, sharing the vision God has given me for effective ministry. I will be sensitive to the needs of others and develop the character and compassion of Jesus Christ. I will never lose the urgency to bring people to Him. I will keep confidences confidential and seek to earn the trust of those under my care by being a person of integrity. I will seek to protect the innocent, the infirm, children and the aged. I will report suspected or confirmed

cases of abuse, as the law requires. I will be sure all the business of the church is conducted in a legal and orderly manner.

5. **With Other Ministers:** I realize the need for a personal network of colleagues and friends to provide fellowship, accountability, support and counsel. I will always treat with respect those who precede and follow me in my ministerial assignments. I will not entertain or spread gossip about another minister or fellow staff member. I will not influence members from other congregations to join mine. I will not interfere in another congregation. I will be cooperative with those within the NWMN and seek to cooperate with other ministries that are faithful to God's Word as I have opportunity. I will seek to learn from others and willingly share my gifts with those who could benefit from my training and experience. If I am serving as a staff pastor on a multi-staffed church, I will always be supportive and loyal to the entire team, especially the senior pastor (and if unable to do so, will graciously resign). If I am serving as a senior pastor, I will always strive to treat staff pastors under my leadership with respect, encouragement, and graciousness. When making ministry transitions, I will do my best to provide an atmosphere that guards the health of the church body and provides a healthy environment for those who follow me.

6. **With The NWMN:** I am an Assemblies of God minister. Among other things, I have received a credential, training, support, accountability and a place of ministry because of my association with the Assemblies of God. I will voluntarily cooperate with The NWMN and the General Council of the Assemblies of God. As I have opportunity, I will be supportive of and an active participant in my denomination at the local, sectional, district and national levels. I will seek to support our leadership and promote and support our ministries and mission throughout the world.

7. **With My Community:** As a Christian leader, I will live as a faithful representative of Jesus Christ, acting as salt and light to those around me. I will live a life above reproach, protecting the reputation of the church and the Christ I serve. As a member of a local community, I will be involved in those activities where my influence as a representative of Christ can help bring redemption to society, reconciliation to those who oppose each other, and enrichment to the church and social structure. As a good citizen, I will

respect my government, seek to obey the laws of the land in accordance with Scriptures, and encourage others to do so.

Signature Date

Print Name:

APPENDIX B: SURVEY FOR ASSEMBLY OF GOD PASTORS, DISTRIBUTED IN PERSON, OVER EMAIL AND THROUGH THE MAIL.

This survey is part of a research project for Trisha R. Peach's doctorate program through Bethel Seminary. The purpose of this survey is to collect data pertaining to the rate and causes of pastoral attrition. Thank you so much for your willingness to participate in this project. Your candor is appreciated. Know that your responses are completely anonymous. Your responses, the data gathered, and anything written comments may be used for the project. By filling out the survey, you are giving your consent to use the data gathered and to quote written answers in the paper (anonymously). Data will be used to determine the causes of and recommend solutions to the problem of pastoral attrition.

1. How long have you been in vocational ministry (serving every or almost every Sunday or midweek, leading a ministry), either paid or unpaid? (Choose one)

- A. Less than 5 years
- B. 5-15 years
- C. More than 15 years

2. Are you currently: (Choose One)

- A. A full time staff member?
- B. A part time staff member?
- C. An unpaid ministry leader?
- D. Not currently in ministry?

3. How many different ministry positions have you held during your lifetime, paid or unpaid, even if they were within the same church? (Choose one)

- A. Only 1 position
- B. 2 – 5 positions
- C. 6 or more positions

4. Are you male, female or prefer not to answer? _____

5. Thinking about your most recent ministry departure: which of these scenarios BEST describes your story of decision to leave that position? (Choose all that apply)

- A. Amicable, smooth transition agreed upon by the church and myself
 - B. Not my decision
 - C. A somewhat difficult transition
 - D. A traumatic experience
 - E. Other (please explain)
-

6. If you have voluntarily left one or more ministry positions, what was your MOST compelling reason to resign/leave? (Choose all that apply)

- A. Financial reasons. The ministry position did not pay enough to support me or my family. The benefits and/or retirement was unsatisfactory
- B. I felt unsatisfied and unchallenged
- C. I wanted a position that better fit my strengths, talents
- D. I no longer felt called to ministry
- E. I disliked certain parts of being a pastor: (i.e., preaching, teaching, recruiting etc.)
- F. Personal or family challenges, such as depression, illness or family crisis

G. Stressful and/or painful interactions with staff, board members, parents and/or my supervisor

H. Not applicable (have never left a position)

I. Other

7. Indicate how influential the following components were in your decision to voluntarily leave or resign from a position.					
Put an "X" by what BEST describes how much each factor influenced your decision to leave your position:	Extremely Influential	Moderately Influential	Somewhat Influential	Slightly Influential	Not at All
A. Financial reasons. The ministry position did not pay enough to support me or my family. The benefits and/or retirement was unsatisfactory.					
B. I felt unsatisfied and unchallenged					
C. I wanted a position that better fit my strengths, talents					
D. I no longer felt called to ministry					
E. I disliked certain parts of being a pastor: (e.g., preaching, teaching, recruiting, etc.)					
F. Personal challenges such as burnout, depression or illness					
G. Family challenges or crisis					
H. Stressful and/or painful interactions with staff, board members, parents and/or my supervisor					
Additional Comments:					

8. In the past 6 months, have you seriously considered leaving your current vocational ministry? (Choose one)

- A. I did not seriously consider leaving my ministry position.
- B. Once in awhile. But in all, I'm happy in my position.
- C. I sometimes consider leaving my current ministry position. I don't think this is where I will be in five years.
- D. I think about leaving my current position several times a week.
- E. I have decided to leave my current position of ministry.
- F. I am planning to leave vocational ministry entirely.

9. At your last ministry position, if you left voluntarily, at what point did you alert your church, supervisor of your intent to leave that position? (Choose one)

- A. 6 months to a year ahead of time, so we could prepare for the transition
- B. I gave one month's notice
- D. I gave 10-14 days' notice that I was leaving.
- E. I left without notice.
- F. Other _____
- G. N/A

10. Which answer best represents your mood in the weeks, months following your departure from your ministry position? (Choose all that apply)

- A. Relief that it was over.
- B. Excited to move on to the next chapter.
- C. Exhausted and in need of rest and recovery
- D. Grieving over the loss. Perhaps experiencing depression, confusion and withdrawal

E. N/A

F. Other _____

11. How would you describe the work environment when you left your last position?

(Choose all that apply _____)

A. Healthy, stable place to work.

B. Detached. Our staff did not argue, but we also rarely interacted.

C. Toxic. Gossip, arguing, power plays, mostly negative interactions

D. Highly Stressful. Stress that was nearly constant.

E. Other (please explain)

F. N/A

12. How has your current ministry affected you personally? (Choose one)

A. No effect, really

B. Serving in ministry has benefitted my physical and mental health.

C. Serving in ministry has negatively affected my physical and mental health.

D. Other: _____

13. How has serving in vocational ministry affected your family? (Choose all that apply)

A. No effect, really.

B. Our family has benefitted from my serving in ministry.

C. My spouse has been negatively affected by my occupation.

D. My children have been negatively affected by my occupation.

14. On a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being not stressed at all and 10 being unbearable stress, what would you rate your ministry stress level? _____

15. If you were to encounter difficulty in ministry, which of the following strategies would you try? (Choose all that apply)

A. Professional Counseling

B. Exercise

C. Sabbatical

D. Further education/training

E. Vacation

F. Asking for help from denominational leadership

16. Do you feel supported by the lead pastor, board and staff in your current ministry?

A. Definitely yes

B. Probably yes

C. Uncertain

D. Probably not

E. Definitely not

F. N/A

17. Do you believe high pastor turnover is a real problem, and if so, why?

18. What do you think the church could do better to support their pastors, leaders?

19. Are there any additional comments you would like to make regarding your experience with leaving a ministry position?"

Thank you for your contribution towards understanding and promoting pastors' longevity in ministry!

APPENDIX C: INFORMED CONSENT FORM FOR THESIS RESEARCH

In Partial Fulfillment of Requirements for Doctorate of Ministry Degree
Bethel University, St. Paul, MN

You are invited to participate in a study of pastoral attrition. The goal to learn key reasons why pastors leave vocational ministry and identify strategies for increasing retention of pastors. You were selected as a possible participant in this study because you attended an Assemblies of God Bible College (NCU) and/or served in full-time ministry.

If you decide to participate, I will include your quotes and/or stories in an open source document (which can be accessed by the public). I will use a pseudonym instead of using your real name. Any information obtained in connection with this study that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission. In any written reports or publications, no one will be identified or identifiable and only aggregate data will be presented.

Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your future relations with the Assemblies of God in any way. If you decide to participate, you are free to discontinue participation at any time.

This research project has been reviewed and approved in accordance with Bethel's Levels of Review for Research with Humans.
You will be offered a copy of this form to keep.

You are making a decision whether or not to participate. Your signature indicates that you have read the information provided above and have decided to participate. You may withdraw at any time without prejudice after signing this form should you choose to discontinue participation in this study.

Signature

Signature Date

APPENDIX D: SURVEY TWO, DISTRIBUTED
THROUGH SOCIAL MEDIA

This survey is part of a research project for Trisha R. Peach's doctorate program through Bethel Seminary. The purpose of this survey is to collect data pertaining to the rate and causes of pastoral attrition. Thank you so much for your willingness to participate in this project. Your candor is appreciated. Know that your responses are completely anonymous. Your responses, the data gathered, and anything written comments may be used for the project. By filling out the survey, you are giving your consent to use the data gathered and to quote written answers in the paper (anonymously). Data will be used to determine the causes of and recommend solutions to the problem of pastoral attrition.

1. What state or country do you reside in? _____

2. Do you feel connected at your church? Choose one:
 - A. It is a supportive family. I could share my struggles with my church.
 - B. We do not talk or interact much as a church. However, my church might help in a crisis.
 - C. I would not feel safe to share personal struggles with my church.
 - D. My church is definitely emotionally unhealthy.

3. In your opinion, is your church "emotionally healthy?" Choose one:
 - A. Yes. Our church focuses on grace and growing together. I feel supported and listened to.
 - B. It can be. We are trying to be more emotionally healthy. We still have issues to work through.
 - C. We have never even thought about emotional health as a church.
 - D. No. I don't feel supported or listened to. There is too much gossip, legalism etc.

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