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BETHEL THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY
BETHEL UNIVERSITY

A CASE STUDY OF LIMITATION AWARENESS CONCERNING CONVERGE
NORTH CENTRAL SENIOR PASTORS

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

BY
ADAM M. SIDLER
SHOREVIEW, MINNESOTA
MARCH 2023

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ABSTRACT

Considering the obstacles Senior Pastors face within their churches, “A Case Study of Limitation Awareness Concerning Converge North Central Senior Pastors” is a project to address the following research questions: (1) To what level are Converge North Central (CNC) Senior Pastors aware of their limitations and need for emotional wellness and mental health? (2) If aware, how are CNC Senior Pastors addressing their emotional wellness and mental health? There is plenty of research and material illuminating burnout amongst Senior Pastors in their lives and ministry context. However, little research points to the level of awareness Senior Pastors have regarding their current emotional wellness, mental health, and their limitations. This issue is paramount since Senior Pastors are the primary rudder used to steer a church’s understanding and pursuit of these areas. Thus, the intentional pursuit and level of emotional wellness and mental health awareness amongst Senior Pastors works to build a healthy foundation for their congregations, marriages, and families.

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CHAPTER ONE: LIMITATION AWARENESS CONCERNING CNC SENIOR PASTORS

This researcher, a Converge North Central (CNC) Senior Pastor, has experienced firsthand the challenge of leading a congregation prone to emotional and mental deterioration. A Senior Pastor, charged with the leadership of a church community and a church's presence and impact within the larger community the church inhabits, carries a substantial burden. If not addressed appropriately, that burden can lead to burnout, anxiety, depression, and the danger of suicide.

Traditionally, congregations and communities hold Pastors in high regard. Congregants are prone to place their Senior Pastor on a pedestal and assume a stature of spiritual fortitude and higher expectations.

Often, congregants expect their Senior Pastor to be beyond the reach of emotional unwellness and mental unhealthiness. Congregants can embrace the belief that anything short of emotional wellness and mental health is solely a spiritual issue in their own lives and that of their Pastors. For instance, suppose their Senior Pastor displays or discusses any semblance of emotional unwellness or mental unhealthiness. In that case, the immediate assumption is that they lack spiritual integrity, which then delegitimizes the Pastor's influence and effectiveness.

A Pastor is also prone to "assume a throne," either intentionally or unintentionally. Depending on their motivation for taking a throne stance, their awareness of emotional and mental deterioration can manifest in one of two ways. First, a Senior

Pastor can believe there is no place for being aware of or addressing their emotional wellness or mental health. They can think that if they are “spiritually sound,” they need not concern themselves with such things because those dangers won’t manifest. Second, a Senior Pastor may believe that the presence of emotional or mental deterioration delegitimizes and disqualifies them from leading a church.

The response then is for Senior Pastors to either ignore any evidence of burnout, anxiety, depression, and thoughts of suicide or to see the presence of these things as proof of their disqualification as Pastors. Either way, there often is an unwillingness amongst Senior Pastors to see emotional wellness and mental health as something to embrace or necessary, especially as they carry their own burdens and the burdens of the congregations and communities they lead.

Overview of the Project

This project addresses the lack of understanding of the degree to which CNC Senior Pastors practice the leadership skill of limitation awareness to prevent their emotional and mental deterioration.

Limitation awareness is the ability to understand one’s limits. A single individual cannot be all things for everyone all the time, for there remain, for all people, limitations. However, church culture often brews a concoction that leads Christians to believe that limitation is unacceptable. Without limitation awareness, however, one will push through despite their emotional and mental unhealthiness, leading to severe and damaging results that affect their lives and the lives of many around them. CNC Senior Pastors are no exception.

The first step in this research process is to address biblical definitions of humanity’s weakness as it relates to God’s strength. The apostle Paul speaks to the

weakness of the human condition in 2 Corinthians 4:7-11 by comparing humanity to a jar of clay. Paul then further digresses on the issue of humanity's weakness, in 2 Corinthians 12:9-10, by comparing it to the strength of God and how God's power intersects and works through the weakness of humanity.

The second step in this research process is to review literature that addresses the following issues: (1) What are the difficulties facing Senior Pastors today? (2) What are the emotional wellness and mental health needs Senior Pastors must address? (3) What are possible solutions to increase Senior Pastors' emotional wellness and mental health?

This researcher determines that for a Senior Pastor to live out emotional wellness and mental health, there must first be a foundation of limitation awareness. As such, this researcher sought literature highlighting the reality, and thus danger, of emotional and mental deterioration and literature that points to resources that would increase emotional wellness and mental health.

The third step in this research process is to create and conduct surveys specifically for participating CNC Senior Pastors. This researcher chose CNC Senior Pastors as a subgroup since this researcher is a CNC Senior Pastor themselves. This status gave this researcher access to a directory through the help and resource of CNC headquarters and staff. This researcher sent out a survey to all CNC Senior Pastors to determine three things: (1) At which level are CNC Senior Pastors aware of their limitations? (2) At what level are CNC Senior Pastors experiencing emotional wellness? (3) At what level are CNC Senior Pastors experiencing mental health? (4) Are CNC Senior Pastors aware of and pursuing resources to improve their overall emotional wellness and mental health?

After completing the initial surveys, this researcher then conducted one-on-one interviews with a much smaller sect of CNC Senior Pastors to flesh out their everyday relationship with their limitation awareness, emotional wellness, and mental health.

This research, in turn, provides the foundation and framework for developing and growing emotional wellness and mental health in Senior Pastors. This researcher has determined that a Senior Pastor's greatest challenge is to "resist the throne" they and their congregation place themselves on. To embrace one's weakness is counter-cultural but remains essential for any Christian, especially Senior Pastors and other ministry professionals. For ministry to be effective, they must learn to "become less" so that God can "become greater" (John 3:30).¹

An Example of Humanity's Limitations

Humankind has many limitations; some are more obvious than others. But as previously noted, churches and ministry professionals have adopted a western cultural mindset that leads Christians to believe limitations should be avoided at all costs. John Mark Comer, in his book *The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry*, gives a basic and beginning list of limitations that serve as a springboard for this research: (1) our bodies, (2) our minds, (3) our giftings, (4) our personalities and emotional wiring, (5) our families of origin, (6) our socioeconomic origins, (7) our education and careers, (8) our seasons of life and their responsibilities, (9) our eighty or so years of life ... if we're that blessed, and (10) God's call on our lives.²

¹ Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture citations are from *The Holy Bible, New International Version*, (Colorado Springs, CO: International Bible Society, 1984).

² Comer, 65-68.

Definition of Terms

Converge North Central (CNC) “is a movement of churches within the upper Midwest working to help people meet, know and follow Jesus. They do this by starting and strengthening churches together worldwide.”³

Senior Pastor refers to those individuals responsible for the leadership of their local church.

Limitation awareness points to the awareness the apostle Paul outlines in 2 Corinthians 12:5, 9-10. This awareness comes from the Greek word “astheneia,” meaning “incapacity, a state of weakness or limitation,” referring to all humanity's overall past, present, and future condition.⁴ Awareness is the active state of accepting one’s limitations in hopes of leaning into and relying on God’s incomparable power and ability.

Mental deterioration is the accelerated decline regarding what and how a person thinks about self, others, past, present, and future.

Emotional deterioration is the accelerated decline regarding how a person feels about self, others, past, present, and future.

Emotional wellness is the ability to handle the stresses and changes of life effectively.

³ Converge, “North-central,” accessed February 4, 2021, <https://www.converge.org/north-central>.

⁴ James A. Swanson, “ἀσθένεια, *astheneia*,” in *Dictionary of Biblical Languages: Greek, New Testament* (Logos Research, 1997), 819.

Mental health is “[the] state of being... that includes the biological, psychological or social factors which contribute to an individual's mental state and ability to function within the environment.”⁵

God's power and ability are the complete and indescribable ableness that God possesses and reveals in His Word, creation, and humanity.

Delimitations and Assumptions

The research is limited to CNC Senior Pastors within the Converge North Central district.

This research is also limited to Paul's description of weakness, and subsequently, God's ability through one's weakness, in 2 Corinthians 4:7-11 and 12:9-10. Furthermore, this research is limited to a literature review on the importance of emotional wellness and mental health related to limitation awareness and the pitfalls of ignoring these areas within a church leadership context.

Through Paul (the human author of 2 Corinthians), the Bible accurately describes the relationship between the human condition of limitation and that of God's infinite and accessible power and ability through weakness. As such, Senior Pastors can experience emotional wellness and mental health by accepting and leaning into the awareness of their limitations, relying primarily on God's ability and power.

Being a CNC Senior Pastor, this researcher has been adequately able to engage with other CNC Senior Pastors in a way that gives this research credibility and evaluative knowledge.

⁵ Laurie A. Manwell, Skye P. Barbic, Karen Roberts, Zachary Durisko, Cheolsoo Lee, Emma Ware, and Kwame McKenzie, “What is Mental Health? Evidence Towards a New Definition from a Mixed Methods Multidisciplinary International Survey.” *British Medical Journal Open* 5, no. 6 (2015): 1.

Subproblems

This researcher has sought to correctly interpret Paul's definition of weakness, first of his own life and, secondly, how it applies to Christians today. Within the context of this research, this researcher also has sought to understand Paul's definition of God's power, specifically related to humanity's weakness.

The literature explored in this research reveals the importance of emotional wellness and mental health, with significant attention given to identifying the pitfalls of ignoring these areas within a church leadership context.

This research has sought to increase limitation awareness to prevent future emotional and mental deterioration in the life of Senior Pastors through the following two research tools: (1) A research survey (a collection of data reflecting CNC Senior Pastor understanding and awareness of their emotional wellness and mental health), and (2) an interview guide (focusing on discovering how these areas have helped or, due to ignorance, hurt Senior Pastor's personal lives, families, and ministry contexts).

Setting of Project

Converge, formerly known as the Baptist General Conference, was a great revival product in the 19th century. It has since grown into a "movement of churches working to help people meet, know and follow Jesus."⁶ Within Converge, a fundamental focus remains on starting new churches worldwide while providing tangible associative support for churches under its organizational umbrella. Over the next ten years, Converge has a singular vision to start more churches worldwide, develop growing churches, increase

⁶ Converge, "About Converge," accessed April 2, 2021, <https://www.converge.org/about>.

cultural diversity, and increase collaboration between churches, ministry organizations, and ministry professionals.

Specifically, CNC serves as a regional branch of the overall Converge association. CNC encompasses Converge churches throughout the upper Midwest. The number of current CNC churches totals 208 at the time of this research. Within each of the 208 CNC churches sit Senior Pastors tasked with leading its congregants and ministries, experiencing both struggles and joys.

Importance of Project

To the Researcher

The Cat in the Hat, by Dr. Seuss, presents a perfect portrayal of a Senior Pastor when not aware of their limitations and thus not adopting the pursuit of their emotional wellness and mental health:

That is what the cat said
Then he fell on his head!
He came down with a bump
From up there on the ball.
And Sally and I,
We saw ALL the things fall.⁷

Regarding limitation awareness, the problem presented in this research is essential to this researcher because of their personal experience in each local church ministry context they have pastored. This researcher entered full-time local church ministry leadership nearly 20 years ago and was ill-equipped emotionally and mentally to handle the tremendous leadership complexities within a local church setting. Because of their significant lack of understanding and awareness of their limitation, this researcher

⁷ Theodor Seuss Geisel, *The Cat in the Hat* (Random House Books for Young Readers, 1957), 21.

unknowingly placed themselves in situations that brought personal harm to themselves and damage to those they pastored and led.

It has only been within the past six years that this researcher has come to understand and engage with developing their emotional wellness and mental health. This understanding has primarily come from this researcher's pursuit and acknowledgment of their personal limitations while creating a foundation and thus living within limitations to provide the healthiest leadership in their life, marriage, family, and local church setting.

To Immediate Ministry Context

According to recent Barna research, around "half of Pastors who lead churches of fewer than 100 (51%) or between 100 to 250 people (56%) have experienced depression."⁸ Given that the average size of the American church is relatively small, this statistic means that nearly half of the nation's Pastors have suffered from some level of emotional and mental deterioration. It's important to note that these numbers only represent those with some semblance of their limitations and deterioration. Barna's results cannot indicate how many Senior Pastors are truly experiencing emotional wellness and mental health decline but are either unaware or unwilling to admit it.

In many local churches today, those hurting the most emotionally and mentally are those called to lead them. Many Senior Pastors are progressively deteriorating due to the lack of limitation awareness and not growing in healthy ways emotionally and mentally. There is a growing lack of reliance on the all-surpassing power God provides in the lives of His followers. Emotional wellness and mental health provide a foundation

⁸ Barna, *The State of Pastors: How Today's Faith Leaders are Navigating Life and Leadership in an Age of Complexity* (Barna Group, 2017), 47.

that allows many other things to be set appropriately into place in the life of a church.

Pete Scazzero, in his book *The Emotionally Healthy Church*, lays out a chart that describes the stark difference between a church that embraces limitation awareness and one that does not.

Table 1: Two Types of Churches⁹

<i>Proud & Defensive</i>	<i>Broken & Vulnerable</i>
Guarded and protective about imperfections and flaws	Transparent and weak; Discloses oneself to appropriate others
Focuses on “positive,” strong, successful parts of oneself	Aware of the weak, needy, and limited parts of oneself; Freely admits failure
Highly “offendable”; Defensive	Approachable and open to input
Naturally focuses first on the flaws, mistakes, and sins of others	Aware of brokenness; Has compassion and slow to judge others
Gives opinion a lot, even when not asked	Slow to speak and quick to listen
Doesn’t get close to people	Open, soft, and curious about others
Keeps people from really seeing what is going on inside	Delights in showing vulnerability and weakness, so Christ’s power may be seen
Likes to control most situations	Can let go; Gives others opportunity to earn trust
Has to be right to feel strong and good	Understands that God’s strength reveals itself in admitting mistakes, weakness; Able to state “I was wrong”
Blames others	Takes responsibility for self and speaks mostly in “I,” not “you” or “they”
Often holds grudges and rarely asks forgiveness	Doesn’t hold people in debt; Able to ask others for forgiveness as needed
When offended, writes people off	When offended, asks questions to explore what happened
Denies, avoids, or withdraws from painful realities	Sees truth underneath surface, even when it hurts
Gives answers and explanations to those in pain, hoping to fix or change them	Present with people in pain; Comfortable with mystery and saying, “I don’t know”
Has to prove am right when wronged	Can let things go
Demanding	Asserts oneself respectfully and kindly
Highly self-conscious and concerned about how others perceive them	More aware of God and others than the impression one is making
Sees people as resources to be used for God	Sees people as gifts to be loved and enjoyed

⁹ P. Scazzero and W. Bird, *The Emotionally Healthy Church: A Strategy for Discipleship that Actually Changes Lives* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2015), 118.

Senior Pastors must first develop an awareness of their limitations and instead rely on God’s ability and power. They will thus grow emotionally and mentally healthy and become whole and ready leaders in their personal lives, families, and congregations, which, in turn, will lead their congregants and churches to do the same.

J.F Lehr, in his book *Clergy Burnout: Recovering from the 70-Hour Work Week—and Other Self-Defeating Practices*, points to an important tool created by Donald Hands (former Clinical Director of Wisconsin’s St. Barnabas Center), called the “Codependency Graph.” It helps to outline the trends and “pathology” of churches today.

Table 2: Codependency Graph¹⁰

Maximum Self-esteem, Self-care, Personal Identity					
Minimum Relationships with Others Negative/Conflicted, Painful/Neglected, Failure	<table border="1"> <tr> <td style="vertical-align: top;"> <p>II. Hidden Codependency (Small Percent)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Dominance, Control, Grandiosity - Enmeshment Phobia - “Hero” Role and Mentality - “I Matter, You Don’t Matter” </td> <td style="vertical-align: top;"> <p>I. Interdependence (Very Rare)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Honesty - Closeness/Healthy Boundaries - “I Matter, You Matter” </td> </tr> <tr> <td style="vertical-align: top;"> <p>III. Hopelessness (Fastest Growing)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Despair, Depression, Isolation - Active Addictions: substances, food, work, sex, religion - Suicide Potential (physical, emotional, spiritual) - Numbed Feelings - “Lost Child” Role and Mentality - “Nothing Matters” - “Nothing Ever Really Changes” </td> <td style="vertical-align: top;"> <p>IV. Codependency (Normative)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Submission - Martyr/Victim - Abandonment Phobia - Enmeshment - “You Matter, I Don’t Matter” </td> </tr> </table>	<p>II. Hidden Codependency (Small Percent)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Dominance, Control, Grandiosity - Enmeshment Phobia - “Hero” Role and Mentality - “I Matter, You Don’t Matter” 	<p>I. Interdependence (Very Rare)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Honesty - Closeness/Healthy Boundaries - “I Matter, You Matter” 	<p>III. Hopelessness (Fastest Growing)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Despair, Depression, Isolation - Active Addictions: substances, food, work, sex, religion - Suicide Potential (physical, emotional, spiritual) - Numbed Feelings - “Lost Child” Role and Mentality - “Nothing Matters” - “Nothing Ever Really Changes” 	<p>IV. Codependency (Normative)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Submission - Martyr/Victim - Abandonment Phobia - Enmeshment - “You Matter, I Don’t Matter”
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Minimum No or Low Self-esteem, No Personal Identity Personal Neglect/Lack of Self-care					
Maximum Relationships with Others Positive, Rewarding, Successful					

¹⁰ J.F. Lehr, *Clergy Burnout: Recovering from the 70-Hour Work Week—and Other Self-Defeating Practices* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006), 30-31.

Lehr helpfully describes the graph by stating the following:

The horizontal axis measures satisfaction and success in ministry: The right end of the axis indicates maximum satisfaction in relationships with parishioners and a rewarding and successful ministry; the left end indicates poor or painful relationships with parishioners and a conflicted, failing, or even neglected ministry. The vertical axis measures personal care. The top end of the axis indicates maximum self-esteem, self-care, and a healthy, solid personal identity; the bottom end points to low self-esteem, lack of a healthy and solid personal identity, and poor or neglected personal care.¹¹

It's evident from Hands' graph that much is at stake as it relates to the emotional wellness and mental health of Senior Pastors. Such things as "dominance," "despair," "phobias," and "abandonment" may run rampant, which, in turn, will manifest into irreversible situations of abuse and possible suicide of either the Senior Pastor, staff member, or congregant. Leaning into and addressing the emotional wellness and mental health of church leaders is paramount to the success and health of the church.

To Academia

This research project will help illuminate the need for ministry-focused academia to best prepare future Senior Pastors for theological, ecclesiological, and exegetical practices necessary to lead congregants of local churches. It will also prepare them emotionally and mentally to be whole and healthy contributors to the Kingdom without doing so at their expense or the expense of their families.

Academic institutions would bode well to lean heavily into preparing future ministry professionals for the challenges of church ministry and their eventual emotional and mental challenges. These growing statistics, provided by H.B. London and Neil B.

¹¹ Lehr, 30-31.

Wisemen in their book *Pastors at Greater Risk*, should highlight the importance of academic preparation, where they write that: (a) 50% of all congregations in the United States are either plateauing or declining, (b) 90% of Pastors work more than 46 hours a week, (c) 80% believe that Pastoral ministry affects their families negatively, (d) 33% say that being in ministry is an outright hazard to their family, (e) 75% report they've had a significant stress-related crisis at least once in their ministry, (f) 50% feel unable to meet the needs of the job, (g) 90% feel they're inadequately trained to cope with ministry demands, and (h) 40% report a serious conflict with a parishioner at least once a month.¹²

This research project will help ministry-focused academic institutions send to local churches men and women best prepared to face the challenges, setbacks, expectations, hurts, and trials that often accompany occupational local church Senior Pastor leadership.

¹² H. B. London and Neil B. Wiseman, *Pastors at Greater Risk* (Ventura, CA: Gospel Light, 2003), 20.

CHAPTER TWO: BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL BASIS

An undeniable human condition is weakness. Amid this human condition, a child of God is not to run away from their weakness but instead embrace it. However, God instructs the believer not simply to embrace their weakness but also to be strong. The call to be strong in the Lord is the believer's awareness of their fragility and God's strength manifest within. God must be seen as the primary source of strength. The perfection of a believer's weakness, as Paul points out in 2 Corinthians 12:10, is what results in God's power. The strength of God is only realized once a believer comes to grips with their limitations, weaknesses, and vulnerabilities.

Within Pastoral work the demands can be significant, which can cause a Senior Pastor to focus solely on the plethora of these demands rather than the psychological and emotional distress they may experience.¹³ This can cause them, subsequently, to see their limitations as something they must avoid. Instead, weakness derived from one's limitations should be celebrated and be seen as a gift. Paul himself points out in 2 Corinthians 12 that his leadership's success is not despite his weakness but because of it.¹⁴

¹³ Andrew Miles and Rae Proeschold-Bell, "Overcoming the Challenges of Pastoral Work? Peer Support Groups and Psychological Distress among United Methodist Church Clergy," *Sociology of Religion* 74, no. 2 (2013): 200.

¹⁴ Scazzero and Bird, 120.

Human fragility and limitation are further articulated within Paul's statement in 2 Corinthians 4:7, "But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us." Here, Paul reminds God's children that they are clay jars. Jars of clay are meant to be temporary holding places. Paul is pointing out in this analogy that God's children are vulnerable. One of the fundamental problems within Senior Pastor leadership is that many do a great job of ignoring and being ashamed of their vulnerabilities and limitations. Instead, Senior Pastors must come to love their vulnerabilities to fully realize spiritual health and vitality.

Paul further points out that strength and power come from God. In 2 Corinthians 4:7, he states that these things are "from God and not from us." Furthermore, the treasure that Paul refers to in verse seven is laid out previously in verse six, where Paul writes, "For God, who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' made His light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of God's glory displayed in the face of Christ." The treasure Paul alludes to is the light of the knowledge of God's glory displayed through Jesus. For those who have given their life to Jesus, the light of God's glory is inside them. That light is inside vulnerable clay jars so that God's all-surpassing power comes from Him and not from the jars themselves.

In 2 Corinthians 4:8-9, Paul further writes, "We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed." When God's children embrace their vulnerability and accept that power and strength are not something they possess, then the light of God's glory is revealed when the jar's cracks are exposed. The believer's weakness, fully realized, is

what shows the strength of God because the eyes of the world are on the glory of God revealed through the fragile cracks of the jar.

Jars of Clay

In 2 Corinthians 4:7-11, Paul narrows in on the weakness of the human condition by comparing it to the frailness of a clay jar. The description Paul provides illuminates humanity's inherent weakness as "inferior, ignoble, and disposable, as well as fragile and easily broken."¹⁵

But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us. We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body. For we who are alive are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that his life may be revealed in our mortal body. So then, death is at work in us, but life is at work in you.

Mankind's Weakness

The Fragileness of a Clay Jar

In this day and age, no one instinctively strives to be likened to a "jar of clay." Western culture seeks to perpetuate rhetoric of self-sufficiency, willpower, and taking care of oneself. There is no room today for any sign of weakness. As such, Paul's bold attempt in 2 Corinthians 4:7 to liken humanity to something as uniquely fragile as a clay jar is damning and repulsive. This certainly would have been the case for Paul's original Corinthian audience. The ancient Roman saying, "*Aut viam inveniam aut faciam* (I will either find a way or make one)," perfectly encapsulates the mindset not only of early Rome but that of the early gentile Christians.

¹⁵ Frank J. Matera, *II Corinthians: A Commentary*, The New Testament Library (Louisville: Presbyterian Publishing Corporation, 2013), 108.

Whatever Paul was specifically referring to when mentioning clay jars, it is abundantly evident that Paul is underlining the extremely fragile condition of humanity. A clay jar was broken easily, and “they were also easily replaced and not worth repairing,” should it incur damage of any kind.¹⁶

The Value of a Clay Jar

It is quite humbling to compare humanity to an item that at the time of Jesus was an everyday overlooked vessel, similar to that of a fast-food container.¹⁷ No one would have batted an eye to see a jar of clay broken or discarded. Much care will go into something that cannot be replaced easily. The owner of a jar made out of precious metal or glass would go to great extremes to ensure its protection. But a jar made of clay is not unique and is easily replaced. A jar made of precious metal, if damaged, can be melted down to its essence and then reshaped.¹⁸ A clay jar, once damaged, will be tossed away and replaced with a different one.

An interpretation of Paul’s synonymizing of humanity and clay jars must imply both the jar’s weakness and its lack of value. A clay jar, especially in the time of Paul’s original writing to the church in Corinth, would have been understood as expendable and relatively cheap, and the original listeners would have known that the “two ideas

¹⁶ David E. Garland, *2 Corinthians: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture* (Holman Reference, 1999), 162.

¹⁷ R. Kent Hughes, *2 Corinthians: Power in Weakness*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2006), 89.

¹⁸ Timothy B. Savage, *Power Through Weakness: Paul’s Understanding of the Christian Ministry in 2 Corinthians* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 165.

certainly appear together in the OT.”¹⁹ Clay jars would be readily available in markets and homes, and there would be no concern as to a clay jar’s protection, only the protection of its contents.

Jars of clay were so common that they would be “used for storing and transporting (of water, oil, grain, and olives), cooking, eating, drinking, and presenting offerings.”²⁰ But, as Paul is prone to do, his analogy does eliminate misconceptions for those claiming personal superiority or indestructibility.

Interestingly, “the more valuable the object to be stored, the nicer the container.”²¹ Many of God’s realities are paradoxes to humanity’s limited comprehension. The idea that a commonplace clay jar would be the holding mechanism for the treasure of God’s glory seems incomprehensible. However, as Paul points out in Philippians 2, Jesus Himself, although “being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his advantage; rather, he made himself nothing...” (Philippians 2:6-7a). If Jesus, determined to be a servant, held within Him the very nature of God, it is not inconceivable that humankind, commonplace as they are (jars of clay), would have a bountiful treasure inside.

Connecting a Clay Jar to the Reality of Overall Humanity

Not all suffering is the same. But there are some sufferings that testify to the gospel of Jesus. Paul points to these sufferings in verses eight through nine. Those who

¹⁹ Savage, 165.

²⁰ James M. Scott, *2 Corinthians*, New International Biblical Commentary (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1998), 103.

²¹ William R. Baker, *2 Corinthians*, College Press NIV Commentary (Joplin, MO: College Press Pub, 1999), 183.

are “hard-pressed... perplexed... persecuted... struck down” for the sake of the gospel, testify to the power and glory of the gospel.²²

As Paul Barnett points out in his commentary *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, someone once asked St. Francis how it was he was able to do so much in his life. Reportedly he responded by stating, “This may be why: The Lord looked down from heaven and said, ‘Where can I find the weakest, littlest man on earth?’ Then he saw me and said, ‘I’ve found him, and he won’t be proud of it. He’ll see that I am only using him because of his insignificance.’”²³

Humanity is limited. All humans eventually die. Human life is “quite ordinary and transitory.”²⁴ Paul’s comparison of human life to a clay jar illuminates the fragility and short lifespan humans face.

Paul makes no distinction between his outer self and inner self. When he refers to humankind as a jar of clay, he refers to the totality of human existence.²⁵ That is the mental, emotional, physical, and, yes, spiritual aspects of humanity. All these things are fragile within the human context. Humanity has tremendous limitations.

Paul made sure, later in 2 Corinthians 10:13, to communicate to the Corinthian church, in no uncertain terms, that those who genuinely follow Jesus should “not boast beyond proper limits” and that all believers should only boast of “service God himself

²² Ronald J. Allen, “2 Corinthians 4:7-18,” *Interpretation* 52, no. 3 (1998): 287.

²³ Paul Barnett, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1997), 215.

²⁴ Scott, 103.

²⁵ Matera, 108.

has assigned to us.” Others in the church, who had caused quarrels and division, were proclaiming themselves, according to Paul, as “super-apostles” (2 Corinthians 11:5), essentially sending a message that the “power for ministry arises within them” and that they “have more of it than Paul.” Paul, in response, did not claim inferiority but instead placed his superiority, not in his abilities but the “authority that Lord gave” him (2 Corinthians 10:8).

Those super-apostles were busy criticizing Paul for his lack of authority as it related to his “insufficient” display of power and strength. But even greater than that, the presence of Paul’s suffering and brokenness was, to the super-apostles, evidence of God’s absence from his life.²⁶

The quarrels and division in the Corinthian church motivate much of Paul’s discussion on weakness and strength. Whereas those calling themselves more extraordinary and Paul as someone ignorable, Paul seized the opportunity to level the playing field. Those creating division and calling themselves greater were taking for themselves the rightful originator of strength, power, and greatness. Paul, referring to humanity (including himself) as jars of clay, placed the origination of power and strength in God’s hands alone. God is not only the originator of those things but also the sole maintainer.

Paul’s opponents were set to point out Paul’s inadequacies and use that as proof of Paul’s lack of authority and leadership. Even Paul admits this, to a degree. In 2 Corinthians 11:6, Paul states, “I may indeed be untrained as a speaker.” But throughout 2

²⁶ Allen, 287.

Corinthians, Paul repeatedly points to the many paradoxes that exist in the Christian life, such as the Christian life producing an “aroma that brings life” and an “aroma that brings death” (2 Corinthians 2:16). Paul’s point is that the weakness his opponents use to prove the invalidity of his leadership, he “now declares to be fundamental to ministry that faithfully represents the Crucified One.”²⁷

Paul was most likely aware of Isaiah’s words in Isaiah 64:8, where the author writes, “Yet you, LORD, are our Father. We are the clay, you are the potter; we are all the work of your hand.”

A clay jar, despite its fragility, is made with care and craftsmanship. Human life is no exception. Not only is human life fragile, common, and expendable, but also created, molded, and shaped by its Creator. Even Jesus Himself experienced the wear and tear of human existence. He was born to a woman (Luke 2:6-7). He was tired (John 4:5-6). He grieved (John 11:35). He experienced sorrow (Matthew 26:37-39).

In Paul’s letter to the church in Philippi, he underlines the shared suffering a believer has in comparison to the suffering Jesus experienced. In Philippians 3:7-11, Paul writes,

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

²⁷ Barnett, 214.

The believer should not be surprised that suffering, weakness, trial, and tribulation are a part of the human experience. Even the Son of God Himself experienced these things. And to do so is not something, as a believer, a person should avoid. But as Paul points out, a believer should pursue “participating in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death” (Philippians 3:10).

It remains the case for some in professional ministry to interpret suffering, weakness, or emotional and mental deterioration as a sign that either God is displeased or that they have failed in some level of spiritual strength and fortitude.²⁸ However, human reality is a weak reality. Nothing within the human condition can sustain its existence, let alone increase or decrease its impenetrableness. The human condition is forever fragile and forever destined for decay.²⁹

The Treasure in Comparison to Mankind’s Weakness

The Treasure, Defined

When considering the clay jar metaphor Paul uses, it’s easy to focus on the structure of the clay: its fragility and proneness to becoming broken. But that’s not the purpose of the metaphor. Yes, it’s critical to consider the fragility of the jar, but more importantly, one must consider “why” such a vessel, whilst containing an immensely valuable treasure inside, would be fragile. The reason for the “why” of Paul’s metaphor is to “illustrate the fact that the appearance of his person in no way detracts from the

²⁸ Larry Kreitzer, *2 Corinthians*, New Testament Guides (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), 101.

²⁹ Victor Paul Furnish, *II Corinthians*, Anchor Bible (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1984), 278.

‘treasure’ that he carries.”³⁰ As such, it’s the treasure one should focus on, not the vessel that contains it.

Some believers are led to believe, or believe of their own accord, that their jar is one of “tinsel and glitter”³¹ and beyond that of a simple, ordinary jar of clay. Some believe that the power and strength to withstand being hard-pressed, perplexed, persecuted, and struck down comes from themselves and not because of something else.

Paul’s emphasis on humanity’s comparison to a jar of clay illuminates the ordinariness and lack of beauty a jar of clay possesses. However, that emphasis is not Paul’s central concern. It’s not the jar of clay itself that makes it unique or beautiful. It’s what’s inside, or what it contains, that makes it special. If a jar of clay held gold coins of great value within it, humanity’s specialness does not come from the container (which is inherently limited) but from the treasure it holds.

In laying out the dimensions of the human experience (hard-pressed, perplexed, persecuted, struck down), Paul testifies to his own experience with these things.³² He emphasizes that they are essentially unavoidable. Christian or not, every human being experiences moments and seasons of being hard-pressed, perplexed, persecuted, or struck down. Paul is not saying to avoid such things. Instead, he is saying that because of the treasure that resides in the clay jar of the believer, even though they may be hard-pressed, perplexed, persecuted, or struck down, they will, in turn, not be crushed, in despair,

³⁰ Brooks Duff Paul, “Apostolic Suffering and the Language of Processions in 2 Corinthians 4:7-10,” *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 21, no. 4 (1991): 161.

³¹ Garland, 168.

³² Baker, 186.

abandoned, or destroyed. The defining difference is not the quality of the clay jar but what's inside.

Even given the weakness of humanity, because of the treasure inside, weakness is not what defines a believer. A believer is not crushed, in despair, abandoned, and ultimately not destroyed. It is not the clay jar itself that keeps it from being crushed, in despair, abandoned, and or destroyed, but it is solely because of the treasure. The contents within any clay jar give the jar its worth, not the jar itself.³³ Thus, the contents of the jar are of the utmost importance in determining the value of the jar.

Verses eight and nine of 2 Corinthians 4 testify that the treasure within the jars of clay serves as a sort of stop-gap, preventing the things in life that would cause one to be hard-pressed, perplexed, persecuted, and struck down, resulting in that individual being crushed, in despair, abandoned, or destroyed. Thus, the human condition is prone to the former, but the treasure inside can avoid the latter. But it is solely the work of the treasure and not the jar of clay.

The competence believers possess to face the tasks and purpose given by God does not come from human origination or endeavor. Paul points this out in 2 Corinthians 3:5, where he writes, "Not that we are competent in ourselves to claim anything for ourselves, but our competence comes from God." Humanity's jars of clay are not sufficient enough for the job. Instead, the competency believers possess to be "ministers

³³ Barnett, 215.

of a new covenant” (2 Corinthians 3:6) is much greater than if humanity’s jar were made of precious metal, solely “because of the treasure they contain.”³⁴

The value of the treasure that resides in the clay jars of humanity is what gives it worth. Therefore, the believer must declare that, as Paul points out in Galatians 2:20, “I have been crucified with Christ, and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me.” The glory of God and the changing power of Christ crucified reside in the believer’s clay jar.

Therefore, it should be the intent of the clay jar to be a reflection of what’s inside, not what’s outside.

Paul testifies in Philippians 2:1-8 the need to be like Christ, where he writes,

Therefore if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any common sharing in the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others. In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross!

Jesus, being fully human and fully God, existed in bodily form as a clay jar, similar to all other humans. However, there is a critical distinction. A believer has a treasure not intrinsic to their being, nor because of anything an individual does. That same treasure, however, was inherent to whom Jesus in very nature was, and thus

³⁴ Garland, 162.

believers should “share in his un-self-striving, self-negating, servant-like, God-centered faith.”³⁵

The Source of the Treasure

Believers, especially those in professional ministry contexts, can be tempted to assume their abilities, strength, talents, and success as something that comes from themselves. Paul alludes to such in 2 Corinthians 10:12-13 where he writes,

We do not dare to classify or compare ourselves with some who commend themselves. When they measure themselves by themselves and compare themselves with themselves, they are not wise. We, however, will not boast beyond proper limits, but will confine our boasting to the sphere of service God himself has assigned to us, a sphere that also includes you.

Paul lays out the contrast between those who would measure their abilities against others or themselves and those believers who instead understand their proper limits within the scope and sphere of what God has called them to; no more and no less.

Whether someone is a believer or not, it must be agreed upon that humanity did not create the clay jar themselves. No one human being can stake claim to their creation. Again, Isaiah 64:8 states, “Yet you, LORD, are our Father. We are the clay, you are the potter; we are all the work of your hand.”

The pottery does not create the pot. Humankind is the result of intentional design and creation. As such, there is only so much the created can do. Since God is the Potter, and humanity the clay, repair is beyond the scope of the creation’s ability. Only the creator can repair.

³⁵ Savage, 174-75.

Paul's conflict with those in the Corinthian church claiming superiority had caused him to reflect on his, and the overall human condition. Human beings exist in a perpetual state of limit. There is a limit to humanity's power that can withstand being hard-pressed, perplexed, persecuted, and struck down. Human pride has blurred the line between what the human condition can withstand and what it cannot. As such, many, especially believers, are led to believe in more significant limits and abilities when experiencing times withstanding being hard-pressed, perplexed, persecuted and struck down. These moments can often lead a believer to forget that "the power to lift humans out of their powerlessness in the face of suffering, decay, and death does not come from within themselves; it comes only from God."³⁶

The Treasure at Work

But not all suffering in the human life points to the power of the gospel. One should not make the mistake that all human suffering is for the purpose of revealing the gospel of Jesus. Rather, suffering that "results from the voluntary witness to the gospel"³⁷ illuminates the gospel, and not always for the benefit of the one suffering.

So then, if the suffering that comes from the voluntary witness of the gospel is not for the benefit of the one suffering, then for whom is the suffering for? In Paul's case, his suffering was for the benefit of the Corinthians. "Paul points out that he is carrying around and displaying the process of Jesus' death for their benefit."³⁸ He, as a clay jar, is

³⁶ Barnett, 215.

³⁷ Allen, 287.

³⁸ Paul, 163.

being processed through the lives of the Corinthians, revealing his abundant inadequacies so that others would not take notice of his vessel but rather the treasure inside him.

Furthermore, the vessel containing the treasure inside must easily be dismissed by those witnessing it. If the vessel were made of gold or porcelain, the viewer may be prompted to give their focus on the beauty of the vessel and not consider what may be inside. With a vessel made of common clay, the vessel becomes obsolete and unnoticeable. All that matters then is what's inside the vessel. The treasure gets all the attention. Hence, as the treasure displays incredible power, that power is attributed to the glory of the treasure and not the common vessel that contains it.³⁹

Paul's metaphor of the clay jar becomes easily attributed to the human condition, and thus, its two unquestionable categories: that which is seen and that which is unseen. The seen is the "outward man, the present sufferings, transitoriness, the earthly vessel, the veiled face, the letter that kills and finally Jesus' sufferings of death." The unseen is the "inward man, salvation in the midst of sufferings, the eternal and lasting, the valuable treasure, the heart and the Spirit, as well as the life of Jesus." It is that which is unseen that resides within that which is seen. Thus, that which is seen is given the responsibility to reveal that which is unseen. Because it is only that which is unseen, the "treasure," that can bring salvation, life, and hope.⁴⁰

Paul's suffering was not simply his lot in life. His brokenness was not just the basic product of human existence but was much more than that. Paul's suffering was in

³⁹ Paul, 163.

⁴⁰ P.J. Grabe, "The All-Surpassing Power of God Through the Holy Spirit in the Midst of Our Broken Earthly Existence: Perspectives on Paul's use of *δύναμις* in 2 Corinthians," *Neotestamentica* 28, no. 1 (1994): 148.

direct correlation to Jesus and His crucifixion. Because of Paul's sole alignment with Christ's sufferings, he suffered as well. As such, because Paul's being was so interconnected to the gospel of Jesus, his suffering was then "transformed into the epiphany of God." That is, Paul's connected suffering with Jesus helped pull back the veil concealing the Almighty God, revealing His glory and hence, the true meaning of existence for all humankind.⁴¹

The same power Paul refers to in 2 Corinthians 4:7 is the same power we see in Jesus' life and resurrection. Paul again points this out early to the church in Ephesus, where he writes in Ephesians 1:18-21,

I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people, and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is the same as the mighty strength he exerted when he raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every name that is invoked, not only in the present age but also in the one to come.

Thus, the suffering that Paul describes in verses eight and nine of 2 Corinthians 4 serves as a comparison and contrast between that which a believer will undoubtedly experience. Still, a believer who relies on the treasure will surely not endure.⁴² The list of suffering Paul lays out is not a scorecard for Paul, or anyone else for that matter, to list as their qualifications. Suffering itself does not qualify one for the ministry of Christ. Instead, suffering is an inevitable outcome of the human condition. The goal, then, is not to feverishly avoid such sufferings (nor to pursue them in hopes of attaining greater

⁴¹ Paul, 163.

⁴² Savage, 171.

spiritual fortitude purposely). The goal is instead to embrace one's "proper limits" (2 Corinthians 4:13) and to thus rely on the treasure of God's glory inside, which will ultimately prevent one from being crushed, in despair, abandoned, and destroyed.

The treasure inside is not fleeting, nor is it temporary. In 2 Corinthians 4:10, Paul tells us that "we always carry around in our body the death of Jesus." The treasure of God's glory, perfectly displayed through the redemptive work of Christ on the cross, remains in the life (clay jar) of the believer, for the sole purpose that "the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body." For any believer to avoid or disregard the fragility of their humanity (the clay jar), it would preclude their ability to reveal Christ.

The perseverance Paul describes in these verses is not the product of the believer's endeavor but the result of the very persevering nature of God. God's "all-surpassing power" enables any believer to persevere. The fragility of humanity sets the stage for God's power to be executed and revealed to the world. Weakness is not just a byproduct of the human condition, but Paul attests that it is the very prerequisite necessary to disclose the "all-surpassing power" of God.⁴³

Today, it is striking that anyone would consider Paul to be anything less than extraordinary. However, at the time, Paul was seen by others as one lesser and not qualified to carry the mantle of "apostle." All the more important when considering then how evident God's mighty work was done in the life of someone deemed "ordinary." Paul, himself, points this out in 1 Corinthians 1:26-29, where he writes,

Brothers and sisters, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God

⁴³ Furnish, 280.

chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. God chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him.

Paul points out that the quality of the treasure inside a believer's clay jar is not just adequate for the task of repelling being crushed, in despair, abandoned, and destroyed, but "all-surpassing" in its nature. It not only rises to the challenge of the human condition but far surpasses what it sets out to do. Paul underlines this in his letter to the Romans, where in Romans 8:38-39, he states that he is,

...convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

It's important to note that not only does the clay jar show the fragileness of humanity, but also that the treasure inside "offers no protection for the treasure."⁴⁴ The sanctity of the contents is not contingent on the strength and fortitude of the container. Paul's point that individuals are clay jars is not the result of Paul's effort to be poetic or hyper-religious. Instead, it is Paul's acknowledgment of God's innate desire that the power of the Creator is evident within the frailty of the creation.⁴⁵

God's power is not contingent on humanity's strength. But instead, the revelation of God's power is contingent on an individual's awareness and acceptance of their weaknesses and limitations. An individual's determination to lean into and accept their weakness is not an answer to increase one's power. The treasure inside the clay jar does

⁴⁴ Garland, 162.

⁴⁵ Barnett, 215.

not make the jar itself stronger. “The equation for power is: my weakness plus God’s power equals God’s power.”⁴⁶ The treasure’s power inside the jar of clay provides all the strength the jar needs. Thus, as others consider the weakness of the jar of clay, the power of what gives it strength becomes all the more apparent.

In one’s fragility, the temptation is to seek immediate relief from its weakness or to ignore it completely. However, in verses eight and nine, Paul illustrates that the power of God is realized within the midst of enduring perseverance.⁴⁷ “As one controlled by the love of Christ, [Paul] dared to reach beyond his limits because he trusted God’s power to redeem all that he did.”⁴⁸ Similarly, a believer leaning into their fragility and weakness is not only necessary since it is their natural condition but is also an act of trust, trusting that in one’s weakness, God’s power will always prevail.

Amidst difficulty, individuals who ignore their innate fragility will interpret their hardships as something to overcome with tenacity, courage, and self-grown strength. “For Paul, however, difficulties must be met and borne with faith, and thereby they disclose not ‘what men are’ but that the power which is beyond any comparison belongs to God and not to us.”⁴⁹ Hardships are the times when believers must persevere, accept their weakness, get out of the way, and allow the power of God to win the day. This then reveals that the power displayed is from God and not from the self.

⁴⁶ Hughes, 94.

⁴⁷ Scott J. Hafemann, *2 Corinthians: From Biblical Text to Contemporary Life*, NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Pub. House, 2000), 184.

⁴⁸ Garland, 168.

⁴⁹ Furnish, 282.

Embracing and leaning into one's weakness is imperative for any believer, especially those who serve as Senior Pastors, for they will find themselves tempted to rely on their strength and ability to be someone others look up to and emulate. However, a Senior Pastor who ignores their weakness prohibits their congregation from experiencing the power of God manifest from their weakness. This then prohibits their church from being the vulnerable revelation of God's power to the world.

In 2 Corinthians 13:4, Paul writes, "... [Jesus] was crucified in weakness, yet he lives by God's power. Likewise, we are weak in him, yet by God's power we will live with him..." Paul is saying that as believers are called to be like Jesus, they are called to weakness, just as Jesus was, so that the power of God can manifest within.⁵⁰

Power Made Perfect in Weakness

But [God] said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong (2 Corinthians 12:9-10).

Jon Walton, in his journal article *2 Corinthians 12:1-10*, shines a spotlight on the difficulty of the weakness and power paradox in the Christian faith, when he writes, "on the face of it, it is patently absurd. Vulnerability does not defend the nation against attack. Weakness does not drive an industry to succeed in a world market. Frankness about poor performance or the limitations of getting older never saved a job from corporate downsizing."⁵¹ That is what makes the relationship of weakness and power within the

⁵⁰ Matera, 111.

⁵¹ Jon M. Walton, "2 Corinthians 12:1-10," *Interpretation* 52, no. 3 (1998): 295.

Christian so counter-cultural: weakness in the life of the Christian, and thus the Church, launches the inevitable conclusion of God's power revealed so that the world witnesses and receives for itself the gospel of Jesus that alone can save.

Under the light of many mysteries within the realm of God, no mystery looms larger than that of Jesus' power, making "its dwelling in [humanity's] broken existence."⁵² The fact that the Supreme God of the universe would make its home within the limits of humanity is the profound conundrum of the age.

In 2 Corinthians 12:9-10, Paul boasts of personal weaknesses. He then compares the state of his weakness (and thus, humanity's weakness) and compares it to God's power and ability. The Greek word for "weakness" Paul uses in this passage is the word "*astheneia*," meaning: "incapacity, a state of weakness or limitation."⁵³

God's Power Perfected in Mankind's Weakness (12:9-10)

It is strange to think that weakness can bring about strength, but this is what Paul alludes to in 2 Corinthians 12:9-10. As 2 Corinthians 4 reveals, as clay jars, believers "can make do with the grace [they] have already received, and the power of Christ will become more visible as it works through [their] weakness."⁵⁴

The Greek word for "perfected" Paul uses in this passage is "*teleitai*," which means "brought to completion," or "made fully present." The fact that this word is given in the present tense asserts that God's power continues to be in the process of being made

⁵² Grabe, 150.

⁵³ Swanson, 819.

⁵⁴ Garland, 468.

“perfect” and coming to its grand completion.⁵⁵ William Baker, in his commentary 2 *Corinthians*, explains it best where he writes,

The verb “is perfected (*teleo*)”...refers to bringing something to completion. If it involves taxes, as in Rom 13:6, it means to pay them. If it involves laws, it means to keep them (Luke 2:39). If it involves prophecies, it means for them to be fulfilled (Luke 18:31). If it involves a person’s life, it means for it to be finished, or the person to die (John 19:20). If it involves a person’s mission or purpose, as here, it means to complete it. The paradox in this passage is that two missions are involved, Paul’s and Christ’s, which are in a symbiotic relationship. Perfection, or 100% completion only occurs when one party, Paul, supplies “weakness,” and the other party, Christ, supplies “power.”⁵⁶

A popular and dangerous notion within Christian ranks is the idea that a Christian’s level of spirituality is displayed through their demonstrated and dramatic power. When this becomes the norm, the Church will only anticipate that drama within the confines of “intense feelings, miracles, and revelations from God,” much like the super-apostles led others to believe, the ones who criticized Paul’s apostolic authority.⁵⁷

Here’s the rub, to what level can power at all be ascribed to the human condition? Paul’s focus on weakness begets the question of where power comes from. It is as if Paul is ultimately saying that “all power and all confidence entirely belong to God” and that any power that humans experience or demonstrate has no origin whatsoever from human existence.⁵⁸ Power is a creation of God and only demonstrated by Him.

⁵⁵ Garland, 468.

⁵⁶ Baker, 434-35.

⁵⁷ Allen, 286.

⁵⁸ Grabe, 153.

Should the intrinsic weakness of the Christian be a surprise? Isn't the symbol of the Christian faith a cross, one of execution and death?⁵⁹ But just as Paul never forgot the relationship between the cross and the resurrection, the Christian should not forget the relationship between humankind's weakness and the power of salvation from God. The two things are inseparable. Thus, a person who gives their life to Jesus and then assumes His sacrifice will become the vessel that carries within itself the only power that is power at all: the power of salvation from God.

There indeed were adversaries of Paul's within the Corinthian church who saw him as inferior and not one to be heard. However, Paul's "inadequacies" were tools used to elevate the work of God within and through him. The more inadequate Paul became to others, the more apparent God's power became.⁶⁰ As such, Paul saw fit not to boast in his accomplishments, intellect, and skills but rather boast in the very thing that enabled God most completely to work through him and his weakness. Thus, it is strange that the believer, as fragile and inadequate as they are, would be the residence of a God majestically powerful in every way.⁶¹

Suffering is also forever tied to the life of a Christian because Jesus suffered. The suffering of Jesus must be present within the Christian for the power of God's resurrection to be in play, for "the life of Jesus might also be revealed" in the body.⁶²

⁵⁹ Walton, 295.

⁶⁰ Garland, 468.

⁶¹ Garland, 468.

⁶² Grabe, 152.

Another vital aspect of God's power perfected in humanity's weakness is the role of grace. Paul's use of the word "sufficient (Gr. *arkeo*)" in verse nine implies that God's grace is strong enough for the task at hand.⁶³ If the power of God were subject to the strength or endeavors of humanity, then the ownness of the believer would be to avoid weakness at all costs: for to fail to do so would result in the diminished power of God. However, the display and revelation of God's power is not reliant on the strength and fortitude of humanity and "is not under [humanity's] control."⁶⁴ Once again, this is grace in action, assuring the believer "of [their] standing with God, and that nothing in life or death, in the present or the future, can separate [them] from God's love in Christ (Romans 8:38-39)."⁶⁵

Similarly, God's power is ingrained within the grace He provides through Jesus. Paul points out that God's grace knows no limit and cannot be overcome by any torment or struggle in life. Also embedded in God's message to Paul is that His grace results from His power. It is the never-failing power of God that enables His grace to be sufficient. God's power is so vast that it forever fuels the grace afforded to those who believe.

Paul's boasting of his weaknesses parallels the weakness and power of Jesus on the cross and His resurrection. "Christ's power—as now imparted to him by the risen Lord—only arose out of his powerlessness in crucifixion. In the divine dispensation there

⁶³ Baker, 434.

⁶⁴ C. K. Barrett, *A Commentary on the Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, Harper's New Testament Commentaries (New York: Harper & Row, 1973), 317.

⁶⁵ Barrett, 316.

had to be weakness (crucifixion) before there was power (resurrection).”⁶⁶ In Philippians 2, Paul urges believers to have an attitude like Jesus, who “became nothing” and “took the nature of a servant.” Believers are also to share in the power of the resurrected Jesus and to understand that “power in weakness is shorthand for the cross of Christ.”⁶⁷

The super-apostles, in their belief that dramatic spirituality best describes the presence of power, forgot the key components of Jesus’ ministry. His ministry partook “of the pattern of the cross (remembering that for Paul, cross and resurrection are always conjoined as a single event) as revealing divine power and purpose.”⁶⁸

Within the Church, and for many Christians, the crucifixion and resurrection are treated as two separate events, each given its equal individual importance and attention. However, the weakness of the cross and the power of the resurrection “constitute an inseparable unity.”⁶⁹ In the midst of the ultimate weakness of the cross, God displayed the ultimate power of the resurrection and death’s defeat. Such, then, is the Christian life: an inseparable relationship between the weakness of humankind and the power of the Almighty God.

To boast “all the more gladly” in weakness should be the mission of each Christian believer. To lean into one’s weakness is to enable God’s power to be perfected in their life. This, in turn, leads others to be “drawn to the power of Christ they see

⁶⁶ Barnett, 488.

⁶⁷ Hughes, 214.

⁶⁸ Allen, 286-87.

⁶⁹ Grabe, 151.

displayed and are hindered from idolizing Christ's servants."⁷⁰ This should be the motivation of all Christians, especially those seeking to become Senior Pastors.

Discipleship, growth, and worship only occur once God's power is revealed without any confusion or pretense. Thus, it is the responsibility of all those who profess belief in Jesus to not rely on the myth of one's power but instead boast in their weakness, trusting God to be who He says He will be.

If weakness is connected for all time to Jesus' crucifixion, and power to Jesus' resurrection, then it would stand to make sense that the weakness embedded within humankind is forever connected to the power of God in the form of salvation. Similar to a battery that must be placed in the back compartment of an electronic toy, God's power through the resurrection must perpetually be at work within the life of the one who receives salvation only through Jesus. The good news for the Christian is that God's battery never runs out.⁷¹

Jon Walton does a wonderful job of illustrating the equal disposition of each human being and their relationship with the gospel of Jesus. He describes an instance where Bill Webber, the former president of New York Theological Seminary, started a church in the city of New York. Reaching out to a group of people from the suburbs of Connecticut, he invited them to come to his church for a Bible study. On the evening of the Bible study, the rich suburbanites came to Bill's church and began mingling with the locals who called that church their home. As they all sat down, Bill invited each one to

⁷⁰ Baker, 437.

⁷¹ Grabe. 151-52.

describe what they do for a living. One-by-one, the rich suburbanites from Connecticut shared with the group their lucrative positions, from insurance salespeople to executive board members and high-ranking officials. The members of the study who were local residents began to share their occupations which consisted of domestic workers, hospital maintenance, and sanitation staff. Bill quickly realized he needed to change course and subsequently instructed each person to share instead the story of how they came to accept Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior. As each person shared, in contrast to what had previously been, they each discovered equal ground on which they all stood.

“Immediately, all stood on an even plain as each person’s vulnerability and spiritual need was made apparent. As they introduced themselves, they found mutual strength in their mutual weakness.”⁷²

⁷² Walton, 295-96.

CHAPTER THREE: LITERATURE REVIEW

Emotional Wellness and Mental Health

Senior Pastors are adept at doing things *for* God. They forgo the need to cultivate the ability to be *with* God, giving themselves the proper space to reflect, pray, listen, and grow.⁷³ This is so critical because “the church will never mature beyond [its] leadership.”⁷⁴ Senior Pastors must understand even more the importance of prioritizing their emotional wellness and mental health to ensure their individual growth and the growth of their church.

Emotional Wellness

Senior Pastors are often ill-equipped to handle their staff and congregation’s needs on a level that promotes mental and spiritual health and, arguably, as essential, emotional wellness. A contributing factor is the initial lack of emotional wellness study within the nation’s seminaries. These institutions prepare the Senior Pastor for the theological, ecclesiological, and hermeneutic foundations necessary to present, and lead from, God’s Word. However, as Richard Rohr points out in his book, *Falling Upward*, today’s Church is equipped with Senior Pastors “who are cognitively rigid and ‘risk adverse;’ who want to circle the wagons around their imagined secure and superior

⁷³ Peter Scazzerro, *The Emotionally Healthy Leader: How Transforming Your Inner Life Will Deeply Transform Your Church, Team, and the World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2015), 25.

⁷⁴ Scazzerro and Bird, 110.

[standing]; who seem preoccupied with clothing, titles, perks, and externals of religion; and frankly have little use for the world beyond their own control or explanation.”⁷⁵

The average Senior Pastor is prone to ignore and run away from emotional reflection. This increases considerably when Pastors lead relationally with other humans, prone to emotional ignorance. This potent concoction can become disastrous.

Peter Scazzero points out in his book, *The Emotionally Healthy Leader*, a person “cannot change what [they] are unaware of.”⁷⁶ Hence, a Senior Pastor’s process of exploring the deep areas of their life requires tremendous boldness and courage. This means they must resist their human instinct to run away from those things that seem uncomfortable and instead “move toward the emotion, into it, and eventually through it.”⁷⁷

Mental Health

For this research study, mental health, not to be confused with emotional wellness, will be defined as “a state of being...that includes the biological, psychological or social factors which contribute to an individual’s mental state and ability to function within the environment.”⁷⁸

⁷⁵ Richard Rohr, *Falling Upward: A Spirituality for the Two Halves of Life* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2011), 41.

⁷⁶ Scazzero, 66.

⁷⁷ Travis Bradberry and Jean Greaves, *Emotional Intelligence 2.0* (San Diego, CA: TalentSmart, 2009), 68.

⁷⁸ Manwell, Barbic, Roberts, Durisko, Cheolsoo, Ware and McKenzie, 1.

Because of their multiple roles, Senior Pastors face a barrage of “spiritual, physical, emotional, and social bombardment.”⁷⁹ They can become unaware of the “vicarious trauma” they experience through caring, leading, and mentoring their congregations.⁸⁰

Despite the danger Senior Pastors face, there seems to be ignorance or unwillingness for these individuals to address their mental health. They will often elect not to seek help because of their preconceived belief that the “vocational prerequisite” of their calling is that they possess spiritual, emotional, and mental fortitude.⁸¹ This self-imposed expectation is beyond what is found in other secular vocational fields, which cause many Senior Pastors to have a heightened fear of failure.⁸²

The Difficulty Facing Pastors

Why do churches end, and Senior Pastors quit? There are many reasons for these things. Some undoubtedly can be positive. However, the negative reasons for a church’s demise and a Senior Pastor quitting a life of ministry are plenty: “pride and egotism, selfish ambition, obsession with power and control, competitiveness, rivalry, malicious attempts to destroy those considered ‘the opposition,’ arrogant insistence on ‘my way or

⁷⁹ J. Spencer, Bruce Winston, and Mihai Bocarnea, “Predicting the Level of Pastors’ Risk of Termination/Exit from the Church,” *Pastoral Psychology* 61, no. 1 (2012): 85.

⁸⁰ Robin John Sneglar, Michelle Renard, and Stacy Shelton, “Preventing Compassion Fatigue amongst Pastors: The Influence of Spiritual Intelligence and Intrinsic Motivation,” *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 45, no. 4 (2017): 248.

⁸¹ Erik Salwen, Lee Underwood, Gabriel Dy-Liacco, and Kathleen Arveson, “Self-Disclosure and Spiritual Well-being in Pastors Seeking Professional Psychological Help,” *Pastoral Psychology* 66, no. 4 (2017): 506.

⁸² Rae Proeschold-Bell, Ashley Eisenberg, Christopher Adams, Bruce Smith, Sara Legrand, and Amber Wilk, “The Glory of God is a Human Being Fully Alive: Predictors of Positive Versus Negative Mental Health Among Clergy,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 54, no. 4 (2015): 704.

the highway,’ and stubborn self-righteousness.”⁸³ For many years, those who have committed their lives to professional Pastoral leadership have been increasingly suffering from obesity, hypertension, and depression. In many cases, Senior Pastors suffer from these things at higher rates than most Americans. And these concerns have become exacerbated by the onslaught and rise of cell phone access and social media demands.⁸⁴

Emotional Unwellness and Mental Unhealthiness

The concern over mental health and emotional distress is enormous within the Church and society. “Researchers estimate that nearly 25 percent of the U.S. population has at some point seriously considered ending their own lives.”⁸⁵ That same research reveals that 30% of those who took the initiative to receive counseling have also thought about suicide. Around 10% of adolescents have thought of ending their own lives. Recent studies indicate that depression is one of the highest mental health disorders. Those same studies further suggest that depression is “associated with a poorer quality of life, increased risk of suicide, and a host of chronic physical illnesses (e.g., cancer, chronic pain, respiratory, and cardiovascular disorders).”⁸⁶ These individuals are sitting in the church pews of America.

⁸³ John R. Cionca, *Dear Pastor: Ministry Advice from Seasoned Pastors* (Loveland, CO: Group, 2007), 89-90.

⁸⁴ Amy Simpson, “Working in the Soil of Depletion,” *Christianity Today* 58, no. 8 (2014), 78.

⁸⁵ Loren L. Townsend and Daniel G. Bagby, *Suicide: Pastoral Responses* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2006), 21.

⁸⁶ Joseph R. Bardeen and Jesse S. Michel, “The Buffering Effect of Religiosity on the Relationship between Intolerance of Uncertainty and Depressive Symptoms,” *Psychology of Religion and Spirituality* 9 (2017), S90.

The Stigma of Emotional Wellness and Mental Health

Churches often ignore or dismiss emotional wellness and mental health issues and the severity of where those issues can lead. “Self-destructive thought symbolizes spiritual failure,” or spiritual ineptitude.⁸⁷ When this becomes the characterization, Christians will preclude themselves from speaking out about their struggle. Thus, a Senior Pastor will not feel compelled to address their own emotional and mental needs if these concerns are taboo within their church. This can pose a significant problem because churches are often the first resource for those struggling with emotional and mental health concerns. But churches and their Senior Pastors can be ill-equipped and not trained to handle these issues when they surface.⁸⁸ Emotional and mental illness leads those who suffer to hide their struggle. Thus, they suffer alone: possibly with tragic consequences.

Emotional Wellness and Mental Health Verses Spiritual Health

The Church displays a tendency to isolate emotional wellness and mental health to either physical or spiritual spheres. “The medical and psychological fields...continue to question or minimize the role of spirituality in the understanding and treatment of mental diseases.”⁸⁹ Churches need to consider the importance of both the physical and spiritual. Instead, the medical and psychological arena often stands opposed to the spiritual, and vice versa. This leads care receivers to two opposing options: one that is

⁸⁷ Townsend and Bagby, 22.

⁸⁸ Reggie Abraham, “Mental Illness and the Ministry of the Local Church,” *Pastoral Psychology* 63, no. 5 (2014): 525-26.

⁸⁹ Jennifer Shepard Payne and Krystal Hays, “A Spectrum of Belief: A Qualitative Exploration of Candid Discussions of Clergy on Mental Health and Healing,” *Mental Health, Religion & Culture* 19, no. 6 (2016): 609.

exclusively focused on spiritual concerns and one that is exclusively focused on physical ones. Those who would attribute proper care only to the physical fields deny the importance of the spiritual components that remain necessary for the complete wholeness of the individual. Similarly, a Christian's response to emotional wellness and mental health concerns should not be to revert solely to things like prayer, Bible reading, Bible study, listening to sermons, and reading Christian books, for what can be overlooked is how God may wish to speak to the individual through their mental or emotional health crisis.⁹⁰ There must then be a cohesive relationship between the physical and spiritual. "Each dimension—physical, emotional, intellectual, social, spiritual—[is] inextricably bound to each other."⁹¹ One can focus only on the physical, or even only on the spiritual, as is true for many Christians, and subsequently misunderstand that a person's physicality and spirituality are intrinsically tied to their mentality and emotionality. However, the connection between these things is largely untapped.⁹²

The viewpoint of emotional wellness and mental health amongst Senior Pastors and churches is alarming. In her dissertation *Exploring the Role of Shame and Stigma Surrounding Suicidal Depression among Christians*, Alice Allen-Ervin found that some Pastors stated that depressed individuals were weak in their faith and spiritually

⁹⁰ Scazzerro and Bird, 34.

⁹¹ Roy M. Oswald, *Clergy Self-Care: Finding Balance for Effective Ministry* (Washington D.C.: Alban Institute, 1991), 199.

⁹² Simon Dein, F.R.C. Psych, "Religion, Spirituality, and Mental Health: Theoretical and Clinical Perspectives," *Psychiatric Times* 27, no. 1 (2010): 29.

deficient.⁹³ Further, she indicated that two individuals in a focus group said they were told by their Pastor that the devil created their depression and that their spirituality should be questioned. Five churchgoers stated they experienced judgment from Pastors for suffering from depression.⁹⁴ Allen-Ervin's study revealed that these factors, amongst others, precluded individuals from going to their church Pastor regarding their emotional wellness and mental health needs.

Senior Pastors can believe that emotional unwellness and mental unhealthiness are not things they should deal with and that they are immune from these effects because of their position's stature. Furthermore, there can reside "a belief that the symptoms of anxiety, stress or depression mean that something has gone wrong with the individual's relationship with God."⁹⁵ Because of a Senior Pastor's role within their church, they can be motivated to protect their perceived relationship with God. Thus, they will ignore or repel any presence of emotional unwellness or mental unhealth.

Participants in a study at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary in 2013 looked at Pastors, who had confronted the issue of suicide in their congregations, and shared that "in the beginning of the development of their professional identity, they would over-spiritualize suicide and miss the mental health issue."⁹⁶ Over-spiritualizing emotional

⁹³ Alice Allen-Ervin, "Exploring the Role of Shame and Stigma Surrounding Suicidal Depression among Christians" (PsyD diss., California Southern University, 2017), 119.

⁹⁴ Allen-Ervin, 125.

⁹⁵ Douglas W. Turton and Douglas Walter, *Clergy Burnout and Emotional Exhaustion: A Socio-Psychological Study of Job Stress and Job Satisfaction* (Lewiston, N.Y.: Edwin Mellen Press, 2010), 18.

⁹⁶ Karen Mason, Monica Geist, and Mollie Clark, "A Developmental Model of Clergy Engagement with Suicide: A Qualitative Study." *Omega* (2017): 350.

wellness and mental health is not something that Senior Pastors do only for their congregations. This is also indicative of their personal lives.

The Hurting Church

Over the past few years, what had previously existed as “tensions over one’s highest loyalty—whether to country or political party” have increased significantly.⁹⁷ What once was a noticeable divide has since turned into a giant chasm of two audiences influenced by sizable pendulum swings toward an unmovable political opinion, value set, or societal conviction. This has proved tricky, especially within the Church, to live out Paul’s directive in Philippians 2:2 to be “like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind.”

Richard P. Olson, in his book *A Guide to Ministry Self-Care: Negotiating Today’s Challenges with Resilience and Grace*, points to what was an acutely tough season in American churches in 2018. Churches were faced with diminished staffing, significantly reduced giving trends, and in many cases, church closures.⁹⁸ Given the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic, churches across the nation have experienced an even more significant burden in these areas. Olson also refers to a group of individuals he terms “dones”: those who are leaving the church but were active before.⁹⁹ Anxiety, worry, stress, and burnout are increasing exponentially.

⁹⁷ Richard P. Olson, *A Guide to Ministry Self-Care: Negotiating Today’s Challenges with Resilience and Grace* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 2018), 7-8.

⁹⁸ Olson, 123.

⁹⁹ Olson, 6.

The cards seem stacked against Senior Pastors before they even complete seminary and step foot within their churches. Around 84% of American churches are in a steady attendance decline or are falling behind the growth of the regions in which they reside.¹⁰⁰ Because of this, a Senior Pastor rarely comes into their position as the church is growing.

Furthermore, within any given church setting, there are “economic, structural, relational systems, and more, each interacting with the others.”¹⁰¹ This wide variety of individuals and people groups makes it difficult for any Senior Pastor to navigate the church’s many needs, issues, and opinions.

The Hurting Pastor

Emotional wellness and mental health concerns are not something to which Senior Pastors are immune. Research shows that practically half of Pastors surveyed have or do experience illness in these areas.¹⁰²

Senior Pastors, like those within their congregation, are humans and prone to sin. But the presence of sin within the lives of congregation members is expected and perceived as appropriate. Any biblical shepherding Senior Pastor will underline that God provides the means of salvation through Jesus Christ. It is by grace through faith that one is saved. But what about the humanness, sinfulness, and limitations of the Senior Pastor?

¹⁰⁰ Jared Roth, “The Relationship between Emotional Intelligence and Pastor Leadership in Turnaround Churches” (EdD diss., Pepperdine University, 2011), 72.

¹⁰¹ Olson, 122.

¹⁰² Barna, 11.

When a congregation member's sin is revealed, the Senior Pastor is expected to shepherd that individual toward confession and the pursuit of righteous living. But when a Senior Pastor's sin is revealed, it could cost them their job and financial security. It's no wonder, then, why many will go to great lengths to veil their sin and struggle. These Senior Pastors will then, in turn, "[worship] the status quo and [protect their] present ego position and personal advantage."¹⁰³ And any Senior Pastor who prioritizes vulnerability will most likely face opposition and be challenged by leadership and members of their congregation. One can withstand that challenge for a time before beginning to question their worth and calling as a Pastor.

Those who decide to be a Senior Pastor are often surprised by the threat to their emotional wellness and mental health. Within any context, leadership has an inherent propensity to be the recipient of criticism. However, within churches, unhealthy criticism from others comes as a shock to Senior Pastors who expect their church culture to be free from individuals who hurt others. Thus, the "rhythm of work may be disrupted by criticism or by fear and avoidance of it."¹⁰⁴ This will cause them to isolate further from their vulnerability, their congregation, and their families. And then when a Senior Pastor's life spirals downward, they are less likely to seek help. Because of sin's propensity to keep things hidden, a Senior Pastor may seek comfort in other hidden and secret ways, such as an adulterous relationship.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰³ Rohr, 11.

¹⁰⁴ Olson, 37-8.

¹⁰⁵ Stephen J. Rossetti, *Why Priests are Happy: A Study of the Psychological and Spiritual Health of Priests* (Notre Dame, IN: Ave Maria Press, 2011), 141.

A study conducted in 2017 revealed that despite a growing understanding of various Pastors' views on emotional wellness and mental health, there is still an absence of research as to the inner workings of Pastors and how that affects their views on these issues.¹⁰⁶ A study focused on Pastors' understanding of emotional unwellness, mental illness, and treatment found that only 56% of those leaders studied strongly agreed that churches should give support and provide resources for people who exhibit or express any signs of emotional unwellness and mental illness. Only 40% of those Pastors believed that medication could or would help. And only a staggering 2% of those Pastors thought that psychotherapy should be an option considered.¹⁰⁷ It is fair to estimate that many Senior Pastors are failing to consider these concerns for themselves should they experience any sign of emotional unwellness or mental illness in their life and ministry.

The hurting Senior Pastor knows no church-size boundary. As stated earlier, "half of Pastors who lead churches of fewer than 100 (51%) or between 100 to 250 people (56%) have experienced depression, compared to one-third of large-church leaders (32%). Pastors who report declining attendance numbers are also more likely to say they are or have been depressed (62%)."¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁶ Salwen, Underwood, Dy-Liacco, and Arveson, 508.

¹⁰⁷ Payne and Hays, 601.

¹⁰⁸ Barna, 47.

The Caring Role

Pastoral leadership is considered one of the helping professions, including other occupations such as counselors, teachers, and nurses.¹⁰⁹ Helping professionals are at much greater risk for emotional and mental stress. A study of 480 caregivers discovered that individuals who worked with those experiencing suicidal thoughts, or had attempted suicide, reported scoring relatively low compared to others regarding their emotional and mental health.¹¹⁰ A Senior Pastor is someone who commonly engages with individuals who exhibit emotional unwellness and mental illness. Some of these individuals also experience suicidal thoughts or have attempted suicide. Senior Pastors are then statistically susceptible to emotional unwellness and mental illness.

The *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* shared a study focused on the relationship between positive and negative mental health and thus discovered that Pastors, as caregivers, experience both pendulum swings in several ways.¹¹¹ Senior Pastors desire to live a life of meaning. They, like other caregivers, experience a substantial calling to their occupation. Even when circumstances within their role cause the pendulum to swing towards negative mental health, the Senior Pastor will ignore their negative mental health because of their commitment to their calling. Senior Pastors also have a deep sense of calling to their work. They will then likely forego activities or habits that would benefit and lead them toward positive mental health.

¹⁰⁹ Stephen Muse, Milton Love, and Kyle Christensen, "Intensive OutPatient Therapy for Clergy Burnout: How Much Difference can a Week Make?" *Journal of Religion & Health* 55, no. 1 (2016): 149.

¹¹⁰ Karen Mason, *Preventing Suicide: A Handbook for Pastors, Chaplains, and Pastoral Counselors* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2014), 134.

¹¹¹ Proeschold-Bell, Eisenberg, Adams, Smith, Legrand, and Wilk, 703.

Senior Pastors can believe they are immune to any injury as they care for their congregants, especially those who experience some level of mental or emotional distress. Albert Wu, professor of Health Policy and Management at the John Hopkins School of Public Health, “coined the term ‘second victim’ in 2000. Wu acknowledged that a caregiver involved in the death or serious injury of a patient can be emotionally traumatized by the event, too.”¹¹² When a Senior Pastor gives care to a congregant suffering emotionally or mentally, that Senior Pastor can experience a level of distress themselves. This injury might not be observably potent and thus dismissible, but it is still there. Thus, as that Senior Pastor continues to engage with other congregants who are suffering emotionally and mentally, the culmination of injury grows to a boiling point. The effect is burnout, moral failure, depression, and leaving the ministry altogether. However, an even greater risk is prevalent: human life. There’s been a growing awareness and concern for physicians and medical staff in recent years because of the rise of physician suicide. “According to the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention, 300-400 physicians die by suicide in the United States every year.”¹¹³ Churches and Pastors should also take note. Senior Pastors can become “second victims” and are thus susceptible to the same dangerous and life-ending fate a growing number of caregiving physicians experience.

¹¹² “More Healthcare Organization are Addressing Second-Victim Syndrome, but More Must Be Done,” *Medical Environment Update* 28, no. 8 (2018): 1.

¹¹³ “More Healthcare,” 3.

Overwhelming Expectations

The amount of expectation Senior Pastors experience can be tremendous. They are expected to be an expert at many things and expected to wear various hats, such as “mentor, caregiver, preacher, leader, figurehead, disturbance handler, negotiator, administrator, manager, counselor, social worker, spiritual director, teacher, and leader in the local community.”¹¹⁴ In 2001, *Pulpit and Pew* researched over 2,500 Pastors, finding that a sizable percentage experience profound emotional, mental, and physical pain from the demands of their job.¹¹⁵ They also discovered that over 75% of these Pastors work over 50 hours weekly. Sundays always come, and congregants (hopefully) come to church each Sunday, sit in their seats, and anticipate an uplifting sermon from the Senior Pastor. This happens regardless of their Pastor’s current emotional wellness and mental health.¹¹⁶

Since the average church size in the United States is small (for instance, 124 is the average size within the United States Assemblies of God denomination), the measurement of a Senior Pastor’s performance in these churches is quite large.¹¹⁷ Performance is based on things like church attendance, conversions, baptisms, Sunday school attendance, etc.¹¹⁸ Even beyond these basic measurement categories, a Senior

¹¹⁴ Miles and Proeschold-Bell, 200-01.

¹¹⁵ Lehr, 5.

¹¹⁶ William L. Self, *Self Surviving the Stained Glass Jungle* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2011), 29.

¹¹⁷ R. Michael Oney, “Exploring the Casual Relationship of Emotional Intelligence to Clergy Leadership Effectiveness” (PhD diss., Regent University, 2010), 102.

¹¹⁸ Oney, 83-84.

Pastor will primarily be measured on other more specific performance measurements, such as budget growth, outreach, counseling, vision, management, preaching, and conflict resolution.¹¹⁹

Compassion Fatigue

Compassion fatigue was a term first used in 1984.¹²⁰ This idea describes a caregiver's relationship with a care-receiver whose circumstances primarily do not improve. Khan, Khan, and Malic define compassion fatigue as “a condition characterized by a gradual lessening of compassion over time.”¹²¹

Compassion fatigue within church ministry, however, is ambiguous. Most of the concerns congregants bring to their Senior Pastor are not treatable through medicines or surgeries. Instead, most concerns include a plethora of emotional unwellness, mental illness, spiritual questions, and relationship conflict. A Senior Pastor can provide care to an individual repeatedly without seeing tangible results. This lack of progress can lead to a greater risk of compassion fatigue.

Compassion fatigue can also increase due to the rising demands Senior Pastors face and their propensity to dismiss their personal boundaries. This rise of compassion fatigue comes from constantly giving of oneself and perpetually providing care to others while neglecting their health, which ultimately results from a sole focus on giving compassion to others at the expense of self-compassion.

¹¹⁹ Oney, 102.

¹²⁰ Spencer, Winston, and Bocarnea, 94.

¹²¹ Snelgar, Renard, and Shelton, 248.

Busyness

Busyness is the greatest enemy of the heart. In his book *The Rest of God*, Mark Buchanan points to the Chinese pictograph for “busyness.”¹²² This single idea of “busyness” is made up of two characters: heart and killing. The implication is stunning. Busyness kills the heart. Busyness leads to the belief that to pause, reflect, and be changed is inconvenient. “Restoration meddles with what [a person has] learned to handle, removes what they’ve learned to live with, bestows what they’ve learned to live without.”¹²³

A Senior Pastor’s emotional wellness and mental health are under threat from forces that would serve to distract and make their life busy by filling it with perceived helpful expenditures that give the illusion of time well spent.

You’re far more likely to run into the enemy in the form of an alert on your phone while you’re reading your Bible or a multiday Netflix binge or a full-on dopamine addiction to Instagram or a Saturday morning at the office or another soccer game on a Sunday or commitment after commitment after commitment in a life of speed.¹²⁴

Today, a person will often sacrifice sleep to achieve, watch, eat, or play more video games. But before the invention of the lightbulb in 1879, the average individual slept eleven hours at night.¹²⁵ Today, if a person slept that long, others would view them as lazy.

¹²² Mark Buchanan, *The Rest of God: Restoring Your Soul by Restoring Sabbath* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2006), 45.

¹²³ Buchanan, 150.

¹²⁴ Comer, 20.

¹²⁵ Comer, 31.

Pete Scazzero, in his groundbreaking book, *The Emotionally Healthy Leader: How Transforming Your Inner Life Will Deeply Transform Your Church, Team, and the World*, defines a leader who is emotionally unhealthy as one who “operates in a continuous state of emotional and spiritual deficit, lacking emotional maturity and a ‘being *with* God’ sufficient to sustain their ‘doing *for* God.’”¹²⁶ Unfortunately, for many Senior Pastors, the propensity is to focus only on doing *for* God before addressing being *with* God. This tendency comes from equating laziness with being *with* God.

Burnout

Burnout manifests itself through “physical and emotional exhaustion, cynicism, and self-depreciation.”¹²⁷ According to Barna Research, “[one in three Pastors are] at risk of burnout.” And “more than one-third of Pastors are at high risk or medium risk of burnout, and three-quarters know at least one fellow Pastor whose ministry ended due to stress.”¹²⁸ Barna also states that the growing rise of stress amongst Pastors means that almost half are at high risk of marital, family, and relationship failure.

Burnout is often self-diagnosed and self-treated. At the onset of burnout symptoms, Senior Pastors will trudge forward without the aided help of someone outside of themselves. This is referred to as “tainted objectivity.”¹²⁹ However, a “doctor who is

¹²⁶ Scazzero, 25.

¹²⁷ Oswald, 70-71.

¹²⁸ Barna, 11.

¹²⁹ Eugene H. Peterson, *Working the Angles: The Shape of Pastoral Integrity* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1993), 165.

[their] own doctor has a fool for a doctor.”¹³⁰ Self-diagnosis and self-treatment largely occurs due to an individual’s craving for comfort, not healing. Thus, root issues are not addressed.

Roy Oswald, in his book *Clergy Self-Care: Finding Balance for Effective Ministry*, reveals a list of Pastor tendencies that often set the stage for future burnout. Oswald states that Pastors: (1) are idealistic and over-committed; (2) are in direct contact with the poor, the sick, and the dying where setbacks and discouragement are the order of the day; (3) have high needs to please everyone, and a low tolerance for dissonance in the parish; (4) avoid conflict; (5) have difficulty saying “no” to protect personal boundaries or to make time for rest, relationships, and recreation; and (6) suffer from role confusion.¹³¹

Also, a study by Barnard and Curry reveals four dimensions of a Pastor’s personality that indicate a propensity towards burnout within the ministry: (1) a desire to please others; (2) guilt or shame proneness; (3) a lack of self-compassion; and (4) an inability to differentiate self from the role.¹³²

Addressing a Pastor’s Emotional Wellness and Mental Health Needs

The decline of emotional wellness and mental health is not restricted to those just in Pastoral positions. According to the book *Emotional Intelligence 2.0*, “in 2008—for the first time since [they] began tracking it—collective emotional intelligence

¹³⁰ Peterson, 165.

¹³¹ Oswald, 69-70.

¹³² Laura K. Barnard and John F. Curry, “The Relationship of Clergy Burnout to Self-Compassion and Other Personality Dimensions,” *Pastoral Psychology* 61, no. 2 (2012): 151-52.

dropped.”¹³³ The emotional wellness and mental health of any leader are paramount. According to Scazzero, “58 percent of performance in all types of jobs” is tied to one’s emotional health and intelligence. This outweighs every other performance aspect, such as “IQ, personality, education, experience, and gifts.”¹³⁴ It is essential for those tasked with caring roles, such as Senior Pastors, to concern themselves with the depreciation of their emotional wellness and mental health.

John West outlines in his research the relationship between Pastors and emotional intelligence. He found there are three main risk factors that any Pastor faces: stress and burnout, career longevity, and “the proclivity toward personal and professional crises.”¹³⁵ West’s research shows that by emphasizing emotional intelligence (let alone mental health), a Senior Pastor can better ensure their job satisfaction and thus circumvent the danger of these risks.

Ignorance

One of the common fallacies within the Church, and especially among its leaders, is the notion that any given church cannot be built, nor can it grow, if God is not involved. This is false. There are plenty of examples of churches that “succeed” and grow apart from God’s desire, design, and will. “Jesus doesn’t say we can’t lead or build a church without him. What he does say is that our efforts are worth nothing unless they

¹³³ Bradberry and Greaves, 229.

¹³⁴ Scazzero, 61.

¹³⁵ John L. West, “An Analysis of Emotional Intelligence Training and Pastoral Job Satisfaction,” *Journal of Pastoral Care and Counseling* 61, no. 2 (2016): 84.

flow out of a relationship of loving union with him (John 15:5).”¹³⁶ Without a “loving union” with God, which includes attention towards emotional wellness and mental health, a Senior Pastor can lead their church on fumes and momentary “highs” that negate a true sense of worth in who they are and what they’re doing.

A recent study found that “[50%] of clergy have thought about leaving the ministry, and 70% report decreased self-esteem since beginning ministry.”¹³⁷ A common thread amongst Senior Pastors is the belief they are “called” to their church. While this may or not be true, the tendency of many, considering their calling, is to tuck away any notion of their emotional or mental unhealthiness. This can prohibit the Senior Pastor from evaluating their emotional and mental unhealthiness and its effect on their life, ministry, and family.

The Greek word for “personality” comes from the word “mask” (persona).

Made up of innate qualities, coping strategies, conditioned reflexes and defense mechanisms, among lots of other things, our personality helps us know and do what we sense is required to please our parents, to fit in and relate well to our friends, to satisfy the expectations of our culture and to get our basic needs met.¹³⁸

As an individual gets older, and their coping mechanisms increase and become more complex, it is difficult to arrive at one’s true self or know the difference between the mask they wear and the true nature in which they were created.

The aspects of one’s life that cause the greatest hindrances, such as “the inner urges, compulsions, and dysfunctions of [their] personality,” are the aspects that Senior

¹³⁶ Scazzero, 118.

¹³⁷ Barnard and Curry, 150.

¹³⁸ Ian Morgan Cron and Suzanne Stabile, *The Road Back to You: An Enneagram Journey to Self-Discovery* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2016), 22-23.

Pastors often ignore.¹³⁹ That ignorance continues until it can no longer be ignored and then manifests itself explosively.

Vulnerability

Within churches, congregation members take their cue from their leadership, namely their Senior Pastor. “When church leaders explore their own vulnerability and shape a culture from it, they invite others to find comfort in their own vulnerability.”¹⁴⁰ A Senior Pastor must determine to value vulnerability in their personal life and display it publicly. They have the most significant influence on the culture of their church. “Human beings in community are like rocks in a riverbed; we are shaped by the flow of life in the communities we are a part of.”¹⁴¹ For the sake of their congregations, Senior Pastors can set the trend by embracing their vulnerability and limits, thus enabling their congregation to do the same. This happens when the Senior Pastor decides to “stay involved with [their] own soul—the place where God’s Spirit is at work stirring up [their] deepest questions and longings to draw [one] deeper into relationship with [God].”¹⁴²

To embrace vulnerability, it requires that the Senior Pastor commits to “a moment-by-moment lifestyle of agreeing with God about the true condition of [one’s]

¹³⁹ Gary McIntosh and Samuel D. Rima, *Overcoming the Darkside of Leadership: The Paradox of Personal Dysfunction* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1997), 22.

¹⁴⁰ Mandy Smith and David Hansen, *The Vulnerable Pastor: How Human Limitations Empower our Ministry* (Westmont: InterVarsity Press, 2015), 120.

¹⁴¹ Ruth Haley Barton and Leighton Ford, *Strengthening the Soul of Your Leadership: Seeking God in the Crucible of Ministry* (Westmont: InterVarsity Press, 2008), 128.

¹⁴² Barton and Ford, 25.

heart and life—not as everyone else thinks it is but as [God] knows it to be.”¹⁴³ This determination goes against humanity’s sinful and selfish tendencies. Vulnerability requires one to submit to God’s deconstruction of the self. A Senior Pastor can accept and lean into this refining or resist it. However, if one chooses to resist, they “simply make it necessary for God to intensify and prolong the process.”¹⁴⁴

Reflection

Nouwen, in his excellent book, *Can You Drink the Cup?* gives a beautiful illustration of the importance of reflection. When one drinks a glass of wine and is serious about the process, they will undoubtedly know the contents of what they are drinking. They will care about where the grapes came from, how it was processed, and the age of the wine. All these things will be considered before even a drop enters the mouth. “Drinking wine is more than just drinking.”¹⁴⁵ Similarly, life must be reflected upon and not just lived.

Reflection is essential. Many, including Senior Pastors, resist the call to notice where God is moving in their lives. “We slide inexorably into a way of life that offers little or no opportunity for paying attention and then wonder why we are not hearing from God when we need God most.”¹⁴⁶ God’s voice becomes absent not because He isn’t talking but because people are not listening.

¹⁴³ Nancy Leigh DeMoss, *Brokenness: The Heart God Revives* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2002), 50-51

¹⁴⁴ DeMoss, 129.

¹⁴⁵ H. J. M. Nouwen, *Can You Drink the Cup?* (Notre Dame, IN: Ave Maria Press, 1996/2006), 29.

¹⁴⁶ Barton and Ford, 62.

Moses, in Exodus 3:1-3, upon seeing the burning bush, did not momentarily notice it and immediately move on.

Now Moses was tending the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian, and he led the flock to the far side of the wilderness and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. There the angel of the LORD appeared to him in flames of fire from within a bush. Moses saw that though the bush was on fire it did not burn up. So Moses thought, “I will go over and see this strange sight—why the bush does not burn up.”

Moses did not dismiss the phenomenon but instead took notice, intentionally walked over, took off his shoes, and waited. The call of Pastoral leadership requires that one do the same. In inexplicable moments when the bush is on fire, a Senior Pastor must pause, step towards the bush, and prepare to listen and reflect.¹⁴⁷

Possible Solutions Towards Pastor Emotional Wellness and Mental Health

One cannot simply go into a church or ministry context with a self-care mold, expecting it to meet the needs of every context uniformly. “The ‘how’ as to the ways this is done will vary in our numerous places and styles of ministry.”¹⁴⁸ Nonetheless, the emphasis and intentionality churches and their leadership place on addressing the emotional wellness and mental health of their Senior Pastor can be generalized simply by placing the needed focus on certain practices and establishing methods appropriate to that church’s given context.

Systems to Aid in Pastor Emotional Wellness and Mental Health

Research indicates that a Senior Pastor’s resources, or lack thereof, significantly affect their emotional wellness and mental health. Resources such as “frequent

¹⁴⁷ Barton and Ford, 64.

¹⁴⁸ Olson, 191.

participation in religious practices (like prayer)” and “anticipated support from their congregations” have been shown to decrease the psychological distress of Senior Pastors and increase emotional wellness and mental health.¹⁴⁹

Addressing a Senior Pastor’s emotional wellness and mental health is paramount. One of the most pragmatic aspects of this is their retention. Research shows that Pastors experiencing burnout, depression, or anxiety are statistically more likely to leave their Pastoral position.¹⁵⁰ This should, in turn, prompt the church and its leadership to create systems and strategies that would assess not only the burnout, depression, and anxiety of their Senior Pastor but also strategies to address those concerns early on before they balloon to unmanageable levels.

There are resources available for Senior Pastors to strive towards their emotional wellness and mental health. Pete Scazzerro, in his book *The Emotionally Healthy Church*, outlines five potential practices: (1) silence; (2) Scripture meditation; (3) The Daily Office [an “ancient practice of using prayer to mark the times of the day”]; (4) the prayer of Examen [“a tool that helps us to reflect on the day in order to attend to the movements of God’s Spirit within us”]; and (5) Sabbath-keeping [“a twenty-four-hour period in which we cease all work in order to rest and delight in God’s gifts”].¹⁵¹

Other suggested and helpful steps towards a Senior Pastor’s emotional wellness and mental health are: (1) reassessing their day off; (2) keep open lines of communication

¹⁴⁹ Miles and Proeschold-Bell, 201.

¹⁵⁰ Rossetti, 13.

¹⁵¹ Scazzerro, 139-40.

with their spouse; (3) resisting isolation at all costs; (4) seeking out therapy; and (5) prioritizing hobbies.¹⁵²

Similarly, McIntosh and Rima, in their book *Overcoming the Darkside of Leadership*, suggest the following practices: (1) Scripture reading; (2) personal retreats; (3) devotional reading; (4) journaling; (5) personality profiles and tests; (6) professional counseling and therapy; (7) personal accountability groups; and (8) formal performance evaluations.¹⁵³

Intentional Solitude

Silence and slowing down often get lumped together with laziness. However, Nouwen points out that it is only in silence that “we confront our true selves.”¹⁵⁴ Noise and distraction serve to cover up the things God wants an individual to confront and face. “Solitude is the furnace of transformation.”¹⁵⁵ Change and growth cannot occur without intentional, focused solitude.

Jesus prioritized solitude Himself; taking time for retreat to ensure His emotional and mental well-being. A Senior Pastor must take time to step away and equip oneself for the work God has called them. These moments are critical “in order to gain perspective, re-strategize and tend to... wounds.”¹⁵⁶ Retreat is not a failure of strategy but itself a strategy.

¹⁵² London and Wiseman, 182-84.

¹⁵³ McIntosh and Rima, 190-200.

¹⁵⁴ Nouwen, 103.

¹⁵⁵ Nouwen, 103.

¹⁵⁶ Barton and Ford, 123.

Self-Care

Barnard and Curry discovered in their study that “[Pastor] burnout is correlated with personality dimensions, specifically self-compassion, that prevention efforts and interventions may potentially address.”¹⁵⁷ Personality is not solely the product of one’s nature but also the product of one’s experiences, upbringing, and choices. Furthermore, those attracted to the Senior Pastor role have a personality trait that elevates the care of others over self and considers “self-care ignorance” as a badge of honor. This martyrdom approach to ministry is often celebrated within the church and its congregations, unknowingly resulting in the degradation of the Senior Pastor’s emotional wellness and mental health.

In Matthew 22:34-40 Jesus has an important interaction.

Hearing that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, the Pharisees got together. One of them, an expert in the law, tested him with this question: “Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?” Jesus replied: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself. All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commands.”

Jesus responded to the Pharisees by giving them a plural answer. Jesus first responds, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.” And then Jesus continues, “Love your neighbor as yourself.” However, there’s a component to Jesus’ command that easily gets ignored. Jesus states, “Love your neighbor as yourself.” The missed component is “as yourself.” “The key to avoiding a crash in ministry is maintaining a balance between self-care and other-care.”¹⁵⁸ Self-care

¹⁵⁷ Barnard and Curry, 160.

¹⁵⁸ Cionca, 181.

can be viewed as selfish behavior. Much emphasis is placed on caring for others, especially in the Senior Pastor role. Jesus emphasizes, however, that a person is to care for themselves just as much as they care for others. The paradox is that if one ignores caring for self, one cannot truly care for others.

Self-leadership should not be something a Senior Pastor thinks of as being inconsequential, selfish, or isolationist. Effective self-leadership is “shorthand for the inner experiences and closest relationships that make Senior Pastors who they are, the fundamental stuff of being human.”¹⁵⁹ Like every other individual, a Senior Pastor possesses the same limitations and thus has need to recognize and invest in personal growth for the sake of themselves, their families, and their church.

Senior Pastors, and their church leadership, should focus, according to Olson, on the following essential self-care steps: (1) increase your skills in advocating for a balanced life with needed self-care; (2) become more effective in time management; (3) use self-care creativity in engaging media; and (4) write and follow a self-care covenant.¹⁶⁰

Similarly, Karen Mason, in her book *Preventing Suicide: A Handbook for Pastors, Chaplains, and Pastoral Counselors*, shares avenues a Senior Pastor can use to maximize effective self-care: (1) practice your faith; (2) reduce isolation through supportive relationships; (3) maintain your [physical] health; (4) relax through recreation, leisure or hobbies; (5) remember your call into your vocation; (6) reduce your load by

¹⁵⁹ Barna, 156.

¹⁶⁰ Olson, 177-84.

setting boundaries; (7) regular self-debrief; (8) regular debrief with peers; (9) manage your thoughts about your perceived failures; (10) see a counselor; and (11) partner with other professionals.¹⁶¹

Community with Others

In 1 Peter 2:4-5, the author writes,

As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

One of the most significant roles a Senior Pastor can take within their church is to resist the throne. It is the sinful propensity for any person in authority to place themselves on a self-described throne. Congregations also are inclined to put their Senior Pastor on a throne. Thus, resisting the throne propels a Senior Pastor to “let go of every distance, every little pedestal, every ivory tower, and just to connect [their] own vulnerability with the vulnerability of those [they] live with.”¹⁶² Resisting the throne illuminates the priesthood of all believers and establishes equal footing for all of God’s people on which to stand.

Spiritual and emotional well-being has been categorically linked to a Senior Pastor’s intentional ability to pursue a relationship that gives as much as it gets.¹⁶³ Relationship with others is paramount in the life of a Senior Pastor. However, the relationship between the church and the Senior Pastor is not equally transactional. Senior

¹⁶¹ Mason, 135-37.

¹⁶² Nouwen, 49.

¹⁶³ Salwen, Underwood, Dy-Liacco, and Arveson, 508.

Pastors give their congregants substantially more than their congregations give to them. Because of this lack of equity in relationship transactions, the Senior Pastor must prioritize equitable relationships outside the church.

A Senior Pastor may find it difficult to have relationships within the church that are equally edifying for both them and those they lead. They often face the challenge of meeting not only the spiritual expectations of their congregation but also the emotional and mental ones. As such, they may find it difficult to be “self-disclosing” and vulnerable with their congregation. But “the psychological element of self-discloser flexibility is critical for the Senior Pastor, as an imbalance in relational connections with other people is a recipe for burnout.”¹⁶⁴

Assessments

Any church organization should focus its concerns and energy on utilizing emotional wellness and mental health assessment tools to discover potential employees who will bring that focus and perpetuate individual effectiveness within the church. However, finding emotionally and mentally healthy candidates to lead a church is not enough. The church must also prioritize healthy emotional and mental practices to ensure the continuation of that Senior Pastor’s perpetual well-being.¹⁶⁵

In 1991 Roy Oswald created *The Clergy Burn-Out Inventory*. This inventory possesses sixteen items that measure at which level a Senior Pastor is in the burnout spectrum. One of the burnout spectrums is, “burnout is not an issue for you.” On the

¹⁶⁴ Salwen, Underwood, Dy-Liacco, and Arveson, 506.

¹⁶⁵ Vanessa Urch Druskat, *Linking Emotional Intelligence and Performance at Work: Current Research Evidence with Individuals and Groups* (London: Taylor & Francis Group, 2005), 61.

other end is, “you are a victim of extreme burnout.” When initially introduced, Oswald’s inventory was striking: over 65% of those Pastors who took the inventory indicated they were “bordering on burnout or experiencing burnout to some degree.”¹⁶⁶

A significant contributor towards preparing the Senior Pastor for the challenges they will undoubtedly face is to begin assessing their readiness while they prepare in seminary. “Seminaries are recognizing their important role in supporting the mental health of Pastors—both in building their health as they train, and in setting them up for healthy ministry in their future careers.”¹⁶⁷ This effort will help ensure that the issues causing Senior Pastor burnout are dealt with more in the prevention phase rather than urgently reacting to it when it presents itself later in ministry life.

Sabbath Keeping

The Sabbath is essential for maintaining the vital rhythms that help ensure emotional wellness and mental health. “Sabbath keeping honors the body’s need for rest, the spirit’s need for replenishment and the soul’s need to delight itself in God for God’s own sake.”¹⁶⁸ However, even as some Senior Pastors highlight the need for their congregants to honor the Sabbath, very few keep it in their own lives.

The Sabbath can be a very tricky situation for Senior Pastors because Sunday is an important workday. Thus, they “may fail to make provision for other ways to meet

¹⁶⁶ Joseph D. Visker, Taylor Rider and Anastasia Humphers-Ginther, “Ministry-Related Burnout and Stress Coping Mechanisms Among Assemblies of God-Ordained Clergy in Minnesota,” *Journal of Religion and Health* 56, no. 3 (2017): 954-55.

¹⁶⁷ Simpson, 83.

¹⁶⁸ Barton and Ford, 122.

their deep human need for spiritual sustenance, emotional renewal, and rest.”¹⁶⁹ This might come because of a failure to prioritize another day in the week for Sabbath renewal or because the Senior Pastor may believe their role precludes them from the Sabbath’s importance.

John Mark Comer, in his book *The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry*, writes of the Seventh-Day Adventists, who prioritize the Sabbath more than many other religious sect.¹⁷⁰ A doctor studied Seventh-Day Adventists and discovered they live, on average, ten years longer than other Americans. Comer notes that if a person honors the Sabbath every seven days throughout their lifetime, that amount of time equals to about ten years. Not only is keeping the Sabbath a command given by God, but it seems to be, in its most literal sense, life-giving.

Spiritual Direction and Professional Therapy

Throughout the Church’s past, a Senior Pastor was expected, if not equipped, with someone in their life who would provide a level of spiritual guidance and direction.¹⁷¹ However, this urgency and expectation no longer seem to exist. Churches, namely their leadership groups, do not prioritize spiritual direction, mentorship, or guidance for their Senior Pastor. Thus, their Pastor is unchecked and alone. Having someone walk alongside them in their recovery is crucial to healing.¹⁷²

¹⁶⁹ Olson, 38.

¹⁷⁰ Comer, 157.

¹⁷¹ Peterson, 165-66.

¹⁷² J. R. Briggs, *Fail: Finding Hope and Grace in the Midst of Ministry Failure* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2014), 161.

Similarly, a Senior Pastor must take time and space to, through professional guidance, address childhood wounds that have made them susceptible to adult myths about themselves and their relationships with others. Senior Pastors have deep childhood wounds, which do not negate their ability to lead others with similar wounds.¹⁷³ Having wounds doesn't eliminate effectiveness. Instead, the lack of awareness of existing wounds and the unwillingness to address them causes ineffectiveness and the possibility of damaging those a Senior Pastor is called to help.

Summary

Because of the many problems facing Senior Pastors, the propensity seminaries have toward ill-equipping them for future ministry, and the overwhelming expectations church congregations possess, Senior Pastors must understand even more the importance of prioritizing their emotional wellness and mental health to ensure their individual growth and the growth of their church. They can do this by first addressing not only the problem but also their innate limitations. Senior Pastors, and their church's leadership, must develop essential practices, systems, structures, and a culture that promotes emotional wellness and mental health to prevent future burnout and moral failure.

¹⁷³ Edward P. Wimberly, *Recalling our Own Stories: Spiritual Renewal for Religious Caregivers*. 1st ed. (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1997), 70.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESEARCH METHODS USED TO UNDERSTAND CNC SENIOR PASTOR LIMITATION AWARENESS

This researcher has used a mixed-method for this research project, combining qualitative and quantitative research. This research process has also utilized a narrative approach as its leading research model. This project's primary research components have been (1) CNC Senior Pastor surveys, (2) one-on-one interviews with selected CNC Senior Pastors, and (3) emotional wellness and mental health biblical and literature data related to local church Senior Pastors.

Mixed-Method Research

According to Paul D. Leedy and Jeanne Ellis Ormond, in their book *Practical Research*, the following are several good reasons a researcher would utilize a mixed-method research model: (1) completeness; (2) quantitative aspects compensating for any weaknesses in qualitative research, and vice versa; (3) hypothesis generation and testing; (4) development of appropriate research tools and strategies; (5) making sense of seemingly inconsistent data; and (6) both qualitative and quantitative data leading to the same conclusion.¹⁷⁴

This researcher has determined to carefully document and reflect on the area of emotional wellness and mental health in the lives of Senior Pastors, specifically CNC

¹⁷⁴ Paul D. Leedy and Jeanne Ellis Ormond, *Practical Research: Planning and Design* (New York, NY: Person Education, Inc, 2019), 260-61.

Senior Pastors.¹⁷⁵ In this mixed-method approach, this researcher initially began with a general idea and understanding of the Senior Pastor's role within CNC, investing in a biblical and acceptable literature review. Springing from this initial foundation, further research was achieved through a targeted CNC Senior Pastor survey to best achieve the general data related to emotional wellness and mental health in the Senior Pastor's life. However, as this researcher discovered, a more specific set of data was required, which necessitated "more specific questions... [to] better specify what strategies [this researcher would] use to answer those questions."¹⁷⁶ The specific data needed came from one-on-one interviews with a smaller select group of CNC Senior Pastors, designed to dig deeper into the issues of emotional wellness and mental health and how they relate to the Senior Pastor's life.

The mixed-method two-phase approach allowed a subset of the larger group of CNC Senior Pastors surveyed to provide elaboration on their survey answers, providing a more robust understanding of the original and overall data. Even though "quantitative researchers seek the objective facts of phenomena with little or no interest in the subjective world of individuals," this researcher, not relying solely on the data collected through surveys, sought to reveal the subjective truths through one-on-one interviews.¹⁷⁷ Pastoring a community within the context of a local church means that each Senior Pastor experiences specific and unique phenomena. As such, this researcher adopted a pro-

¹⁷⁵ William R. Meyers, *Research in Ministry: A Primer for the Doctor of Ministry Program* (Chicago, IL: Exploration Press, 1997), 5.

¹⁷⁶ Leedy and Ormond, 229.

¹⁷⁷ Meyers, 31.

active research model that engaged with qualitative research while pro-actively moving towards overall transformation. This helped ensure research “[stood] with the persons in the phenomenon, even as the phenomenon and the persons involved experience the process of transformation.”¹⁷⁸

This researcher understands that “the quality of the data obtained can be only as good as the quality of the sample(s) used.”¹⁷⁹ Thus, the sample used in this research has been explicitly derived from a subgroup of the overall group of Converge Senior Pastors throughout the United States. The subset group in this research is CNC Senior Pastors, located within the Converge North Central district. This group has the unique role of leading churches of various sizes within a region that is diverse enough to bring to light the overall state of Senior Pastors throughout the country. The mixed-method approach to this research has given this researcher the ability to report different perspectives, identify the many aspects involved, and paint a general picture of a Senior Pastor’s needs.¹⁸⁰

Using surveys and personal one-on-one interviews, this researcher has collected, analyzed, and interpreted quantitative and qualitative data into a complete framework of understanding, enabling potential resources and strategies to assist Senior Pastors in growing their emotional wellness and mental health, thus better circumventing the potential of future burnout.¹⁸¹

¹⁷⁸ Meyers, 29, 31-2.

¹⁷⁹ Leedy and Ormond, 270.

¹⁸⁰ John W. Creswell and Cheryl N. Poth, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc., 2018), 44.

¹⁸¹ Leedy and Ormond, 259.

Narrative Approach

This researcher adhered to a narrative approach to study the effects of emotional wellness and mental health in the lives of Senior Pastors by “focusing on the recollections and stories of individuals who have had experiences related to [this] phenomena.”¹⁸² This focus was not just based on the present state of Senior Pastors’ emotional wellness and mental health but also aimed to foresee dimensions of future Senior Pastor life and ways to mitigate potential burnout.¹⁸³

The narrative approach, with reliance on one-on-interviews, has enabled this researcher to understand better the context and events that lead to emotional wellness and mental health challenges amongst Senior Pastors within the setting of their specific churches.¹⁸⁴ Knowing and having experienced the challenges of Pastoral ministry, this researcher has actively collaborated with each participant in this study, especially those involved in the interviews. Thus, the stories and narratives told by each interviewee have been married to this researcher’s background: fusing both perspectives with aid from a larger subset of data derived from the CNC Senior Pastor surveys.¹⁸⁵

CNC Senior Pastor Surveys

This researcher decided, within the mixed-method approach, to use an online survey due to the reasons outlined in William Meyers’ book, *Research in Ministry*: (1) a survey is quick, simple, and effective; (2) it provides clarity of groups; (3) it can be

¹⁸² Leedy and Ormond, 234.

¹⁸³ Leedy and Ormond, 235.

¹⁸⁴ Creswell and Poth, 67.

¹⁸⁵ Creswell and Poth, 73.

tailored nicely for D.Min. pursuits; and (4) it can highlight issues that could have been easy for this researcher to overlook otherwise.¹⁸⁶ Thus, this researcher discovered inferences and traceable generalizations of Senior Pastors through the sampled research of surveyed CNC Senior Pastors.¹⁸⁷

This survey is a snapshot of the larger research endeavored by this researcher. Similar to the survey used, a camera takes a photo of an ongoing event. That photograph is but a moment captured within the larger context.¹⁸⁸ This researcher has sought to bring to light the overall context of Senior Pastor burnout and emotional wellness and mental health neglect by taking a snapshot of a specific subset of Senior Pastors.

Survey Participants

Leedy and Ormond provide helpful guidelines when considering the sample size of a research study. They refer to any given general population with the symbol N .¹⁸⁹

- $N = 100$ or fewer: the entire population should be sampled.
- $N = 300-600$: 50% should be sampled.
- $N = 1,500$: 20% should be sampled.
- $N = 5,000$: 400 should be sampled.

Based on Leedy and Ormond's guidelines, this researcher considered the overall population size of CNC Senior Pastors: 208 within the Converge North Central district. As a result, this researcher determined that the appropriate number of surveys completed by CNC Senior Pastors was 75-100.

¹⁸⁶ Meyers, 65.

¹⁸⁷ Leedy and Ormond, 153.

¹⁸⁸ Leedy and Ormond, 153.

¹⁸⁹ Leedy and Ormond, 179.

Survey Bias

One of the potential biases this researcher considered in doing a survey was the expected random nature of surveys. For CNC Senior Pastors to fill out an online survey meant they needed to be at a convenient place and convenient time.¹⁹⁰ For this research to be a success, each CNC Senior Pastor needed to: (1) receive the email in their inbox, not in their spam folder; (2) have the time within their busy schedule to read and consider the email; and (3) take the time to complete the online survey. In an attempt to address these three potential challenges, this researcher committed to the following: (1) ensure the survey would have the support of CNC headquarters; (2) send follow-up emails to either inform for the first time or remind the recipient to complete the survey; and (3) communicate and ensure the survey would take no more than five minutes.

Yet another potential bias this researcher considered when creating and sending out surveys was to ensure anonymity. When researching and studying a sample of a larger group, people will often “[tell the researcher] what they believe to be true or, perhaps, what they think [the researcher] want[s] to hear.”¹⁹¹ By keeping the survey anonymous to future readers of this research, survey responses were kept completely anonymous and thus received and answered unincumbered by respondent apprehension.

Survey Participant Email

An email was distributed by this researcher using the contact information provided by CNC headquarters in Arden Hills, MN. The email was sent to CNC Regional

¹⁹⁰ Leedy and Ormond, 182.

¹⁹¹ Leedy and Ormond, 183-84.

Senior Pastors, who then, in turn, sent it out to the CNC Senior Pastors within their region. See Appendix A for the CNC Senior Pastor survey email invite.

Survey Questions

The survey questions were formulated to provide general information related to topics such as: general church attendance; seminary preparedness; the Sabbath; mental health therapy; community accountability and support; suicide; and rest and solitude. See Appendix B for the complete list of questions and statements used in the survey.

Though survey participants were informed they were contacted through a partnership with CNC headquarters, they were assured of their complete anonymity from CNC headquarters personnel and this researcher. Thus, survey participants had secure knowledge of anonymity as they participated in this research project. This addressed any concern regarding coercion to participate.

One-On-One Interviews

As discussed earlier, this researcher utilized one-on-one interviews to best bring subjective analysis to the objective data secured through a CNC Senior Pastor survey. This researcher randomly selected and invited 20 CNC Senior Pastors (who may or may not have participated in the online survey) to participate in a one-hour Zoom video interview, which was video recorded, transcribed, and utilized within the totality of this research. Of the 20 CNC Senior Pastor invited to participate, nine agreed to be interviewed. The one-on-one interview focused on discovering how the areas of emotional wellness and mental health have helped or, due to ignorance, hurt the personal lives, marriages, and ministries of Senior Pastors.

This researcher utilized a semi-structured approach to the interviews. Instead of asking each interviewee the same questions and nothing more, this researcher allowed

prepared questions to lead into impromptu questions that would either (1) further elaborate on a previous answer or (2) dive deeper into an issue this researcher believed was being ignored.¹⁹²

The use of one-on-one interviews for this research project was evaluated and received Bethel IRB Level One ethics approval.

Interview Participants

CNC Senior Pastors make up 208 of the overall Converge Senior Pastors in the United States. All 208 CNC Senior Pastors were allowed and asked to participate in the online survey. This researcher made a purposive choice when selecting CNC Senior Pastors as a sample group to be studied to obtain a general understanding of the role of emotional wellness and mental health. According to William Meyers, purposive participants are:¹⁹³ (1) aware of who they are and what they do; (2) have practical knowledge of ministry; and (3) represent attributable nationwide demographics. Thus, for the overall purpose of this research, it was necessary to achieve subjective data specific to an even smaller subgroup of CNC Senior Pastors. This researcher sent invitations to 20 random CNC Senior Pastors to participate in the one-on-one interview. Invitations were sent until up to ten CNC Senior Pastors responded favorably to participate. This researcher then scheduled each of the participants via Zoom for a one-hour recorded video interview.

¹⁹² Leedy and Ormond, 153.

¹⁹³ Meyers, 56.

Interview Email

Even though this researcher conducted these interviews, each interviewee's name and identifiable details have been removed from this study. An email was sent to each of the possible CNC Senior Pastor participants, requesting their coordination in this research effort. See Appendix C for the CNC Senior Pastor interview email invite.

Interview Questions

The one-on-one interview questions were formulated to provide more specific information related to topics such as: number of hours worked a week; number of days off a week; current state of emotional wellness and mental health; seminary preparedness; the Sabbath; mental health therapy; community accountability and support; handling criticism; and rest and solitude. See Appendix D for the complete list of questions used in the interviews.

Due to sensitive topics in the interviews, a two-step consent process was utilized. Before the interviews, each participant was sent an email from CNC headquarters to engage in the interview (a copy of which is located in Appendix C). At the onset of each interview, participants gave verbal permission to video record the interview.

Because data are presented in this research project through case study, following all data collection, each participant received a transcription of the data collected through their Zoom interview and a second consent form to secure each participant's permission to utilize responses and quotes from the transcripts sent. Within the consent form, each participant was given the opportunity to remove any responses from the interview transcription (a copy of the consent form is located in Appendix E). Bethel University's IRB committee approved the use of the two-step process to address the required ethical procedures for this research project.

CHAPTER FIVE: ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

Survey Creation and Distribution

To look into the emotional wellness and mental health of CNC Senior Pastors, this researcher implemented a mixed-method research model that included anonymous surveys of CNC Senior Pastors and one-on-one interviews with a randomized group of nine CNC Senior Pastors.

The first step of this mixed-method approach was to conduct an anonymous survey that presented generalized but strategic questions related to the emotional wellness and mental health of Senior Pastors. This researcher created and distributed a survey through SurveyMonkey, a free survey creation and collection website. The survey was a collection of 29 questions that addressed issues, such as years of pastoral ministry, adherence to a 24-hour Sabbath, church leadership, congregational support, rest, professional therapy, and community outside a Senior Pastor's church.

At the outset of this research project, this researcher had a goal of 75-100 survey participants of the 208 CNC Senior Pastor roster. To maximize this survey's exposure, this researcher partnered with CNC headquarters and staff to have the support and backing of CNC and thus possess a more likely and substantial outcome with survey responses. The survey was created and distributed to CNC Senior Pastors via a small group of CNC Senior Pastors who serve as regional support leaders. This researcher created an email with a link to the survey and sent it to the CNC Senior Pastor regional leaders, who then sent the email to each Senior Pastor under their regional leadership.

This researcher followed up the survey two additional times to encourage more participation. After three weeks of potential survey participation, this researcher closed the survey with 50 responses from the 208 CNC Senior Pastor roster.

Survey Results

The survey first focused on collecting numbers and objective data to group Senior Pastors into more specific subsets and thus be able to compare those subsets to one another. The first question was related to the overall size of each Senior Pastor's church. Of the 50 responses, 22% are pastoring a church of fewer than 100 congregants; 38% are pastoring a church between 100-300 congregants; 16% are pastoring a church between 301-500 congregants; 10% are pastoring a church between 501-800 congregants; and 14%, or seven Senior Pastors, are pastoring a church of over 801 congregants. All in all, the responses of the 50 participants indicate there seems to be a balanced array of different church sizes, with the most prominent being churches of 300 or fewer.

Those who participated indicated that Senior Pastors who had been in overall ministry for one to ten years made up only 4%. A large majority of those surveyed selected they have been in professional pastoral ministry for eleven to fifteen years (28% of those surveyed or 14 total Senior Pastors). The most significant majority, however, were those who had been in overall pastoral ministry for over 20 years, which made up 50% of the 50 participants.

The next question related to how long each Senior Pastor had been in their role at their current church. The largest percentage was less than three years—this made-up 34% of those surveyed, or 17 Senior Pastors. The smallest percentages were those who had been a Senior Pastor at their current church for 16-20 years, or over 20 years, which was

6% for both groups. Those surveyed who have been the Senior Pastor of their current church for seven to ten years were at 24%.

When answering whether each Senior Pastor is currently equipped to deal with the personal needs of their Pastoral position, a large majority of those participating in the survey indicated they agreed with that statement which made-up 70% of those surveyed, or 35 Senior Pastors. This question was answered by selecting *strongly agree*, *agree*, *somewhat agree*, *disagree*, or *strongly disagree*. None of the 50 participants indicated either *disagree* or *strongly disagree*. Six Senior Pastors, or 12% of those surveyed, indicated they *somewhat agree*. Nine of those surveyed, or 18%, selected they *strongly agree*.

Previous seminary training or related experience in addressing emotional wellness and mental health was the focus of the next question. Of those who participated in the survey, 40%, or 20 Senior Pastors, indicated they *somewhat agree* that their seminary education prepared them to address their emotional wellness and mental health. Fourteen Senior Pastors, or 28%, stated they *disagree*. Five indicated they *strongly disagree*. Only three Senior Pastors, or 6% of participants selected *strongly agree*.

When addressing the question as to whether each participant's church leadership prioritizes their emotional wellness and mental health, 50% indicated they *agree* with that statement. The highest percentage were those who *strongly agree*—this made up 24% or twelve participants. No participants stated they *strongly disagree*. Nine participants, or 18%, indicated that they *somewhat agree*.

Whether each participant could differentiate the needs of their family from those of their congregation, no participants surveyed chose *disagree* or *strongly disagree*. A

large majority of those surveyed indicated they *strongly agree* or *agree*. Those that *strongly agree* or *agree* with the statement made up 94%, or 47 participants.

When asked whether the expectation of their church's leadership is greater than their ability to meet them, a vast majority of those participating in the survey, 62%, indicated they *disagree* with that statement. Those that selected *somewhat agree* made up 18%. Only 14% of those surveyed indicated they either *strongly agree* or *agree*.

When asked whether the expectation of their church's congregation is more than their ability to meet them, again a large majority of those surveyed, 48%, indicated that they *disagree* with that statement. The highest percentage were those who *somewhat agree* with the statement at 32%. Only 16%, or eight participants, indicated they *strongly agree* or *agree*.

When addressing a 24-hour Sabbath, each survey participant was asked how often, on average, they commit to a 24-hour Sabbath any given month. Of those who participated, 32%, or 16 participants, stated they commit, on average, to a 24-hour Sabbath three times a month. Those who commit to a 24-hour Sabbath every week made up 18% of those surveyed. Ten Senior Pastors, or 20%, commit to a 24-hour Sabbath only once a month. And 12% of the participants indicated they never commit to a 24-hour Sabbath.

When considering one's mental health, each participant was asked whether they would address their mental health through professional therapy. Of those who participated, 70%, or 35 participants, indicated they *strongly agree* or *agree*. None of the participants chose *strongly disagree*. However, 14%, or seven participants, indicated they *disagree*.

Participants were asked whether they would discuss their emotional wellness and mental health with their church's leadership. A large majority of those surveyed, 48% or 24 participants, stated they *agree*. Participants who indicated they *somewhat agree* with that statement made up 30%, while only one participant selected *disagree*.

Similarly, each participant was asked whether they would discuss their emotional wellness and mental health with their church's congregation. A large majority of those surveyed, 40%, indicated they *somewhat agree*. Those surveyed who either *strongly agree* or *agree* made up 28%. However, 32%, or 16 participants, chose either *disagree* or *strongly disagree* concerning their willingness to discuss their emotional wellness and mental health with their church's congregation.

Each participant was asked whether they are involved in a group of Christians outside their church that supports them and keeps them accountable. Of the 50 participants, 74%, or 37 individuals, indicated they indeed have a group of Christians outside of their church supporting them. Those who selected they are not involved in a support and accountability group outside of their church made up 26%, or 13 participants.

In assessing the overall number of hours per week each Senior Pastor works, on average, each participant was asked whether they work *40 hours*, *41-45 hours*, *46-50 hours*, *51-55 hours*, *56-60 hours*, *60-plus hours*, or whether they are *part-time*. Only one participant stated they work *part-time*. The majority of those surveyed, 34% or 17 participants, indicated they work between *46 to 50 hours* a week, on average. Only three participants stated they work *40 hours* on average a week. While three additional participants indicated they work *60-plus hours* per week, on average. Of those that

participated, 40%, or 20 participants, stated they work anywhere between *51 to 60 hours* per week, on average.

Each participant was asked whether being a Senior Pastor has negatively affected their life. Of those who participated, 72% indicated they either *disagree* or *strongly disagree*. Those who stated they *somewhat agree* made up 18% of the survey participants. Only 10%, or five participants, chose either *strongly agree* or *agree*.

When asked whether being a Senior Pastor has negatively affected each participant's family, 60%, or 30 participants, stated they either *disagree* or *strongly disagree*. Those who indicated they *somewhat agree* made up 28%, or 14 participants. And 12%, or six participants, stated they either *strongly agree* or *agree* that being a Senior Pastor has negatively affected their family in some way.

Each CNC Senior Pastor participant was asked how often they have experienced serious conflict with a congregant, staff member, or church leadership. Each participant had the option to select either *one time a year*, *one time a month*, *one time a week*, or *more than one time a week*. Of those who participated, 100% stated they had experienced serious conflict with a congregant, staff member, or church leadership *once a year* or *once a month*. Most participants indicated that serious conflict happens only *once a year*.

Each participant was asked whether they had thought about ending their life at some point in their pastoral career. Out of the 50 Senior Pastor participants, 84% stated that they had *never* thought about ending their life while being a Pastor. However, 16%, or eight participants, indicated they *had* thought about ending their life at some point while being a Pastor.

Participants were asked whether they had received professional therapy at some point in their pastoral career. Those who stated they had received professional therapy made up 27 participants. In comparison, 46%, or 23 participants, indicated they had not received professional therapy while being a Pastor.

When asked whether or not each participant enjoys being a Senior Pastor, they were given the choice of the following options: *all the time*, *most of the time*, *some of the time*, or *never*. Of those surveyed, none selected *never*. Only 6%, or three participants, indicated they enjoy being a Senior Pastor *some of the time*. Of the 50 surveyed, 97% stated they enjoy being a Senior Pastor either *all the time* or *most of the time*.

Somewhat related was the question of whether each participant feels trapped being a Senior Pastor. Only one participant stated they feel trapped being a Senior Pastor *most of the time*. No participants indicated they feel trapped as a Senior Pastor *all of the time*. Ninety-eight percent, or 49 participants, stated they feel trapped being a Pastor either *some of the time* or *never*. Half of the participants indicated they feel trapped being a Senior Pastor *some of the time*.

When asked whether each participant believes that prescribed medication can assist their overall mental health, only three stated they *strongly agree*. Comparatively, 24%, or 12 participants, indicated they *disagree* with that statement. Those who *somewhat agree* that prescribed medication can help made up 39%, or 19 participants, while 32%, or 16 participants, stated they either *strongly agree* or *agree*.

Each participant was asked whether they had experienced some form of depression and anxiety. Only three, or 6%, stated they had experienced depression or anxiety *many times*. Those who have experienced depression or anxiety *sometimes* made

up 22%, or 11 participants, while 52%, or 26 participants, stated they had *never* experienced depression or anxiety. It should be noted that 20%, or 10 participants, stated they were *not sure*.

When asked whether each participant is too busy to be their most effective self, 76% of those surveyed, or 38 CNC Senior Pastors, stated they are too busy to be their most effective self *some of the time*. Of those surveyed who indicated they are too busy to be their most effective self either *all the time* or *most of the time* made up 20%, while only two participants stated they are *never* too busy.

Each participant was asked whether they are currently burnt out. A majority of the participants, 64%, stated they are burnt out *some of the time*. Those who stated they have *never* experienced burnout made up 12%, or six CNC Senior Pastors, while 6%, or three participants, stated they experienced burnout *most of the time*. None of the survey participants stated they are burnt out *all of the time*. And 18%, or nine Senior Pastors, stated they weren't sure whether what they've experienced could be classified as burnout.

When asked whether each participant prioritizes time for personal rest and hobbies, the majority of those who participated, 54%, stated they *sometimes*, when they are able, prioritize time for personal rest and hobbies. Those who selected that personal rest and hobbies are a *high priority* made up 42%, or 21 participants. Two participants stated they wished they could but couldn't prioritize rest and hobbies.

Each participant was asked how many days off a week, on average, they take for themselves. Each participant was given the options of *zero days a week*, *one day a week*, *one and a half days a week*, *two days a week*, or indicate they're *part-time*. Of those surveyed, one participant stated they are *part-time*. The participants who said they either

take *one day* or *one and a half days* off a week made up 82%, or 41 participants. Only six participants stated they take *two days off a week*, while two stated they *never* take a day off.

Each CNC Senior Pastor participant was asked whether they actively take time to get away for retreat and solitude. Each participant was given the following options: *Yes, this is a high priority for me; Sometimes, but I wish I could do it more often; I don't have time for that; I don't feel it's necessary*. Of the 50 participants, 54%, or 27 CNC Senior Pastors, stated they *sometimes* take time to get away for retreat and solitude. Those who indicated that taking time away for retreat and solitude is a *high priority* for them made up 18% or nine participants. Those who stated they *don't have time* to get away for retreat and solitude made up 22%, while three participants, or 6%, indicated they *don't feel it's necessary* for them.

Survey Results Comparisons

Considering church size and each CNC Senior Pastor's number of years at their current church, *Table 5* below illustrates that regardless of size, most Senior Pastors are at their church somewhere between zero to ten years. Outliers suggest that it is a rarity for Senior Pastors to be at their church for more than ten years. The following data also suggests that churches with a size of 300 congregants or fewer tend to have more Senior Pastors who are there for a shorter duration, ten years or fewer.

Table 3. Current Church Size Vs. Number of Years at Current Church (50 Total Survey Participants)

		Current Church Size				
		< 100	100-300	301-500	501-800	801+
Number of Years at Current Church	< 3 years	7	7		1	2
	3-6 years	1	6			2
	7-10 years	3	5	2	1	1
	11-15 years		2	3	1	
	16-20 years			1	1	1
	20+ years			1	1	1

Further survey results come into focus when looking at a Senior Pastor's current church size and comparing that to their congregation's expectations: whether those expectations are greater than their ability to meet them. Regardless of church size, it doesn't suggest an increase or decrease in a Senior Pastor's ability to meet their congregation's expectations. However, these factors become more potent when research looks at their total years of pastoral experience and total years at their current church. A Senior Pastor's total years of pastoral experience would imply that the more years they are in the role, they become more solidified as to whether they can meet their congregation's expectations. However, research suggests that the expectations of a church's congregation become more than the ability for a Senior Pastor to meet them if they have been at their church less than ten years. For those who have been at their current church for more than ten years, the numbers suggest a greater ability to either meet their congregation's expectations or adapt to them.

Table 4. Current Church Size Vs. Expectations of Church Congregation Greater than Ability to Meet Them (50 Total Survey Participants)

		Current Church Size				
		< 100	100-300	301-500	501-800	801+
Expectations of Church Congregation More than Ability to Meet Them	<i>Strongly Agree</i>	1	2		1	
	<i>Agree</i>		2	2		
	<i>Somewhat Agree</i>	3	8	2	3	
	<i>Disagree</i>	6	6	4	1	7
	<i>Strongly Disagree</i>	1	1			

Table 5. Total Years of Pastoral Experience Vs. Expectations of Church's Congregation More than Ability to Meet Them (50 Total Survey Participants)

		Total Years of Pastoral Experience					
		< 3	3-6	7-10	11-15	16-20	20+
Expectations of Church Congregation More than Ability to Meet Them	<i>Strongly Agree</i>	1			1	1	1
	<i>Agree</i>				4		
	<i>Somewhat Agree</i>	1	2	1	4	4	4
	<i>Disagree</i>			1	5		18
	<i>Strongly Disagree</i>						2

Table 6. Total Years at Current Church Vs. Expectations of Church's Congregation More than Ability to Meet Them (50 Total Survey Participants)

		Total Years at Current Church					
		< 3	3-6	7-10	11-15	16-20	20+
Expectations of Church's Congregation More than Ability to Meet Them	<i>Strongly Agree</i>	2	1				1
	<i>Agree</i>		1	2	1		
	<i>Somewhat Agree</i>	5	2	6	2	1	
	<i>Disagree</i>	10	5	3	2	2	2
	<i>Strongly Disagree</i>			1	1		

When looking at a 24-hour Sabbath within the context of the survey, there seems to be a distinct difference between a church's size and a Senior Pastor's total years of pastoral experience. According to survey results, a Senior Pastor's adherence to a 24-hour Sabbath is unaffected by the size of their church. Similarly, whether a Senior Pastor exhibits a high frequency of adhering to a 24-hour Sabbath doesn't seem to be affected by the length of their total years of pastoral experience, as *Tables 9 and 10* reveal.

Table 7. Current Church Size Vs. Frequency of a 24-Hour Sabbath Each Month (50 Total Survey Participants)

		Current Church Size				
		< 100	100-300	301-500	501-800	801+
Frequency of a 24-Hour Sabbath Each Month (On Average)	<i>Never</i>	3	1		1	1
	<i>1x a Month</i>		5	2		3
	<i>2x a Month</i>	1	4	1	2	
	<i>3x a Month</i>	4	5	4	2	1
	<i>Every Week</i>	3	3	1		2

Table 8. Total Years of Pastoral Experience Vs. Frequency of a 24-Hour Sabbath Each Month (50 Total Survey Participants)

		Total Years of Pastoral Experience					
		< 3	3-6	7-10	11-15	16-20	20+
Frequency of a 24-Hour Sabbath Each Month	<i>Never</i>		1		2	1	2
	<i>1x a Month</i>				2	2	6
	<i>2x a Month</i>	1	1	1	2		4
	<i>3x a Month</i>				8		8
	<i>Every Week</i>	1		1		2	5

Survey results reveal that a Senior Pastor's church size proves that smaller churches, congregations of 500 or fewer, have Senior Pastors working between 40 to 55 hours a week. In contrast, churches with 500 congregants or more have Senior Pastors

who work, on average, between 46 to 60-plus hours a week. Similarly, a Senior Pastor's total years at their current church suggests that those who have been at their church ten or fewer years work, on average, fewer hours a week than those who have been at their current church for eleven to 20-plus years.

Table 9. Current Church Size Vs. Number of Hours Working Per Week (50 Total Survey Participants)

		Current Church Size				
		< 100	100-300	301-500	501-800	801+
Number of Hours Working Per Week (On Average)	<i>40 Hours</i>	3				
	<i>41-45 Hours</i>	2	3	1		
	<i>46-50 Hours</i>	3	8	2	1	3
	<i>51-55 Hours</i>	1	6	2	1	1
	<i>56-60 Hours</i>	1	2	3	1	2
	<i>60+ Hours</i>				2	1
	<i>I'm Part-Time</i>	1				

Table 10. Total Years at Current Church Vs. Number of Hours Working Per Week (50 Total Survey Participants)

		Total Years at Current Church					
		< 3	3-6	7-10	11-15	16-20	20+
Number of Hours Working Per Week (On Average)	<i>40 Hours</i>	2		1			
	<i>41-45 Hours</i>	3	2		1		
	<i>46-50 Hours</i>	6	2	5	3		1
	<i>51-55 Hours</i>		3	4	2	1	1
	<i>56-60 Hours</i>	3	1	2	1	2	
	<i>60+ Hours</i>	1	1				1
	<i>I'm Part-Time</i>	1					

When addressing suicidal thoughts in the life of a Senior Pastor throughout their pastoral career, survey results reveal that the size of a Senior Pastor's current church neither increases nor decreases the possibility of suicidal thoughts or tendencies.

Table 11. Current Church Size Vs. Thoughts of Suicide During Pastoral Career (50 Total Survey Participants)

		Current Church Size				
		< 100	100-300	301-500	501-800	801+
Suicidal Thoughts in Pastoral Career	<i>Yes</i>	2	3		1	2
	<i>No</i>	10	15	8	4	5

Interestingly, a Senior Pastor's total years of pastoral experience seem to affect their view on whether their seminary education prepared them to address their emotional wellness and mental health. Senior Pastors with pastoral experience of ten years or less seem to be more favorable of their seminary education preparedness than Senior Pastors with eleven or more total years of pastoral experience. For those who have had 20-plus years of total pastoral experience, survey results illustrate that the amount of time from seminary graduation to future pastoral work leads a Senior Pastor to further believe in the insufficiency of their previous seminary preparedness.

Table 12. Total Years of Pastoral Experience Vs. Seminary Education Prepared One to Address Their Emotional Wellness and Mental Health (50 Total Survey Participants)

		Total Years of Pastoral Experience					
		< 3	3-6	7-10	11-15	16-20	20+
Seminary Education Prepared One to Address Their Emotional Wellness and Mental Health	<i>Strongly Agree</i>		1		1		1
	<i>Agree</i>	1			3	1	3
	<i>Somewhat Agree</i>	1		1	6		12
	<i>Disagree</i>		1	1	3		9
	<i>Strongly Disagree</i>				1	4	

When looking at a Senior Pastor's willingness to discuss their emotional wellness and mental health with their church congregation, there is an essential distinction between their total years of pastoral experience and their total years at their current church. According to survey results, total years of pastoral experience reveal a somewhat varied response to a Senior Pastor's willingness to divulge their emotional wellness and mental health with their church's congregation. However, a Senior Pastor's total years at their current church significantly affect their willingness to discuss these issues. If a Senior Pastor has been at their church for ten years or fewer, they are much less willing to discuss their emotional wellness and mental health with their church congregation. If,

however, they have been a Senior Pastor at their church for eleven or more years, they are more willing to discuss these matters.

Table 13. Total Years of Pastoral Experience Vs. Willing to Discuss Emotional Wellness and Mental Health with Church Congregation (50 Total Survey Participants)

		Total Years of Pastoral Experience					
		< 3	3-6	7-10	11-15	16-20	20+
Willing to Discuss Emotional Wellness and Mental Health with Church Congregation	<i>Strongly Agree</i>						2
	<i>Agree</i>		1		3	3	5
	<i>Somewhat Agree</i>	1		1	5	2	11
	<i>Disagree</i>	1	1		6		6
	<i>Strongly Disagree</i>			1			1

Table 14. Total Years at Current Church Vs. Willing to Discuss Emotional Wellness and Mental Health with Church Congregation (50 Total Survey Participants)

		Total Years at Current Church					
		< 3	3-6	7-10	11-15	16-20	20+
Willing to Discuss Emotional Wellness and Mental Health with Church Congregation	<i>Strongly Agree</i>					2	
	<i>Agree</i>	4		3	3		2
	<i>Somewhat Agree</i>	5	6	6	2	1	
	<i>Disagree</i>	7	2	3	1		1
	<i>Strongly Disagree</i>	1	1				

A Senior Pastor's involvement in a group of Christian individuals outside of their church who support and encourage them, regardless of their total years of pastoral experience, does not affect whether they are engaged with a group of individuals who support and encourage them. This is true for Senior Pastors who have been in pastoral ministry for ten or fewer years and those who have been in pastoral ministry for eleven to 20-plus years.

Table 15. Total Years of Pastoral Experience Vs. Involved in Group for Support (50 Total Survey Participants)

		Total Years of Pastoral Experience					
		< 3	3-6	7-10	11-15	16-20	20+
Involved in Group for Support	<i>Yes</i>	2	2	2	13	3	15
	<i>No</i>				2	2	9

Results of Interviews

The second phase of this researcher's mixed-method research approach was to conduct one-on-one personal interviews with CNC Senior Pastors. The scope of the CNC Senior Pastor survey was large in intent, but the scope of the one-on-one interviews was small and specific. From the roster of 208 CNC Senior Pastors, this researcher connected with nine CNC Senior Pastors without knowledge of each Pastor's relationship with emotional wellness or mental health. Also, the contexts for each Senior Pastor were largely unknown to this researcher in hope of generating a small group of CNC Senior Pastors that would represent a variety of church contexts and pastoral careers. This researcher invested in a selection process that included selecting 20 CNC Senior Pastors, reaching out via e-mail, and inviting each to participate in a virtual interview on Zoom. Nine of those CNC Senior Pastors responded with a desire to engage in the interview.

Each CNC Senior Pastor one-on-one interview participant is represented in this research by a numeric indication, such as *CNC Pastor One*, *CNC Pastor Two*, and so on. All interviews consisted first of objective questions related to each Senior Pastor's church and ministry experience and progressed in addressing issues related to rest, the Sabbath, emotional wellness, mental health, and supportive Christian community. Within the group of nine CNC Senior Pastors, the one-on-one interview group consisted of Pastors in their 30s and up into their 60s. The group also consisted of Senior Pastors of churches of 100 to those of churches over 800.

CNC Pastor One

CNC Pastor One is in his sixties and has been a professional Pastor for almost 40 years. When asked, on average, how many hours he works per week, CNC Pastor One

expressed he works “60-plus hours each week, doing something related to ministry.” Similarly, CNC Pastor One stated that, on average, he takes one day off a week.

When asked to describe his current emotional wellness, CNC Pastor One gave himself an A-minus and stated, “People like me think we’re emotionally healthy, but we have weak spots we sometimes ignore and sometimes don’t recognize.” Further, when asked to describe his current mental health, CNC Pastor One revealed he doesn’t feel much stress but questioned whether that was “because there is not a lot of stress in my life” or wondered whether it was because he was able to handle stress well.

When asked to describe how his church’s leadership does or does not prioritize his emotional wellness and mental health, CNC Pastor One mentioned that he had not taken an extended sabbatical but has taken off a couple of weeks at a time. CNC Pastor One’s church leadership has urged him to take an extended sabbatical, but neither he nor his wife has any desire to do that.

In response to describing his relationship with committing to a 24-hour Sabbath, CNC Pastor One said, “I technically believe that Sabbath is a creation principle. The idea of being under the cycle of rest as one day out of seven is something I agree with. But I’m not resting as I should be, perhaps.”

When asked to describe his relationship with therapy in addressing his mental health, CNC Pastor One stated, “In theory, I would be glad to do that and practice that. If things were bad enough, I would be willing to do that. But if they are not bad, I can convince myself I don’t need it.”

CNC Pastor One described how being a Pastor has negatively affected his life and his family by stating that “people treat you weirdly because you are a Pastor.” He further

said, “As the years have gone by, I work less and less at the office and more and more at home. But there hasn’t been a clear line between me being at work and home. That has been somewhat confusing.”

When asked what things he wished his church congregation and leadership understood about his challenges as their Senior Pastor, CNC Pastor One emphasized that he wants them to realize that he is one of them. He wants them to know that he’s simultaneously a sinner and a saint.

CNC Pastor Two

CNC Pastor Two is in his forties and has been a professional Pastor for almost 20 years. When asked, on average, how many hours he works per week, CNC Pastor Two revealed that he works 45 to 50 hours a week. Further, CNC Pastor Two expressed that he takes one day per week off for himself.

When asked to describe his current emotional wellness, CNC Pastor Two stated, “I suffer from depression and am on medication for it. I have a depression and anxiety diagnosis that’s not just environmental. My body doesn’t produce the same chemicals at the same rate as the average human, so the doctor says I rank lower.” CNC Pastor Two pointed out that a big challenge in his life is diverting or masking problems as he processes change and stress.

Furthermore, when asked to describe his current mental health, CNC Pastor Two stated, “I’m a high-functioning person with depression. I function very well at work, amongst friends, and at home. With my current health regimen and medication, I seem to be doing pretty well with my mental health.”

In describing how he was unprepared for the role of Senior Pastor through his seminary education, CNC Pastor Two said that he was not prepared to be objectified.

“When someone’s unhappy with the church, they will take it out on me because I am the object of their frustration, and it becomes my job to fix things. It becomes my job to meet their needs.” CNC Pastor Two discussed how congregants will flip the roll in the middle of a conversation, saying, “We’ll begin to talk as friends, and then all of a sudden, they will say to themselves, ‘Oh wait, you’re my Pastor.’ They’ll switch that role on me, and I’ll get objectified.” CNC Pastor Two also talked about how he was not prepared for the spiritual attack being a Senior Pastor would have on himself and his family. He alluded to the litany of things Paul went through in his ministry, such as being beaten, shipwrecked, and whipped. “On top of that is [Paul’s] concern for all the churches,” CNC Pastor Two stated. “Paul’s concern for his churches seems worse than the beatings. Sometimes, I don’t want to be concerned for my church and what is going on. I was not prepared to burden the heartache that concern would cause me.”

When asked to describe how his church’s leadership does or does not prioritize his emotional wellness and mental health, CNC Pastor Two revealed that mental health had been part of his family growing up and in his family now, and has thus brought that into his church. “There once was a scary moment when I had to tell my board, ‘I’m not doing well emotionally.’ It was scary because they held my job. The board is the one who could lead the charge to have me removed. But I finally said, ‘This has been a tough season. I’m now on medication and hope to get better.’ Thankfully, they responded well.”

CNC Pastor Two was asked to describe his relationship with therapy in addressing his mental health and said, “Your brain and heart are part of your body, so I don’t think divorcing your brain from the rest of your body is wise.” He went on to talk about how both are equally valid. “If you need physical therapy because of a torn

ligament in your knee or mental therapy because your brain is hurt, both are important.” CNC Pastor Two discussed how therapy had benefited him in that it had helped him see things that he didn’t usually see.

CNC Pastor Two was asked to describe how he handles criticism in his role as a Senior Pastor and stated, “On a good day, I could sit through my feelings and consider what’s valid and the point of a person’s criticism. On a bad day, I tend to shut down.” He pointed out that he doesn’t need to defend himself but tends to shut down and work feverishly in light of criticism. “I pour myself into being a workaholic and fanatically try to alleviate the problem of being criticized so that the person is no longer feeling those things.”

When discussing the difficulty in having a group of Christian individuals he meets with outside of his church, who support him and keep him accountable, CNC Pastor Two discussed those challenges by stating, “With the stress I have in life, like being [a] dad... and a husband, the personal time I get to relationship build needs to come in the morning. Evenings are tied up, and weekends are tied up with family and ministry. So, if I’m going to have a group of guys who support me, a community who support me, it’s going to have to be in the morning.”

When asked to describe how being a Senior Pastor has negatively affected his life or his family, CNC Pastor Two specified that being a Senior Pastor has been hard on his marriage. “My wife and I are doing well, but my marriage has been taxing and trying. There’s always somebody that wants your time.” CNC Pastor Two further shed light on the reality that there are many difficult conversations with people in his congregation who might be going through hard things, whether in their marriage or because their

health is terrible. “In those times, my wife has to help me remember I don’t have to carry their emotions. For years, I would carry their burdens and stew on them at home. It would rob my time with my wife and my kids.” He further revealed that he’s had to learn to set those things at the foot of the cross and give them to Jesus. “If I try to carry it myself, it will not go well for my marriage or my relationship with my kids.”

An interesting moment occurred when CNC Pastor Two was asked to describe resources and strategies that would best assist him in increasing his emotional wellness and mental health. He talked about how there are sad moments when he realizes he doesn’t have a lot of friends or doesn’t have friends on the level he could call anytime and with anything. “That makes me sad. There are times when I feel this overwhelming wave of loneliness.” CNC Pastor Two further pointed out that few people can relate to what it’s like to be a Senior Pastor, pointing to the different burden they carry. “The group of people where you can say something, and you don’t have to qualify every statement, that circle of people is very small. A Senior Pastor has to consider a group of people they want to hang out with that they have chemistry with. And then, out of those people, there needs to be people ready or close enough to maintain a semblance of a relationship.”

Lastly, CNC Pastor Two was asked to share things he wished his church congregation and leadership understood about his challenges as their Senior Pastor. “I wish they would know how guilty I feel about taking time off and taking time to build a community for myself.” CNC Pastor Two also stated that he must overcome emotional hurdles when taking care of himself first.

CNC Pastor Three

CNC Pastor Three is in his sixties and has been a professional Pastor for over 30 years. On average, CNC Pastor Three works 35 hours per week as a bi-vocational Pastor. And on average, he takes one day off a week.

When asked to describe his current emotional wellness, CNC Pastor Three stated, “It is tenuous at this point. My well is dry. I’m exhausted, and it’s been hard to maintain a proper attitude.” Further, CNC Pastor Three was asked to describe his current mental health. He revealed that he believes he’s biologically predisposed to depression and has made an effort to end his life.

CNC Pastor Three described how he was unprepared for the role of Senior Pastor through his seminary education and prior experience by stating, “My walk as a Pastor has been extremely evolutionary. I come from a militant fundamentalist Baptist background. The things I was taught did not prepare me for ministry.” He further shared that when he first got into the ministry, he had to figure out what it was “to live, breathe, and move with people.” Despite his seminary experience, CNC Pastor Three had to realize that he wasn’t the Holy Spirit. He commented that there were times early in his career when he would give a message and believed it was his responsibility to change a person’s life. “But that’s not my business. I started making changes when I realized that my duty was to God’s word.”

When asked to describe how his church’s leadership does or does not prioritize his emotional wellness and mental health, CNC Pastor Three stated, “We have elders who are passive, unenergetic and disengaged. If I were to describe their interest in my mental health, it would be zero at this stage. A lot of them have the same mentality: a Pastor does things because that’s what the Pastor does, and they don’t care what the cost

is to you.” He continued by indicating that no one in his church asks how his brain is doing. He stated that he knows his church and leadership love him and care about his well-being, “but no one has ever said, ‘Are you doing okay?’” CNC Pastor Three pointed out that one of the significant dynamics of pastoral ministry is that the Pastor is nothing more than the person in a church who gives leadership and serves as its shepherd. “But [Senior Pastors] are also a part of the church. However, people often look at you as the hired gun.”

CNC Pastor Three described his relationship with observing the Sabbath by stating, “God wants us to worship him. The Sabbath is not defined as a day but a day of rest. I’m taking as many days of rest as possible. But I don’t use the word Sabbath.” Interestingly, CNC Pastor Three compared the building blocks of the New Testament Church and stated that the idea of the Sabbath didn’t fit within that structure.

CNC Pastor Three was asked to describe how he handles criticism in his role. “There’s no one more crabby than Christians,” he said. He further stated that a Senior Pastor needs to grow thick skin, but also said, “I always look for truth. I always ask, ‘Is there something in there that I’ve got to learn?’ Christians are so critical in nature, especially American Christians. We tend to be entitled.” CNC Pastor Three revealed that he used to dwell on criticism for months when he was younger. But after time, he began to realize that people, when criticizing, are simply giving one their opinion.

When asked to describe his attitude towards, or involvement in, a group of Christian individuals he meets with outside his church who support him and keep him accountable, CNC Pastor Three responded by stating, “This is absolutely essential because you get so myopic. It’s so easy to look inward, and that’s dangerous.” He

continued by saying that an important thing any person can do is to have input from the outside. “If you’re afraid of accountability, don’t go into ministry. Because accountability is key to your righteousness and integrity.”

CNC Pastor Three was asked to describe how being a Pastor has negatively affected his life and his family and shared, “I try not to bring ministry stuff to my house. Even though my wife is a sounding board, she knows what’s going on. I don’t want it to affect my marriage. We have talked about how our house has got to be the safest place on earth. And so the stuff that is negatively impacting us does not come in.”

CNC Pastor Four

CNC Pastor Four is in his forties and has been a professional Pastor for almost 20 years. On average, CNC Pastor Four works 60-plus hours a week and, on average, takes one day off a week.

When asked to describe his current emotional wellness, CNC Pastor Four stated, “If it had been two months ago, it would have been the opposite answer, like I’m in real trouble.” He continued by revealing that a couple of months before this interview, different factors helped him realize that he was significantly burnt out. “It was, up to that point, the biggest mental health crisis I’ve had, period.” Further, when asked to describe his current mental health, CNC Pastor Four stated that he’s doing much better currently, “or at least on the road.”

CNC Pastor Four was asked to describe how he was unprepared for the role of Senior Pastor through his seminary education and prior experience and said, “Up until a few years ago, I had never heard mental health talked about at all. Burnout was another word that I had never heard talked about. Or if it was, it was in hushed whispers, not something out in the open. The connotation was always more negative with it. You

weren't supposed to struggle or have issues." CNC Pastor Four also stated that there's a tremendous burden in being a Senior Pastor, and thus, the need for connection and community is great. "I've worked hard not to be lonely. I'm far more transparent than I should be with far more people than I should be because this was always one of the things that bugged me. I always heard that being a Senior Pastor was the most lonely position and place to be. Despite my best efforts, I often find myself in that place."

When asked to describe his relationship with observing the Sabbath, CNC Pastor Four stated, "Sabbath and rest have been something that I have preached and believed in. I have insisted on it for everyone else, but I have never modeled it myself." He said he's not done a good job taking time off, taking vacations, or taking Sundays off. He talked more about giving lip service to rest and living out healthy rhythms by saying, "I can't function the way I did for as long as I did without continued serious ramifications for myself, my family, and my ministry."

CNC Pastor Four was asked to describe his relationship with therapy in addressing his mental health and shared, "In the family I grew up in, mental health and going to a counselor was frowned upon. The belief was that if you needed counseling, it was because you didn't have enough faith or just needed to be more joyful in the Lord. But as I watch people close to me struggle with mental health, I realized it was real." There was a season in CNC Pastor Four's life when someone suggested he see a professional therapist. He resisted for quite a while because he believed he could work through it independently. "But I reached a point where I knew I wasn't doing well. So I went to a counselor for a few months, which was one of the most life-giving things I've done."

When describing how he handles criticism as a Senior Pastor, CNC Pastor Four stated, “Over the years, I’ve learned to do my best and to hold things loosely. Often when people are angry, sometimes it’s because of me, but it’s most often not because of me. I’m just the way things are boiling over, and I end up in the crosshairs.” CNC Pastor Four talked about how criticism intersects with his identity and his role in the calling God has given him. “If I live based on people’s criticism or praise, that’s a dangerous spot for me. If I’m called, then that also means that God has equipped me to handle anything that comes my way.”

CNC Pastor Four was asked to describe how being a Senior Pastor has negatively affected his life and his family. He responded by stating that financially it’s been stressful. He continued by saying, “There have been times when I’ve invested in ministry at the expense of my family. I need help taking a break or getting away on vacation. Not doing so has meant that my family is constantly at the epicenter of everything. They don’t get a break, nor can they walk away to refresh and recharge themselves.”

An interesting conversation ensued when CNC Pastor Four was asked to describe resources and strategies that would best assist him in increasing his emotional wellness and mental health. “A bit ago, when it came out that I was burnt out, I started talking to some other Senior Pastors, and they mostly responded by saying, ‘Oh, we’ve all experienced burnout before.’ The problem, however, is that I had never heard of any of those stories. I had never heard them talk about that before.” He continued by stating that while he was appreciative of their help, he would have felt more normal if he had known that others had or were experiencing the same thing. “I wish I had heard some of those stories before I was lying on the floor and beating myself up.”

As the interview concluded, CNC Pastor Four was asked to share things he wished his church congregation and leadership understood about his challenges as their Senior Pastor. “I tend to internalize every comment that’s made. Sometimes people make backhanded comments that they intend innocently. But the power of words matters.” He continued by revealing that he hears much more criticism than encouragement. “It’s easy for everybody to sit back and second guess why we did it this way or didn’t do something that way. Encouraging calls, emails, or text messages we receive end up meeting so much because it feels like they are few and far between.”

CNC Pastor Five

CNC Pastor Five is in his forties and has been a professional Pastor for almost 30 years. When asked how many hours he works per week, on average, CNC Pastor Five said he tries to keep it between 50 and 55 hours. He also shared that he typically takes two full days off a week.

When asked to describe his current emotional wellness, CNC Pastor Five stated, “If you had asked me about this six months ago, we would be having a different conversation. Right now, I’m in a really good place, even though I’ve struggled and have been diagnosed with depression.” CNC Pastor Five was also asked to describe his current mental health. “Most people are shocked when they find out that I legitimately struggle with depression. But I’ve learned how to become friends with my emotional struggles. It’s important to have an intimate awareness of yourself.” He continued by stating that it’s essential for one to know how to function under challenging seasons and then make sure they have the right allies in their life to help them through the process of finding help and getting better.

CNC Pastor Five was asked to describe how he was unprepared for the role of Senior Pastor through his seminary education and prior experience. “When I was going through Pastoral leadership at seminary, most of what they taught me had to do with running an organization.” He continued by sharing that one of the significant aspects of pastoral ministry missing from his education was how to shoulder somebody else’s problems. “Scripture tells us to bear other’s burdens. But who bears the burden of the Pastor?”

When asked to describe how his church’s leadership does or does not prioritize his emotional wellness and mental health, CNC Pastor Five said that his church needs to be rewarded for how well they’ve done. “My church did not do a good job of caring for the previous Pastor. But when I started, they committed not to repeat that mistake.” He stated that he has a team that comes around him to pray and share with one another. “They give me open space to discuss frustrations with the church and the community. I love what I do, but I don’t hold these things so tightly that I can’t be honest and genuine. I approach those meetings with great intimacy and vulnerability and let them see where things are.”

CNC Pastor Five was asked to describe his relationship with therapy in addressing his mental health. “I never want to take away from the sufficiency of Scripture to lead us closer to the throne, but I believe God has creatively equipped people around us to look into our inner being.” CNC Pastor Five also revealed that he’s not opposed to medication. “If I had to take it, I would. But I’ve learned a lot of other coping skills.” He further shared that a Senior Pastor must continue to help people see that therapy and counseling can be a help, leading a person towards a healthier holistic life where they can flourish.

When asked to describe how he handles criticism in his role as Senior Pastor, CNC Pastor Five stated, “I pay attention to who’s doing the complaining and criticizing. When people begin to criticize form over function, I try to help them see the function of things.” He also shared that he’s not afraid of confrontation but also understands the need to be humble enough to receive thoughts, opinions, and criticisms and thus decide what to do about it. “A lot of Senior Pastors take criticism too personally. We often fail to realize that the complaining people also care about the churches we lead. If both ideas can’t coexist, how can we move forward in a way that respects [each] other?”

CNC Pastor Five was asked to describe how he prioritizes personal rest and hobbies. He specifically pointed to hobbies that bring about some semblance of completion. “When I do things, I like them to be completed. If I had to do something that had no end, I don’t know that I would enjoy that.” He went on to talk about how much of his life is incomplete, especially when it comes to helping and leading people in his church. “There’s always a sermon to preach. So, when things can end, that becomes the place to go, ‘Okay, that was good.’”

CNC Pastor Six

CNC Pastor Six is in his thirties and has been a professional Pastor for over ten years. On average, CNC Pastor Six works 50 hours per week and revealed that when he can take a day off, that day is usually Friday.

When asked to describe ways in which he was unprepared for the role of Senior Pastor through his seminary education and prior experience, CNC Pastor Six said, “Dealing with conflict management and people experiencing grief was something I had to learn on the job.” He also pointed out that administration was something that he had to learn outside of his educational experience. Specifically, CNC Pastor Six spoke about

how unprepared he was for having a staff that, when frustrated with him, would interact with one another, talking about him. “I was now the boss that people were sitting around and venting about.”

CNC Pastor Six described how his church’s leadership prioritizes his emotional wellness and mental health by revealing that he was recently crashing and burning. “They [had someone] coach me and give me incredible emotional health relief.” He further shared that his leadership is relatively aware of his emotional and mental health.

CNC Pastor Six described his relationship with therapy in addressing his mental health by stating, “I’m not opposed to therapy, practically. I’ve just never made time for it. However, my wife has a pretty negative idea of therapy. From an official perspective, that would not be something that, as a team, we would be in favor of.”

CNC Pastor Six described how he handles criticism in his role as Senior Pastor by sharing that he’s had to learn and listen to get his ego out of the way by listening, seeking to understand, asking questions, and helping people feel heard. “It makes it a whole lot easier for me to handle criticism if I tell myself I don’t care what this person thinks of me. But if I don’t care what this person thinks of me, that’s not good for my relationship with that person.”

When describing how being a Senior Pastor has negatively affected his life and his family, CNC Pastor Six struggled with addressing this question. Even though he talked about how difficult it can be to move his family from place to place, or the lack of consistent financial resources, he wondered aloud whether these struggles were because of adverse effects related to being a Senior Pastor or if they were opportunities that

resulted “in a higher degree of trust in Jesus than my family and I would have had otherwise.”

CNC Pastor Six was asked to describe resources and strategies that would better assist him in increasing his emotional wellness and mental health. “It would not be a bad idea to have a counselor that I can bounce things off of with some degree of regularity.” He also discussed how beneficial it would be to join a small group that regularly got together where he was not the participant’s Pastor and instead just a friend and brother in Christ.

When asked to describe things he wished his church congregation and leadership understood about his challenges being their Senior Pastor, CNC Pastor Six stated, “I wish they understood the difference between being a Pastor and being anything else. In some ways, we go to work and come home. But in a lot of ways, we never really come home from work.” CNC Pastor Six mentioned that when a friend refers to him in the third person as a Pastor, “it’s not the same relationship. That same person doesn’t refer to his friend, who, say, is the chairman of the board, as a chairman.”

CNC Pastor Seven

CNC Pastor Seven is in his fifties and has been a professional Pastor for over 20 years. CNC Pastor Seven stated that, on average, he works 20 to 30 hours weekly and has three days off each week.

When asked to describe his current emotional wellness, CNC Pastor Seven shared that his dad was a Pastor for a long time and instilled in him that “it’s God’s church and not my church.” Further, CNC Pastor Seven stated, “Emotionally, I handle things pretty well. I had a health scare a number of years ago that changed my perspective on everything.” When asked to describe his current mental health, CNC Pastor Seven

revealed that he internalizes many things but wishes he didn't. He spoke about how he has to remind himself that he often has no idea what's happening in an individual's life that might be causing them stress.

CNC Pastor Seven was asked to describe how his church's leadership does or does not prioritize his emotional wellness and mental health and shared,

They do a good job. They don't base my salary on whether I work a certain number of hours per week. All they say is, "Pastor, the only thing we expect is if there's someone in the hospital, we would like you to visit that person. We want you to arrange the church business, care, preaching, and teaching. We want you to be here long-term, and we're not interested in nitpicking what you do week-to-week."

When asked to describe his relationship with observing the Sabbath, CNC Pastor Seven stated, "I'm more interested in interpreting how the Sabbath motivates a person's life. I don't want to put the Sabbath in a box." He continued by sharing that he sees the Sabbath as a time of rest, focusing on God and a person's well-being. "I don't necessarily see it as a specific day of the week."

CNC Pastor Seven was asked to describe his relationship with therapy in addressing his mental health. "Either you believe in medicine, or you don't. I don't have a problem with any medication." He went on to state that there's a big difference between the spiritual and the physical, pointing out that people in the Bible, such as David struggled with depression. "We shouldn't confuse physical depression with spiritual depression."

When asked to describe how being a Senior Pastor has negatively affected his life and the life of his family, CNC Pastor Seven reflected on what it was like to be a Pastor's child. "If my kids were negatively impacted, I tried to ensure it was not because of something I did. I have always had the mindset that you are a child of God, a church

member, and then you are a Pastor's kid. I do not expect anything more of my kids than I would any other church member."

CNC Pastor Eight

CNC Pastor Eight is in his thirties and has been a professional Pastor for over ten years. On average, CNC Pastor Eight works 45 hours a week and takes one day off a week, but stated that he's trying to get to the point where he's taking two days off a week.

When asked to describe his current emotional wellness, CNC Pastor Eight shared, "It is below average right now. We've had a couple of tough, controversial things come up, so I've been trying to work on that." When asked to describe his current mental health, CNC Pastor Eight indicated that it's similar to his current emotional wellness. "Some of the challenges I've had to deal with have taken a toll on my emotional and mental wellness. I don't know where one starts and ends, so they have been lower this season as I'm trying to fight these battles."

CNC Pastor Eight was asked to describe how he was unprepared for the role of Senior Pastor through his seminary education. "My education did not prepare me to know how to navigate an Elder Board that is not fully on the same page with each other. But, honestly, I don't know that someone could fully be prepared for the pressure that will come with being a Senior Pastor." He further revealed that he knew being a Senior Pastor would be challenging, but he did not know how tough it would be.

CNC Pastor Eight shared that his church's leadership does a decent job of prioritizing his emotional wellness and mental health. "Every time we meet as an Elder Board, they ask me, 'How are you doing? How's your soul?' They check in immediately." He went on to talk about how he's working towards getting comfortable with how much he shares where he's at emotionally and mentally with his leadership.

“Right now, the Elder Board doesn’t feel like a safe environment to share those things fully because we’re not all clicking.”

In describing how he handles criticism in his role as Senior Pastor, CNC Pastor Eight discussed how he’s trying to keep himself rooted in daily disciplines and keeping his identity in God in front of him. “Ultimately, I belong to Christ. I am secure in Him.” CNC Pastor Eight revealed that he continues to work on handling criticism. “There have been times when I’ve had a heated e-mail or something that struck pretty hard. Sometimes I handle that well, and sometimes I don’t.”

When discussing how being a Senior Pastor has negatively affected his life and his family, CNC Pastor Eight shared that even though there’s been an increase in joy, there has also been a significant increase in anxiety. “I feel I’m more anxious. With the pressures of decision-making and controversies, I don’t have someone to shoot issues up the ladder.” He further talked about how being a Senior Pastor has put a strain on his wife. “I’ve seen how it’s affected her in many different ways.”

CNC Pastor Eight concluded the interview by sharing what he wished his church congregation and leadership understood about his challenges as their Senior Pastor. “It’d be great if the church understood the nuances of the congregation’s opinions. In the church, there is a collective body of very different people. I’m trying to shepherd and hear everyone while still trying to follow what God is leading me to do.” He further revealed how he wished he was given space to figure difficult things out, wanting his congregation and leadership to know that if they disagree, it’s okay.

CNC Pastor Nine

CNC Pastor Nine is in his fifties and has been a professional Pastor for almost 30 years. CNC Pastor Nine shared that he works, on average, 50 hours per week and tries each week to take one day off.

When asked to describe his current emotional wellness, CNC Pastor Nine stated, “I am equipped or seasoned enough to handle my emotional wellness. I believe in thick skin and a soft heart.” He noted that thick skin comes with being a Senior Pastor because the role takes a lot of hits. But he also shared that, despite all the hits, one needs to still focus on keeping their heart soft. “I am still sensitive to God and caring and loving to people.” When asked to describe his current mental health, CNC Pastor Nine stated, “I look at the amount of stress I’m experiencing and then measure where that stress comes from.” He pointed out that getting push-back from his congregation comes with the territory. CNC Pastor 9 further shared, “I need to approach God and say, ‘Okay, what are you trying to do in my heart? Show me how to lead well in the midst of this.’”

CNC Pastor Nine was asked to describe how he was unprepared for the role of Senior Pastor through his seminary education. He first revealed that he was not sure he was prepared for the level of tension within the church. “Seminary addressed some sole issues and a lot of praxis: such as preparing sermons, studying languages, and managing organizations. But then you meet with families that are mad at you, couples considering divorce, and leadership craziness.” CNC Pastor Nine went on to share that it would be wise to equip future Pastors within seminary institutions to know how to find help in a crisis “because you’re going to face a crisis.”

When asked to describe his relationship with therapy in addressing his mental health, CNC Pastor Nine said, “I’m fully supportive of therapy. But I haven’t reached out

to a therapist in a long time.” He shared that he’s relied heavily on mentoring and close friendships. When his soul is not doing well, he has people he can talk to, but CNC Pastor Nine hasn’t prioritized meeting with a professional therapist or counselor.

CNC Pastor Nine was asked to describe how being a Pastor has negatively affected his life and his family. “The stress of the job has been hard for my wife and my kids. Even though my kids are older, they still like Church which is a bit of a victory.”

When asked to describe resources and strategies that would best assist him in increasing his emotional wellness and mental health, CNC Pastor Nine stated, “I’ve encouraged a lot of people to get counseling, but I wonder if I need it. That’s something I need to explore.” He continued this thought by sharing that he’s had conversations at different times about building cohorts of ministers and Pastors who live in the same space. “There is value in seeing practitioners beyond the walls of my church.”

Lastly, CNC Pastor Nine was asked to share things he wished his church and leadership understood about his challenge as their Senior Pastor. “We need to break down the idea of two different levels of spirituality. Life is hard for Pastors too.” He said that some things weigh heavy on his soul and that being a Senior Pastor “is not like selling insurance.”

Post-Interview Consent

Due to the sensitive nature of the topics outlined in this research, this researcher provided each interviewee with post-interview consent forms (a copy of which is in Appendix E).

This researcher also submitted an outlined review of this research project to Bethel University’s Institutional Review Board (IRB). Upon examination, this researcher received IRB approval.

It should be noted that each interview participant in this research provided their full consent before and after the conclusion of this research project. Furthermore, interview participants expressed gratitude that they were not only able to participate in this research but that the topic of this research and its relation precisely to Pastors was being considered, discussed, and distributed.

CHAPTER SIX: EVALUATION AND DISCUSSION

This researcher has spent considerable time, thought, and prayer on the role of emotional wellness and mental health in the life of Senior Pastors. This researcher selected a subgroup of Senior Pastors within the Converge (formerly the Baptist General Conference) denomination to understand the context of their challenges. Further, this researcher pinpointed a more specific subgroup, the Converge North Central (CNC) district. As of the time of this research project, 208 churches are a part of the CNC district. Of these 208 CNC churches, this researcher hoped to connect with as many CNC Senior Pastors as possible.

This researcher needed to work with CNC headquarters and staff to ensure that CNC Senior Pastors were made aware of this research study and given the proper included steps to achieve research results. Of the 208 Senior Pastors within CNC, only 50 completed the survey, which was sent out and available for three weeks. The 50 survey participants were below the 75 to 100 participant target established at the outset of this research. However, the 50 participants in the survey represent a varied collection of Senior Pastors, ranging in age, experience, and church size. Subsequently, the involvement of survey participants did indeed help this researcher further understand the relationship between Senior Pastors and their emotional wellness and mental health.

Further, this researcher composed a virtual interview format to involve up to ten CNC Senior Pastors of the existing 208 roster. Because the survey was structured to allow participants to be involved under complete anonymity, this researcher could not

specifically select ten CNC Senior Pastors from the 50 survey participants. As such, this researcher referred to the roster of 208 CNC Senior Pastors and, without knowledge of each Pastor's church and experience, randomly reached out to 20 CNC Senior Pastors hoping to acquire ten participants for the virtual one-on-one interview. From those inquiries, nine CNC Senior Pastors agreed to participate and were thus scheduled, per their availability, through a free scheduling online format called Calendly.

Each participant could select a one-hour interview time slot from a list of dates and times. They were then given a Zoom link for the agreed-upon interview, as one-on-one interviews were done virtually through Zoom and were video recorded. At the outset of each interview, participants were asked for their consent to be recorded, which each participant gave. Interviews lasted anywhere from 30 minutes to one hour, depending on each participant's involvement and answers to each question. After each interview, recordings were downloaded and placed within editing software that allowed this researcher to remove the video from the interview's audio and transcribe them into a Word document. Each transcription had all identifiable factors related to each participant removed. After editing each transcription, this researcher combed through the content of each transcription and retained only information found illuminating and valuable for the benefit of this research.

Findings in Relation to Biblical and Theological Analysis

Personal Equipping of Senior Pastors

One of the most critical survey questions in addressing the emotional wellness and mental health of Senior Pastors is whether they currently feel equipped to deal with the personal needs of their pastoral position. A large majority, 70%, of those who participated in the survey stated they *agree* they are presently equipped. However, none

of the 50 participants selected *disagree* or *strongly disagree*, which means that none of the 50 CNC Senior Pastor survey participants currently feel they are ill-equipped to deal with the personal needs of their position.

There are several implications involved in these findings. The first, and arguably most important, is the unclear motivation as to why all 50 survey participants revealed they currently feel equipped to meet the needs of their position. Did they select these answers because they think they *should* be equipped? Or was it because if they shared they don't feel equipped, they would negate in some way the legitimacy of their role as Pastor?

Each believer in Jesus is perpetually tempted to believe they are more capable than they are or should be. It is striking to this researcher that 50 CNC Senior Pastors, 100% of the survey participants, claimed to be thoroughly equipped to do the work they have been called to do. A Christian's abilities, strengths, talents, and success do not come from one's self, as Paul points out in 2 Corinthians 10:12-13, where he writes,

We do not dare to classify or compare ourselves with some who commend themselves. When they measure themselves by themselves and compare themselves with themselves, they are not wise. We, however, will not boast beyond proper limits, but will confine our boasting to the sphere of service God himself has assigned to us, a sphere that also includes you.

Perhaps, the survey question didn't provide enough nuance to allow each survey participant the ability to indicate where their equipping came from. Potentially, a better question may have been, "Do you agree with the statement that your ability to lead your church has been given to you completely by God Himself?" In other words, each participant could have been allowed to point toward where their equipping came from.

Paul underlines this truth in 2 Corinthians 4:7 that strength and power come “from God and not from us.”

The one-on-one interviews provided a more detailed and nuanced perspective on whether a Senior Pastor felt equipped to meet the needs of their position. For instance, CNC Pastor One discussed how many within churches believe that Senior Pastors are automatically emotionally healthy, or should be. But he also quickly pointed out that Senior Pastors, like everyone else, have weak spots they ignore or don't recognize. Senior Pastors are, along with every other human being on the planet, part of a fallen world, and are thus prone to sinful nature and biases.

CNC Pastor Four pointed to a dangerous trend that exists among Senior Pastors today. As quoted earlier, CNC Pastor Four stated, “When it came out that I was burned out, I started talking to some other Senior Pastors, and they mostly responded by saying, ‘Oh, we’ve all experienced burnout before.’” CNC Pastor Four exasperatingly shared that he had never heard stories of burnout before. He revealed that no other Senior Pastor, especially those who had been in their roles for quite some time, shared their struggles with him. The implication is clear: if current Senior Pastors were more vocal and transparent about their struggles and limitations, it would prepare new and future Senior Pastors for the difficulties and challenges of their position. Transparency and authenticity about individual limitations would help Senior Pastors overall. It would also help churches be proactive in the lives of their Senior Pastors instead of reacting when it's too late.

The one-on-one interviews were replete with Senior Pastors who wished their congregations understood that being a Senior Pastor did not mean they were no longer

human. CNC Pastor Six shared in his interview, “We go to work and come home from work.” He further shared, however, that one of the significant differences between Senior Pastors and their congregation is that “in a lot of ways, we never really come home from work.” Senior Pastors carry the burdens of their ministry with them wherever they go. They can never genuinely release their position’s care, concerns, and weight.

Church Elder Boards and leadership teams can exacerbate the expectations of the Senior Pastor role. They can unknowingly present an expectation of their Senior Pastors that can lead them towards future burnout and emotional and mental struggle. CNC Pastor Two alluded to as much when he discussed, as stated earlier, a moment when he needed to tell his Elder Board he wasn’t doing well. Because of the expectations of his position, he instinctively withheld this information for fear that his Elder Board held his livelihood in their hands. It had to get to a point for CNC Pastor Two where he could no longer move forward for him to speak up finally. This isn’t to say that his Elder Board was demanding and putting pressure on him. But, as can be equally destructive, they weren’t displaying a proactive attitude beforehand to ensure that CNC Pastor Two wouldn’t experience any undue expectations or that he would ever feel inhibited to openly and honestly share his struggle.

A common plight among Senior Pastors is that they must fend for themselves. Again, this doesn’t necessarily happen because Elder Boards intentionally withhold their care or concern. Instead, church Elder Boards and leadership teams often aren’t proactively thinking about the welfare of their Senior Pastor. As such, Elder Boards will inquire about the welfare of their Senior Pastor, such as with CNC Pastor Eight, as he shared that “every time we meet as an Elder Board, they ask me, ‘How are you doing?’

How's your soul?' They check in immediately." Instead, church Elder Boards and leadership teams should understand that a Senior Pastor's unhealthiness is not something that could *potentially* happen but most likely *will* happen. What systems and strategies are Elder Boards committing to that will help their Senior Pastor attain and maintain their emotional wellness and mental health? It may surprise many church Elder Boards and leadership teams, but Senior Pastors don't often feel confident sharing their struggles. In his interview, CNC Pastor Eight stated, "I'm working on getting comfortable with how much I want to share and how much I want to explain where I'm at. But right now, the Elder Board doesn't feel like a safe environment to share those things fully."

Given the complexities of the Senior Pastor position, each Senior Pastor is unable to meet the personal needs of their position. They do not possess the strength, ability, and fortitude to meet all the emotional, mental, physical, and spiritual requirements the position requires. This doesn't mean that Senior Pastors are unqualified to be in their role. But understanding inherent limitations and lack of individual equipping, Senior Pastors, when acting out of their limitations and embracing the strength and power that only God provides, set a remarkable stage for their churches to follow, which is the intended life of any Jesus follower.

Congregational Expectations

Knowingly or unknowingly, congregations also possess expectations of their Senior Pastor. Even though survey participants indicated they unanimously felt equipped to meet the personal needs of their position, 52% of those surveyed stated they either *somewhat agree*, *agree*, or *strongly agree* with their inability to meet their congregation's expectations. These numbers didn't change based on church size but did change based on total years of pastoral experience. This doesn't bode well for new or future Senior

Pastors. If this research paints a picture of a larger reality, it would seem that new or future Senior Pastors inherently step into a role in which their congregation's expectations are beyond their ability to meet them.

As Paul points out in 2 Corinthians 4:8-9, we are hard-pressed, perplexed, persecuted, and struck down throughout the human experience.¹⁹⁴ This reality is inevitable. The goal of the Christian life is not to avoid these things but to understand that they are a part of the human experience. Thus, each Christian must boast "all the more gladly" in their innate weakness. This reality should not produce shame but is a reality centered on purpose. What is the purpose? The purpose is to enable God's power to live out in the life of the Christian, which in turn causes others to be "drawn to the power of Christ they see displayed" in the Christian's life.¹⁹⁵ Power and strength inherent in an individual's life is a myth and not something a Christian, nor Senior Pastor, should rely on. Once Senior Pastors fully understand this and embrace it, they will live this out in front of their congregation and leadership teams. They will display a life that trusts God to be who He says He will be.

But because of the complexity of a congregation's expectations of their Senior Pastor, they can set aside their personal wellness to meet the explicitly stated or passively indicated expectations. CNC Pastor Two said, "I feel guilty about doing things for myself. That comes from family of origin, the nature of the job, the expectations we put on ourselves, and sometimes the church puts on us: that we are supposed to live a

¹⁹⁴ Baker, 186.

¹⁹⁵ Baker, 437.

sacrificial life.” CNC Pastor Six also stated, “It doesn’t matter how many times I say I’m taking Friday as a day off; that doesn’t click in my congregation’s minds. They think Fridays are a work day.” Unlike a corporate position that functions to meet a specific need for a particular amount of time each week, Senior Pastors are never *not* Senior Pastors. Life happens. A congregant will go to the hospital, experience a traumatic event, or go through an urgent matter and expect the Senior Pastor to be available at all times and in every way.

CNC Pastor Nine shared, “I’m going to get pushback from the congregation. It just comes with the territory.” Every Senior Pastor knows this. That’s why they must live prepared lives and understand they will never fully meet the expectations of their church. Thus, there must be a determination in each Senior Pastor’s life to commit to ensuring their personal emotional wellness and mental health and then set up proper boundaries for their selves, their marriages, and their families, regardless of the expectations of their congregation or leadership team. No new Senior Pastor should step into their position and be surprised by their congregation’s overwhelming expectations. CNC Pastor Eight, who had been in his role for only four months at the time of this research project, was a great example when he shared, “I knew being a Senior Pastor was going to be tough. But at the same time, it was tougher than I thought it would be.”

Emotional Wellness and Mental Health Transparency

An essential aspect of a Senior Pastor’s role in handling the expectations of their congregations is the importance of publicly displaying a willingness to address their emotional wellness and mental health, encouraging others to do the same. In the survey, participants were asked whether they would discuss their emotional wellness and mental health with their congregation. Sixteen participants stated they *disagree* or *strongly*

disagree with their willingness to discuss these things. This is deeply troubling. In not prioritizing or circumventing emotional wellness and mental health transparency, the Senior Pastor sets the stage for increased expectations from their congregation and Elder Board while knowingly or unknowingly perpetuating the myth the Senior Pastor stands above everyone else.

Paul's comparison of humanity to that of a clay jar is not without purpose. A jar made of clay is simplistic and vulnerable, while a jar made of porcelain or gold is precious and strong. When Senior Pastors withhold a willingness to discuss, in an intentional way, their emotional wellness and mental health with their congregation, they allow the congregation to, by default, view their Pastor as one who is a jar of strength. When that occurs, the jar gets all the attention rather than giving attention to the treasure inside each Christian. When a Senior Pastor illuminates their limitations, the treasure of God inside is on full display and its incredible power is attributed to the glory of God and not to the ordinary clay jar that contains it.¹⁹⁶ The goal for each Christian is to live a vulnerable life, dependent on the strength and power that comes from God alone. A Senior Pastor who doesn't shed light on their limitations robs their congregation of the ability to face their limits and give complete reliance on the strength and power of God.

God's strength and power are visible through the vessel's cracks and deficiencies. The light of God's glory is revealed when the jar's cracks are exposed. This is not only essential for the body of Christ but also essential for the world. The world will see the glory of God through the exposed cracks of the clay jar. A vulnerable follower of Jesus,

¹⁹⁶ Paul, 163.

who understands their innate fragileness, will “illustrate the fact that the appearance of [their] person in no way detracts from the ‘treasure’ that [they] carry.”¹⁹⁷ The treasure becomes the ultimate focus, not the vessel. This is what Paul understood. In 2 Corinthians 12, Paul does not attribute his leadership’s success to his strength, nor does Paul indicate he overcame his weakness to achieve success. Paul’s success came because of his weakness.¹⁹⁸

To truly achieve success that is attributed 100% to God, a Senior Pastor must commit to communicating the reality of their fragility. CNC Pastor Three said, “Everybody in my church knows I go to a counselor.” Freely sharing one’s limitations allows others to explore and understand their limitation. This is imperative in the church, especially since the goal for the church is to be God’s witness to the world (Acts 1:8). However, the Church’s witness to the world is only possible through the power of the Holy Spirit, which is in the life of each follower of Jesus. CNC Pastor Nine shared, “We need to break down the idea of two different levels of spirituality. Life is hard for Pastors too.” This isn’t to state that it is the Senior Pastor’s responsibility to share their troubles to get sympathy from their church. Instead, any congregation’s propensity is to put their Senior Pastor on a pedestal. This mentality not only sets the Senior Pastor up for failure and future burnout but also robs the congregation of understanding their role in the overall mission of the Church.

¹⁹⁷ Paul, 161.

¹⁹⁸ Scazzero and Bird, 120.

A church's Senior Pastor sets the standard. CNC Pastor Two pointed to this when he said, "When I started this church, I got to set the tone. I can even mention from the pulpit that I'm in counseling, and nobody bats an eye." A Senior Pastor's intentionality and attitude towards public vulnerability do two things: first, it adequately conveys to their congregation that their Senior Pastor needs support, accountability, and encouragement. And secondly, it invites the congregation to walk alongside their Senior Pastor instead of observing from a distance.

The Senior Pastor Weekly Work Week

Senior Pastors are prone to work too much. A commonly understood full-time working week schedule is 40 hours a week. However, Senior Pastors will view that as an inadequate effort. This researcher's survey attests to this reality. Seventeen of the 50 survey participants stated that they work 46 to 50 hours a week. Twenty participants said they work between 51 to 60 hours a week. Only three Senior Pastors involved in the survey stated they work, on average, 40 to 45 hours a week.

A Senior Pastor might believe their job should exist within a 40 to 45-hour-a-week time frame but also believe there should be an additional set of hours to either equal or exceed their congregation's involvement in the church. A church congregant who works a full-time job outside of the church will be encouraged and expected to volunteer beyond the full-time hours of their occupation. They may be asked to volunteer in the children's ministry, hospitality, or be a small group leader. As such, they will contribute to their church an additional five to ten hours each week. A Senior Pastor knows this. And thus, it is likely that any given Senior Pastor will increase their workload to feel better about asking those in their congregation to be involved and invest more themselves.

The decision to increase their weekly workload frees Senior Pastors from their guilt. In doing so, they remain committed to their endeavors rather than the complete sufficiency the Lord provides. When Senior Pastors seek to increase their workload to meet some level of expectation, they stand opposed to Paul's reminder in 2 Corinthians 10:13, where he states that no Jesus follower should "boast beyond proper limits." Christians, especially Senior Pastors, should only boast in the "service God himself has assigned" to them and nothing more. It would be more beneficial to a church if led by a Senior Pastor who displayed an attitude that God's power was not reliant on their strength and fortitude. This is the message of grace. Grace is an assurance to the believer "of [their] standing with God and that nothing in life or death, in the present or the future, can separate [them] from God's love in Christ" (Romans 8:38).¹⁹⁹

There's too much at stake. When Senior Pastors exacerbate their work week to the peak of unsustainability, they all but ensure the risk of future burnout. CNC Pastor Four is an excellent example of this. In his interview, he stated, "A couple of months ago, a number of different factors helped me realize that I was getting significantly burned out." Upon further review, it was revealed that, on average, CNC Pastor Four had been working 60-plus hours a week. What good is it for Senior Pastors to exceed their limitations while meeting the preconceived expectations of their congregation, leadership, and themselves, if doing so means they will arrive at a place of emotional and mental unhealthiness that hinders their life, marriage, family, and ultimately the church they are trying desperately to lead?

¹⁹⁹ Barrett, 316.

As stated earlier, Senior Pastors are never not Senior Pastors. They may work eight hours one day and ten hours another day, but when they go home, or when they are out in the community, or even when they are on vacation, they carry with them the care, concern, and weight of the congregations they lead. No one would want a Senior Pastor to cease caring about their church. No one would want a Senior Pastor who disregarded any notion, issue, or urgency that would come up beyond their work day when leaving their office. Senior Pastors are called to become Pastors because they desire to care for those they lead.

Senior Pastors must commit themselves to a 40 to 45-hour work week. CNC Pastor Eight stated, “I need to shake the guilt of spending time for myself.” A church’s congregation and leadership must be committed to limiting a Senior Pastor’s work week, which will mitigate the propensity Senior Pastors have to work beyond their limitations. They will thus be more unlikely to end up in a place of unhealthiness, hurting themselves, their family, and their church.

Senior Pastor Burnout

One of the most challenging aspects of this research has been understanding what burnout truly is. In the survey, 64% of the Senior Pastor participants stated they are burnt out *sometimes*. Only three participants revealed they experience burnout *most of the time*. But nine Senior Pastors said they weren’t sure whether what they have experienced could be classified as burnout. Simply stated, Senior Pastors often don’t know when they are burnt out. They will experience frustration, confusion, and discouragement. But instead of committing to some reflection aspect, they will dig their heels deeper until they eventually crash and burn. Essentially, churches treat burnout as something their Senior Pastor might deal with. It is not something churches actively seek to prevent.

Human pride leads individuals to test their limits. Thus, it is imperative that individuals know their limits and set up resources and strategies to prevent them from exceeding those limits. Senior Pastors are also led to believe they are more than their limits. When facing burnout, Senior Pastors can forget that “the power to lift humans out of their powerlessness in the face of suffering, decay, and death does not come from within themselves; it comes only from God.”²⁰⁰

The difficulties and challenges Senior Pastors experience should not be interpreted as God displeased with them or that they’ve failed in their spiritual fortitude.²⁰¹ There is nothing within humanity that can sustain its existence. The human condition, left to its own device, will always result in continued fragility and is destined for decay.²⁰² Senior Pastors need to lean into and accept their innate weaknesses. A clay jar cannot make itself stronger. The treasure inside the clay jar gives it all the strength it needs. When Senior Pastors ignore their limits, they become prone to react to hardships with self-mustered strength and tenacity.

On modern constructed vehicles, built-in mechanisms alert drivers when they get too close to danger. Senior Pastors desperately need similar built-in mechanisms that alert them to future burnout. CNC Pastor Four discussed earlier how burnout was something he had never heard about before entering into ministry. Even when he became a Pastor, burnout was discussed but “in hush whispers, not something out in the open.” The result of not shining a light on potential burnout among Senior Pastors means that new or

²⁰⁰ Barnett, 215.

²⁰¹ Kreitzer, 101.

²⁰² Furnish, 278.

incoming Senior Pastors will inherently believe that burnout is something you're not supposed to experience. They will think that burnout comes from ineffectiveness or because they are not doing a good enough job. This will cause them to work even harder, ensuring they eventually arrive at a place of burnout. CNC Pastor Two stated, "When faced with criticism I don't tend to defend myself. I tend to shut down and work feverishly."

In any given church, systems and strategies must be in place that prevents Senior Pastors from experiencing burnout. Instead, Elder Boards and leadership teams often wait until burnout surfaces: that is when they will react. CNC Pastor Nine shared, "We've had a couple of Pastors take a leave of absence, who raised a hand saying, 'I'm not doing well.'" Churches and leadership teams fail to recognize that when a Senior Pastor arrives at a stage of burnout, it may be too late. It's like trying to put a Band-Aid on a severed limb.

Retreat and Solitude

A commitment to retreat and solitude is critical in mitigating or completely circumventing the prospect of future burnout. Twenty-seven Senior Pastors who participated in the online survey, or 54%, said they *sometimes* take time away for retreat and solitude. Only nine of the 50 participants stated that retreat and solitude were *high priorities* for them. Of the 50 participants, 28% said they either *didn't have time* or *didn't feel it was necessary*.

A primary role of the Senior Pastor is to live as Jesus lived. However, a significant aspect of Jesus' life in the Gospels, His commitment to retreat and solitude, is something Senior Pastors often neglect to include in their lives. When Paul points to the clay jar in 2 Corinthians 4, he refers to the totality of human existence: mental, emotional,

physical, and spiritual.²⁰³ Because each of these exists within the human being, and because human beings have innate limitations, a human being's mental, emotional, physical, and spiritual components all have limits.

Senior Pastors rarely are expected to commit to retreat and solitude. Instead, retreat and solitude are afforded to the Senior Pastor when they are experiencing some level of crisis. CNC Pastor Four, in his interview, shared, "I have not done a very good job of taking time off, not even unplugging for even a single day from church. Everything is always wrapped up in how your church is doing and how to grow your church. Very little of it is how you are getting fed outside." Senior Pastors are notoriously bad at advocating for their health. Thus it is the responsibility of each church and its leadership to ensure systems are in place that requires a Senior Pastor to adhere to retreat and solitude. CNC Pastor One stated, "For years, we have had only three weekends that we can be out of town." That's not enough.

If a Senior Pastor is charged with the responsibility to shepherd and pastor their congregation, and if they are expected to live as Jesus did, then a church's congregation and leadership should not be surprised when a Senior Pastor advocates for retreat and solitude. Churches should consider mandating retreats and solitude for each of their Pastoral staff. Annual staff reviews should include questions about how well a Senior Pastor is adhering to retreat, solitude, silence, and reflection. To do so would benefit the Senior Pastor, their ministry, and their church's congregation.

²⁰³ Matera, 108.

Findings in Relation to Literature Review

Seminary and Education Preparedness

Great sources of Senior Pastor preparedness are seminary and ministry educational institutions. The survey revealed that 20 of the 50 participants shared they *somewhat agree* their seminary education prepared them to address their emotional wellness and mental health. Further, 28% said they *disagree*, and five participants *strongly disagree*. Senior Pastors who participated in the survey and who have been a Pastor for over 20 years primarily attested to the insufficiency of their seminary preparedness. What's the implication here? It remains possible and likely that not only are Senior Pastors entering their churches unprepared to address their emotional wellness and mental health, but even after Senior Pastors lead for many years, their lack of preparedness increases over time. Senior Pastors are leading churches unprepared and seeing that unpreparedness increase because of no follow-up or continued education specifically addressing their emotional and mental health.

Churches are comprised of a wide variety of individuals representing “economic, structural, relational systems, and more, each interacting with the others.”²⁰⁴ This incredible diversity within any given church presents a Senior Pastor with a tremendous workload in meeting their church's many needs, issues, and opinions. Not only is there immense diversity within their churches, but Senior Pastors are expected to be experts on many aspects of their role: they need to excel at being mentors, caregivers, preachers, leaders, figureheads, disturbance handlers, negotiators, administrators, managers,

²⁰⁴ Olson, 122.

counselors, social workers, spiritual directors, teachers, and leaders in their community.²⁰⁵ How is a Senior Pastor supposed to meet all of these needs? Yet, a seminary graduate in their early to mid-20s will be placed into a Senior Pastor role, leading a wide variety of expectations related to a vast array of congregants, and be expected to excel at all of the abovementioned roles. It's no wonder many Senior Pastors enter their churches and, after a short time, realize they have stepped into something much more complex than they had anticipated, and want to get out.

The level of complexity a Senior Pastor deals with in their church cannot be circumvented entirely. However, seminary and educational institutions that prepare future Pastors can and should be more diligent in preparing them for the complexity of the role. When interviewing CNC Pastor Six, he stated, "Dealing with conflict management and grieving people was something I had to learn on the job." And CNC Pastor Two, in his interview, stated, "There's not a Senior Pastor orientation that talks about mental health and personal well-being. You're going to burn out. You have to take care of yourself. I wish someone had told me that." CNC Pastor Nine stated, "I'm not sure that I was prepared for the level of tension that happens in church. Seminary addressed some soul issues and a lot of praxis, such as preparing sermons, studying languages, and managing organizations. But then you meet with families that are mad at you, couples considering divorce, and leadership craziness."

Considering the importance of the Church, its mission, and the role of the Senior Pastor, no potential Pastor should enter their role blindsided by the complexity of the

²⁰⁵ Miles and Proeschold-Bell, 200-01.

position. Will seminary institutions be able to eliminate the potentiality of a Senior Pastor's future hurt, struggle, and burnout? No. But, Senior Pastors can enter their churches with a readiness about what lies ahead and be equipped with resources and strategies to ensure they best prioritize their emotional wellness and mental health. Seminary institutions can also better equip future Senior Pastors to know how to lead their congregations and leadership teams toward this endeavor. Struggle, discouragement, criticism, and disappointment are not possibilities; they are all eventualities.

Senior Pastor Support and Accountability

One of the striking results from the online survey was that thirteen participants, or 26%, stated they *do not* have a group outside of their church that supports them and holds them accountable. This means that if this researcher's survey results are consistent with the overall population of Senior Pastors in the United States, 25% of all Senior Pastors are currently not involved in a group outside of their church that regularly supports them, encourages them, and holds them accountable.

When Barna held a study in 2018, 25% of church congregants surveyed stated they had a "very positive" opinion of Pastors. But an additional 25% said they had a "negative" view of Pastors.²⁰⁶ Senior Pastors can step into a church for the first time and statistically assume that 25% of their congregation thinks negatively about them. It also makes sense that 50% of a Senior Pastor's congregation remains ambivalent toward them. A Senior Pastor is called to lead their church. However, the church is not a breeding ground for their equitable support, encouragement, and accountability.

²⁰⁶ Olson, 7.

A Senior Pastor is rightly viewed as their congregation's Pastor. In a healthy church setting, a congregant will view their Senior Pastor as one who leads, cares for, and helps shepherd them. In that positive context, a Pastor is rarely, if at all, seen as an equitable friend. When interviewing CNC Pastor Six, he stated, "I don't have a group outside of my church that I meet with on a regular basis. I would love to be in a small group that regularly got together where I was not their Pastor; I was just their friend and brother." Loneliness is a byproduct of the Senior Pastor's role. CNC Pastor Two stated, "I'm trying to find the answer to why I feel so lonely. Few people can relate to being a Senior Pastor. It's a weird job." And CNC Pastor Four stated, "Having people you can vent to that can ask questions is a great source of accountability. I need people that can speak into my life and sometimes give outside perspectives."

Because of a Senior Pastor's love and loyalty to their congregation, it is not uncommon for them to forego their personal need for connection and relationship for the benefit of being that person to their congregation. Because of this, there is value in an intentional outside community a Senior Pastor can be a part of. CNC Pastor Nine shared how valuable this has been for him when he stated, "I'm getting good input once a month. I've had conversations at different times about building cohorts of ministers and Pastors living in the same space. There is value in seeing practitioners beyond the walls of our church." CNC Pastor One shared, "My group is made up of about twelve to fifteen guys. We include an hour of sharing, and we've had some significant times. If I'm struggling, I will call them and say, 'This is what's happening.'" And CNC Pastor Two shared, "I'm a happier person, a happier husband, and a happier father when I do those things."

Church congregations and leadership teams can insist that their Senior Pastor be included in these groups. Again, this should be embedded into the Senior Pastor's job description and stated expectations. This will take intentionality, time, and possibly even financial resources. "I wish my congregation and Elder Board knew that for me to have a solid community around me would take money and time. I'm scared to bring that up," said CNC Pastor Two. No Senior Pastor should feel inhibited or trepidatious about asking for help and the space to be involved in a group outside their church that will support them and hold them accountable.

Senior Pastors and the Sabbath

The role of the Sabbath is critical in the life of the Christian, let alone the Senior Pastor. The survey revealed that Senior Pastors, at least those who participated, have a varied perspective on the Sabbath. When asked how often, on average, survey participants commit to a 24-hour Sabbath any given month, 50% stated they commit to a 24-hour Sabbath either *three times a month* or *every week*. Concerningly, 32% of the survey participants said they either *never* commit to a 24-hour Sabbath or do so only *once a month*. What is ultimately concerning about the results of this survey is that a Senior Pastor's overall total years of pastoral experience did not increase their commitment or adherence to greater Sabbath frequency. Even if Senior Pastors enter the beginning of their careers with an insufficient dedication to the Sabbath, nearly 50% will never end up gaining a greater appreciation or commitment to making it a part of their weekly lives.

As stated earlier, CNC Pastor Four shared, "For the vast majority of my ministry experience, Sabbath and rest have been something that I have preached and believed in. I have insisted on it for everyone else, but I've never modeled it myself." Undoubtedly, congregants take their cue from their leadership, especially the Senior Pastor. "When

church leaders explore their own vulnerability and shape a culture from it, they also invite others to find comfort in their own vulnerability.”²⁰⁷ When considering the essential rhythms of a Christian’s life, maintaining a rhythm of weekly Sabbath-keeping helps ensure not only the body’s need for rest but also the “spirit’s need for replenishment and the soul’s need to delight itself in God for God’s own sake.”²⁰⁸ If this is essential for each Christian, and if church congregations largely ignore this aspect of their lives, then it is even more imperative the Senior Pastor displays a commitment towards maintaining their body’s rest and their soul’s need for replenishment.

Based on the survey and one-on-one interviews, it would seem that many Senior Pastors have different views on how the Sabbath can and should play out in their lives. In the absence of a biblical Sabbath understanding, each Senior Pastor will ease into an unintentional relationship with it. For instance, CNC Pastor One discussed how he technically believes in the Sabbath and the idea of being in a cycle of rest but gave an example of how that would play out for himself by stating, “I will go out with people for lunch or dinner [from my church]. I’m not resting as I should be, perhaps, but it’s kind of what I want to do.” This attitude reflects a Senior Pastor’s propensity to be available at all times and in all ways. Thus, a Senior Pastor will redefine the Sabbath based on what works and doesn’t work concerning their expectations of the job or their congregation’s expectations.

²⁰⁷ Smith and Hansen, 120.

²⁰⁸ Barton and Ford, 122.

The Sabbath is not a rhythm principle that should be adhered to in the form of organic or spontaneous rest. It instead should be a cyclical day each week. CNC Pastor Seven debated this point by stating, “I see the Sabbath as observing a time of rest and a time to focus on God and your well-being. I don’t necessarily see it as a specific day of the week. The Sabbath is not something God says you must do to be in accordance.”

If a Senior Pastor is to live as Jesus lived, then they are to embrace what Jesus shared about the importance of the Sabbath. In Mark 2:27-28, Jesus exclaimed, “The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath.” Jesus revealed that the benefit of the Sabbath is not for the Sabbath itself but rather for the benefit of humankind. Because of humanity’s innate limitations, God has instructed humanity to a cyclical one-day-a-week, 24-hour time of rest, which benefits one’s physicality, emotionality, mentality, and physicality.

But the demands of being a Senior Pastor, and the reality of life in today’s society, inhibits a willing commitment to rest one day a week. CNC Pastor Two stated, “It’s been hard to not let work creep into my Sabbath, like housework and projects.” And CNC Pastor Six shared, “I am poor at setting aside big blocks of time for Sabbath.” The Senior Pastor of any church can make a monumental impact in the life of their congregation by prioritizing a weekly 24-hour Sabbath for themselves and their family. This will come at a cost. It will require Senior Pastors to draw lines in the sand and say, “For these 24 hours, I am not available.”

As has become evident through this research, Senior Pastors will undoubtedly receive pushback from this type of commitment for themselves and their families. That’s why it is imperative for church leadership teams to also commit to ensuring their Senior

Pastor makes this a weekly part of their lives. This requires a culture shift. Unless a church's leadership makes this a priority, the church's Senior Pastor will always be in combat between their need to Sabbath once a week and their congregation's unwillingness to understand why. Because if left unchecked, either the congregation will think unfavorably of their Senior Pastor, or the Senior Pastor will eventually give up on making the Sabbath a priority.

Negative Effects of Being a Senior Pastor

The survey asked all 50 participants whether being a Senior Pastor has negatively affected their life. When confronted with this question, 72% stated they either *disagree* or *strongly disagree* with that statement. However, each of the 50 participants was also asked whether being a Senior Pastor has negatively affected their family. The percentage of those who *disagree* or *strongly disagree* with this statement dropped by 12%. This means that 40% of the 50 Senior Pastors who participated shared they either *somewhat agree*, *agree*, or *strongly agree* that being a Senior Pastor has negatively affected their family. If the results of this survey are any indication, 40% of Senior Pastor's families in the United States have been negatively affected.

This researcher discussed earlier the conversation that Jesus had with the Sadducees and Pharisees in Matthew 22:34-40.

Hearing that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, the Pharisees got together. One of them, an expert in the law, tested him with this question: "Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?" Jesus replied: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself. All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commands."

Jesus gave a plural response to a singular question. Jesus revealed that one is to love God and others *as one loves themselves*. Senior Pastors have a propensity to, yes, love

God and love others, but often at the expense of loving themselves. “The key to avoiding a crash in ministry is maintaining a balance between self-care and other-care.”²⁰⁹

With the expectation that congregations and Elder Boards place on their Senior Pastors and the expectations that Senior Pastors place on themselves, they can be robbed of self-care while going out of their way to provide care solely for the congregations they lead. CNC Pastor Two stated, “It’s the emotional wearing of things that is heavy on me that I take home. I’m not fully present for my wife and kids. I’m learning to set those things down and not pick them up again until I need to. I was not prepared for the spiritual attack it would have on my family and me. I was not ready for the weight.” And CNC Pastor Eight shared, “Taking over the Senior Pastor role, there has definitely been an increase in joy, but there’s also been an increase in anxiety.”

Senior Pastors and their families are in the spotlight within their churches. They know this and, to some extent, expect this. However, many times the spouses and children of Senior Pastors experience many of the same expectations. CNC Pastor Five shared, “One of the tensions my kids had was if they answered something wrong in youth group, they would be criticized. If they answered something right, they would not be affirmed. They were trying to make their faith their own.” And CNC Pastor Nine stated, “The stress of the job has been hard for my wife and my kids.”

Churches seem to be doing better regarding the awareness of their Senior Pastor’s spouse and family members, but there is tremendous work yet to be accomplished in this area. Church leadership must have systems in place and communicate them to their

²⁰⁹ Cionca, 181.

congregation. A church culture should be established that understands not only the plight of the spouses and children of Senior Pastors but also provides tangible help and resources that help alleviate the burden those spouses and children experience. This can be in the form of mandatory yearly marriage retreats or volunteers within the church who take up the mantle of being godparents to the Senior Pastor's children. Without these priorities, a Senior Pastor's spouse and children can unnecessarily experience the weight of the Senior Pastor's role and yet not receive any encouragement or support to alleviate that weight.

Senior Pastors and the Danger of Suicide

Suicide is not something to trifle with. The rates of suicide are increasing with each passing year. Researchers estimate that “nearly 25% of the US population has at some point seriously considered ending their own lives.”²¹⁰ In this project's survey, each participant was asked whether they had thought about ending their life at some point in their pastoral career. Of the 50 participants, 16% said they *have* thought about ending their life. Even though 16% in this case study is below the 25% national average, it is still high given the small subset of individuals surveyed in this research. *Eight out of 50 participants in this small subset of Senior Pastors have considered suicide while serving as Pastors within their churches.* This should cause churches and leadership teams to pause, reflect, and take notice.

One of the many roles a Senior Pastor assumes is the role of caregiver. A Senior Pastor, especially in smaller churches, will meet with congregants experiencing

²¹⁰ Townsend and Bagby, 21.

significant mental or emotional distress. As stated earlier in this research, there is such a thing as becoming a “second victim.” A Senior Pastor, left unchecked, can become a caregiver to a congregant and be emotionally or mentally traumatized by the issues a congregant is seeking care for.²¹¹ This reality opens up the Senior Pastor to carry the weight of their own emotional and mental problems and their congregants’ emotional and mental concerns. This double-sized weight would be overwhelming for any individual and in any capacity, but consider a Senior Pastor charged with the caring concern of 100, 200, 500, or 1,000-plus congregants: it’s no wonder why suicide rates amongst Pastors are increasing at an alarming rate.

It should come as no surprise that Senior Pastors experience depression and anxiety. There are factors in the life of a Senior Pastor that contribute to this. CNC Pastor Six, for instance, shared, “Moving my family from place to place is an example of something negatively affecting my family’s life. Also, the lack of consistent financial resources.” And CNC Pastor Four helped shed light on this reality by stating, “I hear a lot more criticism than I hear encouragement.”

Church leadership teams should consider the potential for their Senior Pastor to experience suicidal thoughts and ideations. They must understand that the Senior Pastor role is predisposed to seasons of deep depression and anxiety. That is not to say that these things are inevitable. But, when the concern of their Senior Pastor has been ignored, it all but opens the door for suicidal thoughts, which can result from seasons of despair. “It would be wise to equip Pastors to know how to find help in crisis because you’re going to

²¹¹ More Healthcare, 1.

face crisis,” said CNC Pastor Nine. As part of a church’s compensation package for its Senior Pastor, it would not be unwise to provide monthly or weekly therapy sessions. These kinds of services shouldn’t be set aside if needed but should be instituted as a means of prevention.

Professional Therapy for Senior Pastors

Survey participants were asked whether they had received professional therapy at some point in their pastoral career. Only half of the 50 participants stated they have received professional therapy. Yet, 70% of those surveyed said they would address their mental health through professional therapy *if given the opportunity*. This means more Senior Pastors desire therapeutic help than those who receive it.

When faced with an emotional and mental struggle, the human instinct is to avoid the things that cause discomfort. However, health and healing come from moving “toward the emotion, into it, and eventually through it.”²¹² Unfortunately, many Senior Pastors will see it as a “vocational prerequisite” of their position to have the spiritual, emotional, and mental fortitude to meet the challenges they face.²¹³ This means that many Senior Pastors exist in constant fear of failure. In their view, any indication of deficiency means they aren’t doing a good job. This will preclude a Senior Pastor from seeking professional therapeutic help for fear that doing so might imply they are not qualified to meet the needs of their position.

It should be no surprise that some Senior Pastors experience moral failure. This happens when they “[worship] the status quo and [protect their] present ego position and

²¹² Bradberry and Greaves, 68.

²¹³ Salwen, Underwood, Dy-Liacco, and Arveson, 506.

personal advantage.”²¹⁴ According to a previously mentioned Barna study, half of the Senior Pastors who lead churches less than 100 have experienced depression. Also, half of the Senior Pastors who lead churches between 100 and 250 people have experienced depression, and 32% of Senior Pastors who lead large churches.²¹⁵ Like any other individual, Senior Pastors also need professional guidance to address childhood wounds that have made them susceptible to life’s challenges. The presence of these wounds does not take away from their effectiveness, but ignoring those wounds will.

It should not be left up to the Senior Pastor themselves to find the means and resources to get the professional help they need. Knowing the challenges and difficulties, Senior Pastors face, it should be the responsibility of their churches and church leadership teams to prioritize and ensure that resources and therapy tools are readily available. This means that churches must set aside financial resources to make this possible.

These days, more Senior Pastors are aware of their need for help. CNC Pastor Four said, “Therapy is something that I’m very quick to point people in the direction of. In the same way that I would never question anybody for going to the doctor for a broken bone, I don’t know why we would question going to therapy.” And CNC Pastor Five shared, “I believe God has creatively equipped people around us to look into our inner being. It’s one thing we must continue to help people see as help and not weakness.” However, this isn’t the understanding or belief of all Pastors. For instance, CNC Pastor Six revealed, “I’m not averse to therapy, practically. I’ve just never made time for it. My

²¹⁴ Rohr, 11.

²¹⁵ Barna, 47.

wife has a pretty good negative idea of therapy. And so, from an official perspective, that would not be something that we as a team would be in favor of.” However, he later stated, “It would not be a bad idea to have a counselor that I can bounce things off of with some degree of regularity.”

There must be in our churches an embedded relationship between the physical and the spiritual. “Each dimension—physical, emotional, intellectual, social, spiritual—[is] and extractability bound to each other.”²¹⁶ Again, Senior Pastors set the tone. There are many hurting individuals within the church. Suppose the Senior Pastor and their church leaders did not prioritize professional help for their Senior Pastor and their family. In that case, the church can also guarantee a culture of negating its congregants’ emotional wellness and mental health.

The Busyness of Senior Pastors

Many individuals’ lives are busy, and Senior Pastors are no exception. However, busyness in the life of Senior Pastors can not only have negative consequences for themselves and their families but can have negative consequences for their church. Participants in the survey were asked whether they were too busy to be their most effective selves. Of the 50 participants, 76% of those surveyed indicated they are too busy to be their most effective selves *some of the time*. Those who stated they were too busy *all the time* or *most of the time* made-up 20% of those surveyed. This means that 96% of those surveyed, Senior Pastors in today’s churches, are too busy to be their most effective selves either *some of the time*, *most of the time*, or *all the time*.

²¹⁶ Oswald, 199.

Busyness robs the individual of an opportunity for reflection. “We slide inexorably into a way of life that offers little or no opportunity for paying attention and then wonder why we are not hearing from God when we need God most.”²¹⁷ How are Senior Pastors in churches today supposed to lead their congregations if they do not have the space to reflect on how God is leading them and what God is saying? When God’s voice is absent, people aren’t listening.

It is imperative for church leadership teams to not only assess the effectiveness of their Senior Pastor regarding agreed-upon goals and strategies but also to measure their Senior Pastor’s level of busyness. One way a church leadership team can help ensure that their Senior Pastor is not too busy is to mandate, or strongly encourage, rhythms of reflection. This can take place in the form of monthly silent retreats, encouragement to spend time in prayer and God’s word during the workday, or providing gift cards for the Senior Pastor and their family to encourage a night of family enjoyment. These practical steps can go a long way towards establishing a culture that dismantles busyness and perpetuates space for emotional and mental healthiness and God’s leading.

Another practical component that affects a Senior Pastor’s busyness is how many days off they take for themselves each week. The propensity of Senior Pastors is to believe they should not take two full days off each week. Doing so would incur guilt and lead a Senior Pastor to believe they aren’t doing the job adequately.

When asked in the survey how many days off a week each Senior Pastor takes for themselves, only six of the 50 survey participants revealed they take two days off a week on

²¹⁷ Barton and Ford, 62.

average. Even though this is the standard for workplaces throughout the country, taking two days off remains taboo for the Senior Pastor. CNC Pastor Five helped illuminate this by sharing an essential aspect the Senior Pastor must believe, by saying, “If I were to be away from my church for an extended amount of time, the church is going to be okay.”

A practical remedy to help ensure that Senior Pastors take the time they need to step away, reflect, and invest in their emotional wellness and mental health is for their church leadership team to insist on a two-day off-a-week schedule. This researcher believes that two days should be held consecutively and should be adhered to militantly. CNC Pastor Three agrees with this by stating, “I shut my phone off. The church knows when it’s going to be off. If there is a crisis, someone will get in touch with me. I prioritize my time by saying, ‘I’m going to walk away from you folks for a while.’”

Walking away for a while does not indicate that a Senior Pastor does not care for their congregation or church. Taking two days off each week consecutively helps ensure a weekly rhythm that enables a Senior Pastor to adhere to the biblical principle of a 24-hour Sabbath: providing rest, reflection, prioritization of self and family, and the space to listen to God’s leading. This ensures that the Senior Pastor most effectively leads the church they’ve been called. This is not about doing less to avoid burnout. It is about intentionally obeying biblical commands designed to protect us from burnout.

Strengths and Weaknesses of Project

Weaknesses

This researcher set out to adequately achieve research information from a CNC Senior Pastor subgroup that would help illuminate the state of emotional wellness and mental health in the lives of Senior Pastors throughout the country. This researcher previously determined the best way to achieve a generalized view of a Senior Pastor’s

emotional wellness and mental health was to get the involvement of at least 100 CNC Senior Pastors to participate in an online survey that addressed different aspects that affect an individual's emotional wellness and mental health. One hundred participants turned out to be an audacious goal.

In an attempt to get 100 CNC Senior Pastors to participate in the online survey, this researcher connected with CNC headquarters over a year prior to the completion of this research project. This researcher's discussion with CNC headquarters resulted in an agreement for CNC headquarters and staff to support and send out the survey of this research project with CNC branding to encourage the most significant response from CNC Senior Pastors. It was the fault of this researcher to wait nine months after that initial agreement to construct the survey and send that out to CNC headquarters for distribution. Difficulties ensued when, at the sending of the survey to CNC headquarters, they had become reluctant to brand it and send it out because CNC headquarters had constructed a similar survey in-house and, within a month, would distribute it to all CNC Senior Pastors. There remained a concern that the in-house survey sent out by CNC headquarters would receive tainted or minimized results if a similar survey, the one from this research project, were sent by CNC headquarters to the same roster of 208 CNC Senior Pastors in the same general time frame.

Thus, CNC headquarters determined this researcher be given the names and contact information of CNC Senior Pastor regional leaders. This researcher was then instructed to send the survey access to those CNC Senior Pastor regional leaders, asking them to send out the same information to their regional roster of CNC Senior Pastors.

Before this researcher sent that out, CNC headquarters sent an initial e-mail to the regional leaders indicating that this researcher would also be reaching out.

All this undoubtedly affected the overall involvement of the survey. Had this research project's survey been officially distributed by CNC headquarters, or if this researcher had been given direct contact information for all 208 CNC Senior Pastors, it's possible this research project would have acquired the 100 participants initially hoped for. As such, only 50 of the 208 CNC Senior Pastors ended up participating in the online survey for this research project. Although 50 participants were a helpful grouping that provided a varied response, this research would have benefited from a larger pool of survey responses.

The survey itself served to meet the general purposes of this research project. However, some aspects of the survey proved unhelpful when addressing the emotional wellness and mental health of Senior Pastors. An example of this was the survey question asking each participant to *agree* or *disagree* with the following statement: "The expectation of my church's leadership is greater than my ability to meet them." It is possible that survey participants confused this question with its preceding one, where participants were asked to *agree* or *disagree* with the following statement: "The expectations of my church's congregation are more than my ability to meet them."

A similar problem possibly existed when asking participants whether they were willing to discuss their emotional wellness and mental health with their church's *leadership*. The preceding question, asking them to *agree* or *disagree*, referred to their willingness to discuss their emotional wellness and mental health with their church's *congregation*. In retrospect, these distinctions should have been made more evident.

The survey also provided an opportunity to answer the following statement: “How often do you experience serious conflict with a congregant, staff member, or church leadership?” This survey statement proved unhelpful for this research project. Similarly, another survey statement proved unhelpful when participants were asked whether they enjoyed being a Senior Pastor. Either these statements should have been made clearer or eliminated entirely.

Even though anonymity was ensured in the survey experience, it would seem, based on some discrepancies in how results were achieved, that many of the CNC Senior Pastor survey participants treated some of the answers as if their identity would somehow be discovered. The survey itself was completely anonymous. No record of who took the survey was given. But, it is possible that participants assumed that some semblance of their information would be present, thus precluding them from truly being authentic. In hindsight, this researcher should have either provided a survey platform that presented more of an anonymous assurance or should have gone to great lengths to express the complete anonymity of the online survey given.

Substantial and helpful insight was gained through CNC Senior Pastor’s self-reflection. However, it should be noted that no one other than each individual was asked to participate. The insight gained into the emotional wellness and mental health of CNC Senior Pastors may be significantly increased by collecting data from the individual’s family, church, and leadership. This would prove most beneficial in additional studies.

Strengths

The one-on-one interviews proved to be an enormous strength in the research of this project, providing an opportunity for “more specific questions... [to] better specify what strategies [this researcher would] use to answer those questions.”²¹⁸

Whereas the survey provided a general understanding of how Senior Pastors approached their emotional wellness and mental health, the one-on-one interviews provided an intimate exploration of these topics. As stated earlier, even though the online survey may have precluded participants from being completely honest and authentic, the one-on-one interviews provided an atmosphere where each participant felt free to share without inhibition. Even though their face was seen, their names were given, and their interviews were recorded, the ability to see one face to face proved to be beneficial to get the most authentic and transparent answers to assist in the research of this project by “focusing on the recollections and stories of individuals who have had experiences related to” Senior Pastor emotional wellness and mental health.²¹⁹

A significant helping contributor to this was that each one-on-one interview participant saw and knew that they were interacting with a fellow CNC Senior Pastor who has and is experiencing much of the same things they described in their interviews. The online survey was void of this personal touch. Thus, much of the specific and helpful understanding related to emotional wellness and mental health in the life of the Senior Pastor has resulted from these useful one-on-one interviews.

²¹⁸ Leedy and Ormond, 229.

²¹⁹ Leedy and Ormond, 234.

It was also a significant strength of this research project that a varied grouping of CNC Senior Pastors participated in both the survey and one-on-one interviews. Participants in the survey consisted of 50 CNC Senior Pastors who are currently pastoring churches of various sizes and have multiple levels of experience. The same was equally true for the one-on-one interviews. The variation of research participants has helped to provide a much broader scope of understanding and has given this research much more validity.

CHAPTER SEVEN: REFLECTION

Personal Insights

Having worked in pastoral ministry for 20 years, this researcher has encountered many highs and lows within the church setting. Without a doubt, this researcher has felt called by God to pastor and shepherd God's Church. However, within the first four years of this researcher's pastoral experience, two Pastor colleagues had affairs, one with another staff member in the church. Another pastor was forced to resign. This was this researcher's initiation into working within a church setting. At the same time, an individual within this researcher's circle made an unfortunate moral decision that affected the life of their marriage, family, and ministry. It became evident that something was amiss and that the Church, although called to be God's witness to the world, was also a place where those called to lead were experiencing great harm to themselves and harming others.

At the risk of becoming jaded and bitter with church and ministry, this researcher was led to begin seminary. In the first semester, the professor gave the assignment to interview three Senior Pastors asking generalized questions related to their ministry and church. At the end of the first interview, this researcher asked an additional question, not on the list: "How do you keep from becoming jaded in ministry?" The first Pastor answered by stating, "People are dumb sheep." This researcher saw that a response of such caliber meant that jadedness had already crept into this Pastor's heart. The second Pastor was asked the same question. Their response was, "You have to take care of

yourself. You have to rest and take some time away.” This response revealed that, although helpful, something was missing.

The third Pastor was asked the same question: “How do you keep from becoming jaded in ministry?” This Pastor, an 80-year-old pastoral professional who had been pastoring churches for nearly 60 years, looked across the table at this researcher and said, with love in his eyes, “I choose to see people for who they can be, not for who they are.” This moment changed this researcher’s life. It was the first time this researcher understood that a critical part of the ministry is to extend grace and love to others while leading them to become whom God has destined them to be.

This researcher didn’t understand it then, but a journey had begun to discover what it meant to lead others, the church, and one’s family, while leading oneself. Four years ago, this researcher experienced a leading to pursue what it means to be a healthy leader within the church. Thus, a doctoral pursuit began. At the same time, this researcher entered another stratosphere of church ministry, becoming a Senior Pastor, while possessing tremendous confidence and conviction about how to lead God’s people toward loving each other and their community as they love Jesus. However, it did not take long for this researcher to discover the necessary proactive pursuit of emotional wellness and mental health, taking up the mantle to lead God’s church from a healthy foundation. Thus, the specific focus of this research product became abundantly clear.

Through quality and helpful biblical and literature sources, this research project has dug further towards discovering the importance of prioritizing one’s emotional wellness and mental health to benefit not just themselves but their family and church ministry. To do so is essential for all people, but even more so for those who are

followers of Jesus. Acts 1:8 describes the mission of the Church: Empowered by the Holy Spirit, be Jesus' witnesses to the world. If this is the mission of the Church, and if Senior Pastors are tasked with leading their churches in this mission, then Senior Pastors must lead from a place of health and wholeness. Otherwise, the mission will fail. This can seem unfair, but this is the calling. When a Senior Pastor leads from a foundation prioritizing their emotional wellness and mental health, their ministry will be saturated with joy. However, it does not mean they will never face challenges, suffering, or persecution. That's why Paul in 2 Corinthians teaches God's people to lead in and through their weakness, not in spite of them.

Humanity has limitation and cannot fend for nor save itself. Individuals do not have the power alone, but have instead been given the power. Jesus said, "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; you will be my witnesses." Paul further emphasizes this in Ephesians 1:18-20, where he writes,

I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people, and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is the same as the mighty strength he exerted when he raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms.

The ones hurting in today's churches the most are often the ones whom God has called to lead them. Many Senior Pastors are leading, caring, teaching, and shepherding from a place of fear and emptiness. Too many Senior Pastors have forgotten they are but clay jars, prone to damage, cracks, and even becoming broken. Churches can be led by Senior Pastors who believe they are strong, metal jars. However, it is the strength and power of God within the life of a Christian that is the sole means by which an individual

can persevere and finish well. The level of one's weakness does not increase the strength of God because God's power is infinite, and humanity's weakness is inevitable.

When Christians understand the tremendous distance between the infinite height of God's power and the inherent weakness of their humanity, they live and behave as if God can do that much through them. Those who see little distance between the infinite power of God and the inherent weakness of their humanity will live expecting that results, success, and goals are achieved through their effort alone.

To "boast in weakness" is to pull the curtains back fully on the infinite strength of the Almighty. Imagine, then, if Senior Pastors in today's churches were not the ones hurting the most but rather those who have pulled the curtains back the farthest, fully revealing the power of God working through them.

APPENDIX A: CNC SENIOR PASTOR SURVEY EMAIL INVITE

Pastor _____,

My name is Adam Sidler, and I am a fellow Converge North Central Senior Pastor at a CNC church located in the Twin Cities area of Minnesota.

You were recently sent an email from CNC headquarters that I would be sending this email to you. Thank you so very much for your willingness to help in my research. I've been in contact with CNC throughout my research and writing, and I believe that the information gleaned from this survey will be tremendously helpful to the CNC district in ensuring and understanding how Converge can best assist our many Pastors.

Specifically, I am researching and writing for my doctoral thesis at Bethel Seminary, studying *Limitation Awareness Concerning Converge North Central Senior Pastors*. Part of my research involves a simple and quick survey of fellow CNC Senior Pastors to best address the critical role of emotional wellness and mental health in the life of a Pastor.

I am seeking 75-100 CNC Senior Pastors to join me in this endeavor by taking five minutes to complete the following survey. The information shared by taking this brief survey will help provide a framework and understanding moving forward, ensuring a healthy environment in which Pastors can thrive, and churches can strengthen. The information and the results of this survey are completely anonymous.

Please take five minutes to complete the survey, and then send it out to your regional CNC Senior Pastors with your endorsement and the endorsement of CNC headquarters.

[Link to survey provided]

I've included the contents of an email you can send, along with the link needed to complete the survey, via SurveyMonkey. Your help in this research will ensure vital information guiding future Pastors toward better resources and strategies regarding their emotional wellness and mental health.

APPENDIX B: CNC SENIOR PASTOR SURVEY QUESTIONS AND OPTIONS

<i>Questions</i>	<i>Choices</i>
What is the overall size of your church?	< 100; 100–300; 301–500; 501–800; 801+
How long have you been a professional Pastor?	< 3; 3–6; 7–10; 11–15; 16–20; 20+
How long have you been Senior Pastor at your church?	< 3; 3–6; 7–10; 11–15; 16–20; 20+
I am currently equipped and prepared to deal with the personal needs of my Pastoral position.	Strongly agree; Agree; Somewhat agree; Disagree; Strongly disagree
My seminary (or like-training) education prepared me to address my emotional wellness and mental health.	Strongly agree; Agree; Somewhat agree; Disagree; Strongly disagree
My church leadership prioritizes my emotional wellness and mental health.	Strongly agree; Agree; Somewhat agree; Disagree; Strongly disagree
I can differentiate the needs of my family from those of my congregation.	Strongly agree; Agree; Somewhat agree; Disagree; Strongly disagree
The expectations of my church's <i>leadership</i> are greater than my ability to meet them.	Strongly agree; Agree; Somewhat agree; Disagree; Strongly disagree
The expectations of my church's <i>congregation</i> are more than my ability to meet them.	Strongly agree; Agree; Somewhat agree; Disagree; Strongly disagree
How often each month do you do a 24-hour Sabbath?	Never; 1x/month; 2x/month; 3x/month; Every week
I am willing to address my mental health through professional therapy.	Strongly agree; Agree; Somewhat agree; Disagree; Strongly disagree
I am willing to discuss my emotional wellness and mental health with my church's <i>leadership</i> .	Strongly agree; Agree; Somewhat agree; Disagree; Strongly disagree
I am willing to discuss my emotional wellness and mental health with my church's <i>congregation</i> .	Strongly agree; Agree; Somewhat agree; Disagree; Strongly disagree
I am involved in a group of Christians, not in my church, that support and keep me accountable.	Yes; No
On average, I work the following hours per week:	40 hours; 41–45 hours; 46–50 hours; 51–55 hours; 56–60 hours; 60+ hours; Part-time
Being a Pastor has negatively affected my life.	Strongly agree; Agree; Somewhat agree; Disagree; Strongly disagree
Being a Pastor has negatively affected my family.	Strongly agree; Agree; Somewhat agree; Disagree; Strongly disagree
How often do you experience serious conflict with a congregant, staff member, or church leadership?	1x/year; 1x/month; 1x/week; More than 1x/week
As a Pastor, I have thought about ending my life.	Yes; No
I have received professional therapy as a Pastor.	Yes; No
I enjoy being a Pastor.	All the time; Most of the time; Some of the time; Never
I feel trapped being a Pastor.	All the time; Most of the time; Some of the time; Never
I believe prescribed medication can assist in my overall mental health.	Strongly agree; Agree; Somewhat agree; Disagree; Strongly disagree
I have experienced depression and/or anxiety	Many times; Sometimes; I'm not quite sure; Never
I am too busy to be my most effective self.	All the time; Most of the time; Some of the time; I'm never too busy
I am burnt out.	All the time; Most of the time; Some of the time; I'm not sure; I've never experienced burnout
I prioritize time for personal rest and hobbies.	This is a high priority for me; Sometimes, when I'm able; I wish I could, but I can't
On average, how many days off a week do you take for yourself?	0 days/week; 1 day/week; 1.5 days/week; 2 days/week; Part-time
I actively take time for retreat, solitude, and silence.	High priority; Sometimes, Wish to do it more; Don't have time; It's not necessary

APPENDIX C: CNC SENIOR PASTOR INTERVIEW EMAIL INVITE

Dear _____,

My name is Adam Sidler, and I am a fellow CNC Senior Pastor in the Twin Cities area. I'm working on researching and writing for my doctoral thesis through Bethel Seminary, entitled *Limitation Awareness Concerning Converge North Central Senior Pastors*.

I'm writing today to invite you to join me in a one-hour Zoom video interview focusing on the vital role of emotional wellness and mental health in the Senior Pastor's life. The information you so generously share in this interview will help provide a framework and understanding moving forward to ensure a healthy environment in which Senior Pastors can thrive and churches can strengthen. The information you share in this interview will be completely anonymous. Your name and identifying information will be withheld from the final project.

The interview itself will last up to one hour and will be conducted via Zoom to provide a workable and convenient experience for you and your schedule. The video from your interview will be recorded. The recorded video will then be edited to remove the video portion, leaving only the audio. The audio recording will then be transcribed for tangible use in this project.

If, at any point, there are questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me. I will always respond promptly to such inquiries. Thank you again for contributing towards this critical issue.

APPENDIX D: CNC SENIOR PASTOR INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

<i>Interview Questions</i>
What is the overall size of your church?
How long have you been a professional Pastor (total years of Pastoral experience)?
How long have you been Senior/Lead Pastor at your current church?
On average, how many hours do you work per week?
On average, how many days off a week do you take for yourself?
Emotional wellness is the ability to handle the stresses and changes of life effectively. How would you describe your current emotional wellness?
Mental health is the ability to function within one's environment amid a mental state affected by biological, psychological, and social factors. How would you describe your current mental health?
Through your education and prior experience, describe the ways in which you were prepared or unprepared for the role of Pastor.
Describe how your church's leadership does or does not prioritize your emotional wellness and mental health.
Describe your relationship with observing the Sabbath.
Describe your relationship with therapy in addressing your mental health. Or describe your aversion to mental health therapy.
Describe how you handle criticism in your role as Pastor.
Describe your attitude towards, or involvement in, a group of Christian individuals you meet with who support you and keep you accountable.
Describe the ways in which being a Pastor has negatively affected your life and your family.
Describe the ways you prioritize time for personal rest and hobbies.
Describe ways in which you prioritize your emotional wellness and mental health.
Describe resources and strategies that would best assist you in increasing your emotional wellness and mental health.
What are things you wish your church and/or leadership understood about your challenges as a Pastor?

APPENDIX E: CNC SENIOR PASTOR INTERVIEW CONSENT FORM

CNC Pastor [#] INTERVIEW PARTICIPANT CONSENT

- I was first asked to participate in a Zoom interview and had the nature of Adam's research project dutifully explained to me.
- I agreed, via an email response, to participate fully in a Zoom interview with Adam Sidler.
- Upon beginning the Zoom interview with Adam Sidler, I was asked permission to video record the interview.
- Upon completing the interview, I understand that the video was removed, the audio was transcribed, and all identifiable information was removed from the transcription.
- I willingly permitted Adam Sidler to record my Zoom interview.
- I have received all transcription that was used from my interview with Adam Sidler, either directly quoted or rephrased.
- I have reviewed all transcribed material given to me from my interview with Adam Sidler.
- I give full approval for Adam Sidler to use any or all of my transcribed responses to the interview questions from the Zoom interview.
- I understand that some of the information I shared in my interview can be considered sensitive, related to issues such as depression, anxiety, burnout, and suicide.
- I have received from Adam Sidler resources to aid in my current or future depression, anxiety, burnout, or thoughts of suicide.
- I consent to the use of my interview transcription EXCEPT the following quotes:
(Skip this if there are no quotes you want excluded)
- _____
- _____
- I DO NOT consent to the use of any of my transcribed responses from my recorded Zoom interview with Adam Sidler.**

Anonymous Signature (Please check the following box as your Signature)

- CNC Pastor One

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