

ABSTRACT
THE SPIRITUAL LIFE AND
MINISTERIAL CRISES

by

Todd H. Benner

A leading cause for pastors leaving the ministry is a weak spiritual life. As a result, their experience of ministerial crises are defeating.

The purpose of this research was to determine the relationship between ministerial crises and pastors' spiritual lives. The information was gathered from United Methodist pastors in Kentucky through an interview process.

Findings revealed that those pastors who have a growing spiritual edge in their lives and ministry generally survive crises; whereas, pastors that do not struggle.

DISSERTATION APPROVAL

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Todd H. Benner

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CHAPTER 1

OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

Background

Since my inception into the pastoral ministry, I have been an active part of a small group and a member of the local ministerial association. Through my involvement with these groups, I have heard, and in some ways experienced, the ministerial crises of these men. I realized that my idealistic views of the Church and how the Church should be as an institution of God might not exist.

Upon leaving seminary, I expected the churches I served to be filled with godly men and women whose main concern and thought in life was to reach the lost with the gospel of Jesus Christ. My job as their shepherd was to teach them and lead them into accomplishing that end. I soon discovered that this ideology was just that, an ideal. This realization had at one time caused me to be in a crisis of ministry. Based on this ideal, I had set myself against the reality that I now experienced.

The crisis became so intense at one point that I asked my bishop at the time, “Why did no one ever tell me ministry would be like this?” Bishop Robert Morgan was gracious, allowing me twenty minutes to expound before he addressed my question. “Todd,” he said, “It wouldn’t have made any difference. You had to experience it for yourself.” I remember feeling at the time that his answer was not very helpful, but as the years have gone by, I have come to appreciate his words more fully. The knowledge of what ministry was like would not have made a difference because such knowledge was irrelevant as to the reality of ministry experienced the way it was. What was significant was how I would experience that reality. Dietrich Bonhoeffer seems to further clarify

what I am saying when he says, “What is happiness and unhappiness? It depends really only on that which happens inside a person” (qtd. in Kelly and Nelson 514). That which happens on the inside is a matter of spirituality in general and a relationship with God in particular.

The Lord speaks to these “inner happenings” in John 14:27. “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives” (NIV). The peace that the Lord places within Christians is not contingent upon external circumstances. I experienced such a peace to be true during a struggle in my own life.

In this period of time, I felt very far from God but did not know why. At other times when I felt distant, I simply increased my devotional and prayer life. Talking the problem out with someone had also helped, but this time was different. Thomas Dubay says, in reference to what I was feeling, that my experience was profoundly different from a real hollowness that I might experience because of the presence of sin in my life on the one hand or a sense of natural indisposition to God based on an illness on the other (161). Once again, I increased my devotional and prayer life, yet I continued to feel cold spiritually while craving spiritual satisfaction. This search for satisfaction in my relationship with God became an obsession. I had to find peace. I took a trip to my seminary to seek God. While there, I spent the day praying, worshipping in chapel, and talking to a close friend and professor. Upon returning home my wife asked if I had found that for which I was looking. I sadly responded, “No.”

A couple of days after the seminary experience, I was sharing this dark event in my life with a Wednesday Bible class. Upon hearing my dilemma, an elderly woman responded, “God is getting you ready for something big.” If that were true, according to

her words, my experience was not the absence of God in my life but the concentration of God into my life.

Until recently I had laid blame for these feelings upon pastoral ministry. Perhaps I was experiencing burnout or had grown callous as a result of my unrealistic expectations of the Church. The blame really lay with me as a sinner saved by grace but yet remaining a man who fell far short of his Father's glory and intended purpose. I was not and am not the image of Christ that I must be. Through these experiences God was dealing with those shortcomings and using the situations to bringing me, at least in measure, closer to that image of Christ. Because of this spiritual condition, I experienced the Lord's presence as distance rather than nearness. Dubay explains this experience:

We do not, however, perceive this communication as light and love but as darkness and pain. This strange perception is due to our incapacity and opaqueness and unlikeness to the Divine. Hence, in this night one perceives the love he is receiving as dryness and emptiness, and he concludes that his prayer is going from bad to worse, even though he is trying to serve God's will. (161)

This experience may have been a separate entity all its own. The experience may have been dealing with me in the area of my personal spirituality and had nothing to do with the Church. The resultant outcome of that experience affected how I viewed ministry. I was able to see more clearly that the Church was not hurting me. As I understood that my expectations of ministry were unrealistic, I experienced a breakthrough of sorts that enabled me not only to see ministry more clearly for what it is, but I was also able to come to grips with my part in the ministry of the Church. I have found with a new understanding of ministry that I have been the one lacking and not the Church. I have been found lacking spiritually. If I had not been found wanting in this way, ministry would have been found possibly to be more fulfilling and joyful. I wonder,

as I take into account my own pastoral ministry experiences and those experiences of pastors with whom I have come into contact, if the reason they have struggled in ministry is not due to a lack of a deeper relationship with God.

Greg Asimakoupoulos suggests that the dilemma among pastors struggling and leaving ministry is of eventual extintual proportions. He is inclined to add ordained pastors who are energized by what they do to the list of endangered species, such as bald eagles, koalas, and spotted owls (123). I liken the pastor and ministerial crisis to that of an automobile accident. In ministry, the accident or crisis is going to come. The key to surviving that accident is dependent upon the presence of the seat belt—the seat belt representing the pastor’s relationship with God.

David Fisher asks a question that in many ways this project set out to discover and answer: “Why is it that so many of us begin with such high hopes and dreams and end up tired and discouraged?” (8). I propose that somewhere along the highway of ministry pastors lose their first love. Somewhere along the freeway, they decide purposefully or subconsciously to leave the seat belt off. To do so sounds preposterous for a person of the cloth, a shepherd of God’s flocks. It is, nonetheless, what I think is happening. Somewhere in ministry many pastors are forgetting or neglecting to feed themselves spiritually. They live or continue to live in a personal, trusting abandonment-type relationship to God. Maybe an abandonment to a relationship with Christ is strong enough to relieve the stress of disappointing ideologies of how things should be. As a result, faith, hope, and consonance to be in relationship with God remain alive and active despite the doubts and trials of ministry. A weakened faith is rekindled by dwelling in the mystery of his presence that evokes and nurtures it (Kaam 27-28).

Through my own experiences in pastoral ministry, through listening to the struggles of numerous pastors in my small group, and through listening to the battered pastors of other denominations in the ministerial association, my heart has been broken for broken pastors. One day in particular stands out to me from early December 1998. On this day I listened in my small group to the struggles of my colleague. He was a pastor of a three hundred-member church with a multiple staff. As he struggled to learn the ropes of his new charge, the honeymoon period soon ended for some of his sheep. I watched helplessly as that church injured this man of God. Two hours later, I again found myself before a group of pastors, this time in a town ministerial meeting. I again listened to the bitter story of a church refusing to go forward into a new decade of ministry. Their defense defeated their pastor, who eventually left ministry. Later that day, while driving home from the office, I felt a burden in my heart for these pastors and others like them. I wanted to learn how to help them and me not only to survive ministerial crises but be more than victors through them.

Problem Formulation

Crises in ministry have long been a part of pastors' lives. From the beginnings of those who would follow and serve God, struggles, even of life and death proportions, have walked with them hand-in-hand. In fact, Paul, in his second letter to Timothy states, "Everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted" (3:12, NIV).

Several other verses depict a life of ministry with a definitive presence of crisis in it. The apostles knew what lay ahead for them, and they admittedly said, "We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God" (Acts 14:22, NIV). Maybe this proclamation to each other helped them to face these crises knowing they were inevitable

as well as assuring them that they were not alone. Paul understood that crises in ministry were inevitable for anyone who believed in Christ. “For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for him” (Phil. 1:29, NIV).

Obviously ministry and crises are inseparable, and yet the crises found in the pastorates of some ministers do surprise and, in some cases, defeat them. First John 3:13 tells fellow ministers, “my brothers,” not to be surprised if the world hates them. John challenges them to be not afraid of what they are about to endure but to hang their lives upon their faith “even to the point of death” (Rev. 2:10, NIV).

The issue, for the sake of this work, was not the existence of crises in ministry but the relationship between these crises of ministry and the individual’s spiritual life and how the two affect one another.

Theological Foundation

On the surface, much of the problems ministers face seem to be derived out of an unhealthy understanding about the nature of their work and how they and the laity intend to carry out ministry. In reality, the problem is far simpler. From the perspective of the earliest Christian pastors, the problem of ministerial crisis has been and always will be spiritual in nature. Paul himself states clearly that “we are not fighting against people made of flesh and blood, but against the evil rulers and authorities of the unseen world” (Eph. 6:12, NLT).

Maybe part of surviving ministerial crises is to first get beyond seeing “flesh and blood” as the cause or as the recipient of a crisis, instead realizing that the battle is not of this world but is one of spiritual dimensions. With this acknowledgment, the ministerial crises as well as preparation for ministerial crises may be met and fought on the level

upon which they are actually being fought rather than trying to fight and prepare for them on a field of what only appears to be the site of the problem.

Ministerial crises are not new, and the level at which they are approached are also not new. Paul clearly depicts this biblically to pastors through his directions to Timothy. Paul tells Timothy probably what was already obvious to him: that ministry is a war and if he is to run it well and finish strong, he has to keep the faith and tend to his own spiritual well-being (1 Tim. 1:19; 4:16).

Faith is weakened and eventually destroyed by an alternate life lived out apart from a life of godliness. Paul says, “Cling tightly to your faith in Christ, and always keep your conscience clear” (1 Tim. 1:19, NLT). In verse 20, Paul gives an example of two souls whose faith had died. Perhaps Hymenaeus and Alexander believed in God, but the absence of this faith lived out in godliness drew them away from their basic belief and trust. Their problem began not in their belief system but in that system not being lived out. If they had lived out their faith in godliness, God promised to save them (4:16).

The pursuit of godliness enables pastors to minister effectively. Physical exercise is also needed in ministry: “[I]t has some value” (1 Tim. 4:8, NLT). The physical condition of pastors is part of a healthy balance but is shallow without the faith dimension—without the depth of relationship with God. Godliness, life lived out in relationship and in the boundaries set by the Lord, is “profitable for all things,” both in ministry now and the life to come (4:8, NLT).

One benefit of godliness is the ability to understand the nature of ministry and to act together with this understanding in undertaking the mission for which the pastor has been called. Maybe the keeping of faith and living that faith relationship out in godliness

help pastors to work on fighting and pursuing ministry on a spiritual level rather than on a field of misunderstandings and unhealthy expectations.

Ministry is carried out in the context of a living and developing faith. Having been told to hold on to his faith and the consequences of not doing so, Paul then directs Timothy to pursue ministry out of a base of faith. Ministry done out of the development of the faith relationship not only pleases God (1 Tim. 2:3; 4:6; 5:4) but also produces spiritual survival (1 Tim. 1:18, 19; 4:8, 16). Along with Paul's final instructions to Timothy in 6:11-12, P. C. Barker sums up the pursuit of faith and a clean conscience nicely:

We cannot detect in them one single, selfish purpose—neither the love of gain, nor the love of power, nor the love of praise, nor the love of ease. What we can detect—it stares us in the face—is an intense love of God, an entire devotion to the Lord Jesus Christ, an unquenchable charity for the souls of their fellowmen, both Jews and Gentiles, and a calm, steady hope of the appearing and kingdom of their unseen Lord. (35)

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study was to determine the relationship of crisis upon the spiritual lives of pastors. It sought to determine a correlation between the depth of pastors' relationships with God and their responses to crises.

Research Question #1

What are the normal day-to-day practices of pastors in the area of spiritual formation?

Research Question #2

What were the impacts of crisis(es) (before, during, and after) on the spiritual lives of pastors?

Research Question #3

What were the impacts of ministerial crisis(es) (before, during, and after) on pastors' view of ministry?

Research Question #4

What impact did the crises have on pastors' spiritual lives?

Definition of Terms

The following definitions are provided to further clarify the work that follows.

Spiritual Life

The spiritual life is the formation of an inner righteousness. This inner righteousness develops as the relationship between pastor and God develops. The practice of spiritual disciplines leads to the reality of the spiritual life but in and of itself cannot create that reality. Inner righteousness is first the work of God by grace.

Spiritual Formation

Spiritual formation is the use of any means that brings people closer or moves them further in the religious areas of their lives. In the case of this work, spiritual formation is the use of any means that brings one closer to God.

Ministerial Crisis(es)

Ministerial crisis(es) is an event(s) that occurs through ministry that has potential to bring about disequilibria or spiritual growth in pastors. Such an event may be comprised of a conflict with a parishioner, a group of parishioners, the church as a whole, the denomination, and/or the pastor themselves. Such an event in ministry may also include difficult situations that have nothing to do with a conflict between people or organizations.

Subjects

The population for this study was 650 active pastors of the Kentucky Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church (UMC). From this population I identified twenty-one self-selected volunteers who had three or more years of ministerial experience. This was a convenient sample selected because of accessibility and availability.

Methodology

A researcher-designed questionnaire (see Appendix A) was the primary instrument used to discover the relationship between the pastors' spiritual lives and the ramifications of such upon their experiences of ministerial crises. The questions were presented to the clergy in a personal one-on-one interview.

Data Collection

Data collection proceeded along the following steps: (1) Permission was enlisted from Bishop James R. King, Jr., bishop of the Kentucky Annual Conference of the UMC to interview the clergy of that conference; (2) District superintendents were contacted from which names of clergy were enlisted; (3) Pastors were called and interviews were setup; (4) The interviews were conducted at the specified time lasting an average of twenty-four minutes; and, (5) The data collected by tape recorder was analyzed according to the research questions of this study.

Delimitations

Considering that there are 650 active pastors in Kentucky United Methodism, I am concerned the twenty-one pastors interviewed from that population may not be

representative of all of the United Methodist clergy in Kentucky.

I am concerned that some elements and aspects of ministerial crises may be unique or limited to Kentucky Methodism.

Importance

This study aids the reader in understanding the extent of the relationship between pastors' spiritual lives and ministerial crises. I hope that through this study, pastors will understand the necessity of feeding themselves spiritually and the personal and professional demise of not.

Overview

Chapter 2 reviews the presence of ministerial crises from a biblical point of reference as well as from the point of some current authors. The spiritual dimension of pastors is also presented from these sources. Material on how to conduct an interview is also presented in this chapter. Chapter 3 breaks down into more detail the elements of the discovery process for the project. Chapter 4 sets forth the findings from the analysis of the interviews. Chapter 5 concludes that pastors who have a weak spiritual life do not deal with ministerial crises well. This chapter also presents a conclusion that pastors who do have a growing spiritual edge cope with ministerial crises in a much healthier manner.

CHAPTER 2

PRECEDENTS IN LITERATURE

I met with a professor of mine in 1999 at a restaurant to discuss my dissertation. I was a little beleaguered because my vision of ministry had met/bumped into reality. I began to explain to the professor that the struggles of working with people in the ministry were taking a negative toll on my family and me. The pastoral expectations of others upon me clouded my own expectations for ministry. The response of the professor hit me hard: “What did you expect?” He went on to explain that ministry is hard and that no one ever said it would be otherwise. The Christian journey, in general, and the pastoral ministry, in particular, involve picking up the cross and following Jesus. As Jesus taught his disciples the lesson of the builder who had to consider if he could afford the cost before actually building, pastors/disciples of Christ must also consider and realize the cost of their decision to follow him (Luke 14). Pastors need to consider the fact that “life is hard and it may not get easier” (Hybels). Pastors may get so tired and lost in a world of expectations that the functional reality of ministry is missed; therefore, because they do not have a healthy knowledge of what is required in ministry, the resulting ministerial crisis proves to be overwhelming.

The Pastors’ Expectations

Some pastors have unhealthy expectations that govern how they do ministry. Rather than draw them into a ministerial partnership with God, these dysfunctional expectations serve to drive them from the presence of God and eventually from a healthy sense of God’s involvement in their spiritual lives.

In some pastors, ministry itself drives them beyond a healthy level of functioning.

These pastors are preoccupied with carrying out their ministry perhaps to the point of working out their own faith through the action of ministry. This “works salvation” on the pastors’ part may be a contributing factor to a sense of distancing from God.

The point of coming to terms with pastoral expectations is not to have a sense that ministry and spirituality have met with total understanding, but the fact of resolved expectations leads to a healthy urging onward in both the area of ministry and the area of spirituality. A new sense of security is found by the pastor in understanding that all of eternity does not ride on the coattails of the ministry. The determining factor of the pastor’s eternal home is not dependent upon the ministry. A separation is able to take place between who the pastor is in Christ and what the pastor does for Christ. Rubel Shelly points out this balance when he says, “So I’m not satisfied with my spiritual life, but I’m secure in my relationship with the Lord. I don’t want to give guilt a bad name; there is a place for it. But neurotic guilt drives us to legalism” (17).

More troubling for pastors than unhealthy expectations of themselves may be the wreckage of expectations they have placed upon the laity. Pastors should be able to “expect Christians to act like Christians, leaders to lead, and the congregation to love God and his Word. On top of that, they should take care of me!” (Fisher 17). Of course, Christians should act like Christians. The problem comes when the pastor’s expected job description does not match the behavioral attitude of those upon which such expectations are placed.

Acting as an agitator to the construction and destruction of pastors’ expectations upon their laity is a dilemma between two paradigms. On the one hand is the paradigm out of which pastors have been doing ministry for centuries. It includes, as part of its

foundation, the idea that the laity do very little actual ministry. As an example, Loren B. Mead states that the average layperson was not expected to have much to say or do about mission except to support it vigorously with prayer, with generous giving, and by encouraging the young to go into “full-time Christian service” (Once and Future Church 22).

Pastorates are now moving out of the familiar paradigm of Christendom into new ministry expectations. The paradigm is as old as Scripture itself. It is a recognized calling upon all laity into ministry that “recognizes the death of the old way, in which the laity had no direct call to ministry” (Mead, Once and Future Church 24). It is the idea of the priesthood of all believers. “Christ loves us, and by His death he has freed us from our sins and made us a kingdom of priests to serve God” (Rev. 1:6, GNB).

Pastors’ expectations that the congregation should minister to them or that the people will willingly accept their new role in the priesthood of all believers are, in many cases, not met by the Church. Rather than becoming a victim to these expectations, Henri Nouwen encourages pastors to forego this hope of needs fulfilled when he says, “Such false hope leads us to make exhausting demands and prepares us for bitterness and dangerous hostility when we start discovering that nobody, and nothing, can live up to our absolutist expectations” (97).

The People’s Expectations

An erroneous expectation existed, and still exists, that in large part pastors accomplish the majority of ministry in the Church. This expectation was not necessarily biblical, as much as the ministerial tasks of the pastors were expected on the basis of “that’s what pastors did” (Fisher 23). One pastor expressed his frustration when he said,

“We are expected to be super human beings who are expected to do and be everything, but we are just fallible people” (Lehman).

Some churches flounder because of the difference in expectations between the pastor and the laity. Even if pastors were to reject the expectations of their churches and live in a balanced and healthy life with Christ and their families, they may be greatly criticized for not suffering for “the cause.” Maybe the Church believes every pastor needs to be a Saint Catherine of Genoa who may have been perceived as one who sacrificed her family to serve and meet the needs of hurting people in the community. Although her family was not sacrificed and in fact her husband worked closely by her side until his death, her sacrifice came on a heart level with a desire to be sold out to God and his ministry to the down trodden (Catherine). Ray Oswald believes that clergy who attempt to balance and order their lives, taking time for such things as family and spiritual development, are viewed suspiciously by some churches. They view such balance as less than self-sacrificing, which they have come to expect as the normative for the Christian pastor (5).

The crisis that may come about in the pastor’s life ought not to come with any surprise and should not be parlayed into the formation of an idea that the pastor is a victim. A correct vision of pastoral ministry needs to be understood, and these true-to-life words of Jesus portray such a vision:

Blessed pastor! So you feel beaten, bullied, and whipped by the demands that people make on you, inconsiderate people who are so troubled that they think of no one but themselves. Well, that’s what you bargained for when you entered *my* [emphasis mine] ministry. And it is *my* [emphasis mine] ministry. Read about it in the Gospels. They tell you about a typical day in my earthly career, a day that begins, continues, and ends with crises, a day of involvement in human need, battling with human hypocrisy, a day that leaves me depleted, exhausted, and ready to

quit—except that I find renewal in prayer. (London and Wiseman, Pastors 173)

People Pleasing

People are all products of their past, and regardless of what occupation in which they find themselves, they come with some needs and/or baggage. Pastors are not exempt from having their pre-pastoral days affect them and their ministry as well. Therefore, they may well be in ministry as a result of a definitive call of God, and yet sometime during the following years, their ministry becomes need based—their needs.

One example is in the spiritual “disease” of being a “people pleaser.” Karen Horney states that “people pleasing” is a neurotic part of the personality (239). This neurotic personality feeds into a fear of disapproval, and in order to avoid this realization or living reality of this fear in their lives, they seek to please others in hopes that by doing so they avoid detection of the fact that they are something other than expected. Horney says that “nearly every neurotic, even though he appears on surface observation to be entirely certain of himself and indifferent to the opinion of others, is excessively afraid of, or hypersensitive to, being disapproved of, criticized, accused, found out” (235).

The affects of being a “people pleaser” in ministry may not be seen in the success of a pastor. Maybe more importantly is not how the visible outward form of ministry is affected but how this neurotic behavior inwardly affects the pastor. For the pastor, lost in some ways in the web of “people pleasing,” an amiable double life seems to appear. On the one hand is a call to ministry for some pastors and, on the other hand, is this neurotic “need” to be pleasing and acceptable. When the latter becomes the primary motivating reason for ministry, the result is, on top of the fear and anxiety, guilt. “He feels guilty because, as a result of his anxieties, he is even more than others, dependent on public

opinion, and hence, mistakes it naively as his own judgments” (Horney 236).

The success and failure of their ministry, and in some ways of themselves as people, do not originate out of a God who created them, but out of the direct opinion and responses of those whom they are to be shepherding. Horney once again explains that the neurotic “people pleaser” does not want to make decisions that will eventually aid others in building a desired goal. Instead they inwardly insist on trying to build a work based on the lives of others. They extract these building materials by “domineering and exploitation or by means of affecting ‘love’ or submissiveness” (240). Parents that, instead of making and setting a course of action for their child’s well-being based on what they think is best, formulate a plan of action based on what the child wants to happen would be similar to Horney’s thought.

Maybe the greatest casualty to the “people-pleaser disease” is that God is not the driving force for pastors to do what they do and, therefore, more than likely leaves them vulnerable to disappointment and failure in ministry. Ray Oswald admits, “Rather than doing ministry as a response to an experience of the Grace of God, I was doing it to assuage guilt or to seek some sort of personal fulfillment. When people needed me, my ministry was confirmed” (14). This humanizing of ministry causes pastors to fail to understand that ministry is not about them but all about God.

God Pleasing

Ministry begins with taking God’s message to God’s people. Another factor makes this statement complete-taking this message to these people must be done according to God’s way (Criswell, Halverson, Hayford, and Warren). Doing so immediately conflicts with the neurotic personality and any other means or reasoning for

doing ministry.

Doing ministry God's way needs to evolve out of who the pastor is as a man or woman of God. The call of God to ministry and the call of God to a personal relationship flow out of the same God. Richard Foster makes this point clear when he says, "The pastor as the image of Christ provides an appropriate transition from being to doing because when the minister is the image of the Sacred, the being is the doing" (79). Out of this statement, ministry seems to occur naturally out of an ever-present relationship and a desire to please God.

God, ministry, and pastors' lives cannot be compartmentalized and separated; "the being is the doing" (Foster 79). Ministry is not something that is simply done because it needs to be. Ministry is intended to flow out of life and a relationship. "We take a giant step forward in Christian devotion when we see it more as a life to be lived than as a time to be observed" (Harper 18). Christian devotion, ministry, and all of life flows out of a life lived for and in relationship to Christ.

With this understanding, the pastor may then begin, in conjunction with God, to do what is necessary to assure Criswell's definition of how ministry should be accomplished. "The pastor needs to be God's man, doing God's work, ministering to God's people, in God's way with God's message" (Criswell, Halverson, Hayford, and Warren). This manner of ministry is set in motion not by the expectations of others or even that of the pastors themselves but by the expectations of God to be found in Scripture and through devotion.

To work against these expectations to pursue the will of God is always dangerous and often powerful. Bill Hybels, the pastor of Willow Creek Community Church in South

Barrington, Illinois, found himself as one who was over concerned with the expectations of people. It was depleting his resources and damaging his marriage, so he decided to “pay attention to what needed changing” in his life “and change it,” allowing “the chips to fall where they may.” He risked the approval of others to make his life and ministry healthy, but it was not easy. “Every significant change I’ve had to make to make my life sustainable has been painful.”

Doing ministry God’s way is also painful for many pastors because it may involve the possibility of giving up their own agendas. Not to be willing to do so, in a sense, demands of God “this is what it is going to take to keep me happy” (Martyn). To be pleasing to God in their lives and ministry, pastors need to get to a point in their spiritual lives where they lay themselves before God’s feet and say, “Whatever you will, I will do.”

Pastors must strive continually to bring themselves back to this hope and will of God, rejecting the plans of man and instead doing “the will of God who sent me” (John 6:38, NLT). Eugene Peterson writes, “[R]edefining by refusing the definitions of pastor that the culture hands me, and formulating my life with the insights and images of Scripture” (Contemplative Pastor 16). In this way expectations dissipate and are replaced with a willing anticipation “to accept whatever God sends into our life” (Martyn). Foster reminds pastors not to forget who called them and the fact that God has promised never to leave or forsake them (10).

The Biblical Experience of Ministerial Crises

Simply having a close relationship with Jesus did not assume that the early pastors of a new young church called Christianity would be immune to the crises that

pastors live through today. In actuality, the cost to them for doing ministry, and the crises that accompanied them as a result, led to physical injury and even death. Philip A. Bence acknowledges that these Christians did proclaim the gospel at great risk to themselves as evidenced by “the scars left by jagged metal at the end of whips” that “they bore on their bodies” (83). The presence of pastoral crises has always been a part of the ministers of Christ.

The Ministerial Crises of Paul

Paul, before his road to Damascus experience, had the job of pursuing and killing those who would follow after Jesus, and he fulfilled his job with a passion. Here was a man who had a lot of authority and, as an educated man, was highly respected and honored. In spite of all his education and prestige, he pursued the cross of Christ with the same passion as he had once pursued the followers of that same cross. In doing so he forsook the benefits of Saul to pursue a relationship with Jesus and a chance to serve God the Father. Paul, in his letter to the Philippians, writes of his pursuit of Jesus:

But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith. I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his suffering, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead. (3:7-11, NIV)

Paul did indeed “share in his sufferings” as a result of being a pastor in the early Church. In Acts 16, Paul had been arrested, beaten with rods, and left with many stripes and bruises. As a part of this experience, Paul’s feet were fastened into stocks that were, at that time, not only used for securing a prisoner but also used as a means of torture. The

stocks used on Paul were equipped with extra holes so that the legs of the prisoner could be forced into painful positions (Keener 370).

In Acts 18, Paul is found in Corinth having made his way through Amphipolis, Apollonia, Thessalonica, Berea, and Athens since leaving the prisons of Philippi, which was a Roman colony. In the process of ministry conducted in each of these places, remarkable things occurred, and those counted in the kingdom of God increased considerably, but a lot of crises occurred as well. In Thessalonica, the Jewish leaders roused a mob into a riot against Paul (Acts 17:5 ff) and even pursued him to Berea for the sake of “stirring up trouble” (18:13). In Corinth, as he shared the gospel, “the Jews opposed him and insulted him” (v. 6, NLT).

In the eighteenth chapter of Acts, Paul gives evidence to some of the frustration he thought may have been building up through these first two missionary journeys. His reaction in verse six does not seem to be a fitting response for Paul in comparison to some of the other situations in which he had once found himself. His response to his imprisonment in Philippi in Acts 16 was the singing of hymns and praises to God with Silas. Now, with only verbal opposition and insults, he says, as he shook the dust from his robe, “Your blood be upon your own heads—I am innocent. From now on I will go to the Gentiles” (18:6, NLT). At this point he seems sick and tired of the opposition he was receiving to his ministry, but more of the same was yet to come.

In Acts 21, Paul, now in his third missionary journey, was arrested in Jerusalem. Beyond the physical abuse, he endured during this arrest, whereupon they beat and bound him with chains (vv. 32-33), the deeper damage to Paul may have been psychological. At the time of his arrest, Paul was dragged out of the church, and the slamming shut of the

doors behind him soon followed (v. 30). For Paul to be taken by force out of the place in which he possibly loved to be the most may have been psychologically painful. It was the place of worship for him, a place where he drew near to God, and because of the lies and stirring up of a few (v. 27), the man, Paul, was separated from the presence of God in a manner of speaking, if not symbolically. Perhaps Paul experienced, as the gates of the temple were shut behind him, a sense of a closing off of the sweetness of worship in that place and thought he would never again have the opportunity to return.

In Acts 23, the effects of Paul's ministry to the Jewish high council enraged more than forty leading priests and other leaders. They felt imprisonment was not enough; they wanted him dead. Therefore, these leaders made a pact with each other not to eat or drink until their end was accomplished (v. 12).

In Paul's second letter to the Corinthians, he provides a summary of his own suffering for the name of Jesus:

They say they serve Christ? I know I sound like a madman, but I have served him far more! I have worked harder, been put in jail more often, been whipped times without number, and faced death again and again. Five different times the Jews gave me thirty-nine lashes. Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked. Once I spent a whole night and a day adrift at sea. I have traveled many weary miles. I have faced danger from flooded rivers and from robbers. I have faced danger from my own people, the Jews, as well as from the Gentiles. I have faced danger in the cities, in the deserts, and on the stormy seas. And I have faced danger from men who claim to be Christians but are not. I have lived with weariness and pain and sleepless nights. Often I have been hungry and thirsty and have gone without food. Often I have shivered with cold, without enough clothing to keep me warm. Then, besides all this, I have the daily burden of how the churches are getting along. (11:23-28, NLT)

The Ministerial Crisis of Stephen

Following the death of Jesus, many, including his disciples, feared for their lives.

John 20 says that as the disciples met, the door was locked. Crises, as a result of their continued proclamation of the gospel, soon befell the followers of Jesus. Stephen was no exception and actually became the first one to die for the sake of the cross and its message.

As the movement of Christ grew, the daily handling of the ministry became so demanding that the twelve disciples could not tend to every matter brought before them. To free themselves up for ministry, the disciples chose seven men “who are well respected and are full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom” (Acts 6:3, NLT). Stephen was among these early administrative assistants who were put in charge of administering a food program for the believers (v. 2).

Stephen’s work extended beyond the mere administrative duties to which he was assigned. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, he “performed amazing miracles” and signs (Acts 6:8, NLT) while simultaneously bringing the wrath of the Jews “from Cyrene, Alexandria, Cilicia, and the province of Asia” (v. 9) down upon him.

Unable to defeat Stephen in debate, like Paul, false accusers were brought in to defame him (Acts 6:11). As a result, Stephen was brought before the Council of the Sanhedrin. Before these men, Stephen recanted to them their own history with regard to God and those who spoke on his behalf, leading to the proclamation that as men of God in the past have been sorely treated, the Council and leaders like them continue to resist the Holy Spirit still today. “You stubborn people! You are heathen at heart and deaf to the truth. Must you forever resist the Holy Spirit? You deliberately disobeyed God’s law, though you received it from the hands of angels” (Acts 7:51, 53, NLT). This honest revelation infuriated the Jewish leaders, and, consequently, Stephen was put to death by

stoning (7:57-59).

The Ministerial Crises of the Disciples

The danger that the disciples shared themselves is made evident by a small, almost passing, verse found in Acts 5. The apostles were doing incredible and miraculous things among the people. People were growing and often met regularly at the temple in Solomon's Colonnade. They tasted the fruits of the gospel's message and spent time admiring the messengers, but the admiration came from a distance, knowing prison, if not death, probably lay ahead in the apostles' future. "No one else dared to join them, though everyone had high regard for them" (v. 13, NLT).

For the disciples, the crises they faced in ministry would indeed lead them to their deaths:

Matthew suffered martyrdom by being slain with a sword at a distant city of Ethiopia. Mark expired at Alexandria, after being cruelly dragged through the streets of that city. Luke was hanged upon an olive tree in the classic land of Greece. John was put in a caldron of boiling oil, but escaped death in a miraculous manner, and was afterward banished to Patmos. Peter was crucified at Rome with his head downward. James the Greater was beheaded at Jerusalem; James the Less was thrown from a lofty pinnacle of the Temple and then beaten to death with a fuller's club. Bartholomew was flayed alive. Andrew was bound to a cross, whence he preached to his persecutors until he died. Thomas was run through the body with a lance at Coromandel in the East Indies. Jude was shot to death with arrows. Mathias was first stoned and then beheaded. Barnabas of the Gentiles was stoned to death at Solonica. Paul, after various tortures and persecutions, was at length beheaded at Rome by the Emperor Nero. (Tan 333-34)

Ministerial crises were a very real issue for the followers of Christ. Besides these obvious death scenarios, they experienced several run-ins with the priests and Sadducees and dealt with the pursuit of Saul who sought to have them killed.

The Ministerial Crises of Jesus

Jesus himself reveals the reality of crises with the work of ministry. Throughout his years of ministry, Jesus suffered numerous crises as a result of the work primarily of the priests and Sadducees, those in power who felt threatened by the words, signs, and wonders of Jesus.

Not everyone was appreciative of Jesus' work. Jesus commanded a legion of demons to flee a man. They obeyed and, upon entering a herd of swine, went over a cliff. The owners of the swine fixed their loss squarely upon Jesus' shoulders (Mark 5:1-17).

When Jesus, seeking to make a difference in the life of a sinner named Zacchaeus, decided to spend some time with him by being his guest for a day, the crowds that witnessed this self-invitation were displeased. "He has gone to be the guest of a notorious sinner,' they grumbled" (Luke 19:7, NLT).

Upon returning to his hometown of Nazareth, Jesus experienced rejection. Here, in Nazareth, the Son of God, the perfect lamb, came home, not to a ticker-tape parade for heroes returning home but to the skeptics, the furious, the hard-hearted, and those deaf to his ministry. Jesus said, "I tell you the truth,' he continued, 'no prophet is accepted in his hometown'" (Luke 4:24, NIV). The Nazarenes had a difficult time accepting Jesus' words of a different life than the ones they had been leading. Although Jesus did and spoke as one with authority, they could not get by the fact that this Jesus was just the son of a carpenter who had grown up with them there in Nazareth. "How can this be?' they asked. 'Isn't this Joseph's son?'" (Luke 4:22, NLT).

Not only could the Nazarenes not accept Jesus' words, but they became furious with him and very nearly pushed him off a cliff, having mobbed him (Luke 4:23-30). The

cost of the message Jesus carried would turn out to be a great one.

The fact of the crises of ministry is again exemplified in Matthew 8. In verse nineteen, a teacher of the law comes to Jesus outwardly determined to do anything to be a disciple of Jesus. Jesus revealed that to do so would cost him. Jesus stated, “Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head” (v. 20, NIV). The teacher of the law, as well as anyone else who heard, may have begun to get some idea of what was included with ministry. Frankly said, costs to discipleship and, subsequently, to the ministry that comes out of that faith commitment are apparent.

The possibility exists for some to forget that Jesus was fully human as he was fully God. Ministry for Jesus had its painful crises, as in the case where Jesus had no place to call home. At times the crises he faced may have seemed unbearable as when he cried for the cup of his sacrifice on the cross for humanity’s sins to be passed from him. There, in that place, as he cried out to the Father, his sweat became as blood (Luke 22:41-44).

The mission that God sent his only begotten Son into the world to do would, as it did for those disciples who would come after him, cost him his life. Jesus understood, as messengers of the gospel today should, that the crises of ministry come with picking up the cross and following him. In John 18, when the soldiers, led by Judas, came to take Jesus away to what would ultimately be his death, he said to Peter, “Put your sword away! Shall I not drink the cup the Father has given me?” (v. 11, NIV).

The Biblical Experience of Ministerial Crises Summary

The biblical experiences of ministerial crises by Paul, Stephen, the disciples, and Jesus reveal to anyone who would pursue God’s call upon them the fact that ministry is

going to have its crises. Maybe some pastors need to be reminded again that when they choose to pick up the cross and follow Jesus, the difficulties, pain and suffering, the rough edges, splinters and nails all go with that acceptance.

Pastors ought to expect that crises in ministry are going to be an inevitable part of their calling. To accept that calling of God upon their lives is not a means to avoid suffering, but instead, it is the arming of the individual to face such suffering with new confidence and hope. Therefore, if ministry is then approached correctly, with the power of the Holy Spirit, the crises themselves can help further develop spiritual fervor and equip the pastor for more effective ministry.

Without a correct view and acceptance of the call of God upon the pastors' lives, the ability to face the crises that will go along with ministry does not come or at best does not make an adequate impression upon the pastors that would enable them to be victorious in and through the crises. This loss of purpose can lead to several negative consequences in pastors' lives and ministry.

Possible Negative Results to Ministerial Crises

Several visible and invisible results can occur in pastors' lives in a negative manner in response to ministerial crises. These negative results reveal themselves in subtle ways that seemingly come upon pastors uninvited. For example, pastors may close within themselves in a defensive manner as an act of protection. As a result they may find a loneliness they were not expecting. Some negative results disclose themselves in a more selective way with pastors choosing to let go of something as a result of what they are experiencing. A possible scenario may be the pastor who leaves the ministry altogether as a result of ministerial crises.

Loneliness

Nouwen refers to the wounded state of some pastors with words such as “alienation, separation, isolation, and loneliness” (85). At first look, such words used to describe the social and/or mental/psychological state of pastors seem exaggerated, if not ludicrous. The ministry of pastors is a highly social activity where pastors often find themselves surrounded with people, but precisely in these conditions some pastors can feel very alone (London and Wiseman, Pastors 51). Upon a second look Nouwen’s statement is not so far off base. Pastors may isolate themselves into two compartments. Who pastors are socially may be different than who they are in a ministerial setting. The challenge may be the ability of the pastors to open their hearts and allow their feelings and convictions to become as active in their ministry as it is in their social spheres. George Barna says, “While they [pastors] have many friends and acquaintances with whom they can share a good laugh and a pleasant evening, they have few people with whom they can share their hearts” (145). As a result, pastors have a lot of people with whom to socialize and even remain friends with across many years, but out of these people very few really know the pastors or in whom the pastors feel so comfortable with that they can allow these friends to know their true selves. Nouwen also attempts to give one explanation as to why pastors are lonely:

When we [pastors] are driven by thousands of different and often conflicting stimuli, when we are always “over there” between peoples, ideas and the worries of this world, how can we possibly create the room and space where someone else can enter freely without feeling himself an unlawful intruder? (92)

Pastors may be pulled and stuffed in so many directions at the same time that to add or include the effort to get close to others may be more than they are willing to give

out above and beyond what ministry already requires from them. This sense of need may be called “self-defense” or “self-preservation” and in and of itself constitutes a ministerial crisis.

A difference between aloneness/solitude and loneliness/isolation needs to be seen at this point. Aloneness/solitude is a welcomed time of rest, peace, and opportunity for contemplation and prayer. It is seen and experienced as a time of recuperation. Children who are nurtured, cared for, and strengthened within a family may find times when they are by themselves but not lonely in any sense. Instead “they become peacefully at home in their own interiority, filled as it is by conformational experiences of the past” (Kaam 164). The adult, then, experiences times of being apart from others in like manner. On the other side, children who experience dysfunction in the home with an absence of being nurtured, cared for, and strengthened from within experience isolation and loneliness.

Ministry intrinsically entails a close interwovenness into and with other people’s lives. Thus, ministers who are already experiencing isolation and loneliness will sense their loneliness more acutely as a result of ministry. Some pastors may go into the ministry acknowledging that relationships could be plentiful, and they do so with a hope that these relationships could cure the loneliness they already feel. Nevertheless, they find that few of those relationships would or could fulfill the isolation experienced in the heart already. The resulting disappointment with isolation serves only to enhance the need previously felt within.

Dissatisfaction

The challenge in ministry is to be about the work of God, which, if it truly is of God, requires faith. Abraham was told by God in Genesis 12 to leave the land of Haran

and to go to a land that God would show Abraham. The revelation of this destination did not occur until verse seven, after Abram and everything that was his had already left the land of his forefathers. Ministry is much the same way. No guarantees are present, only commands to go. The foundation of ministry is obedience and faith that God knows what he is doing.

If pastors could remain and work out of this mode of belief and thinking, they would have a greater sense of fulfillment and satisfaction in their work and less dissatisfaction setting in over the ministerial crises and disappointments that are an inevitable part of ministry. For many, this foundation of ministry is weakened along the way.

Understanding that faith is essential in answering the call of God in ministry, the demands of the congregation are made easier. Peterson says, “Being a pastor who satisfies a congregation is one of the easiest jobs on the face of the earth—if we are satisfied with satisfying congregations” (Contemplative Pastor 131). In doing so, the foundation out of which pastors work begins to be compromised. Doing ministry simply to satisfy the congregation may be easier, and maybe even satisfying to a point, but it changes and also jeopardizes the call to ministry itself. When clergy compromise what God has called them to do, the end result is a feeling of dissatisfaction, leaving them with only a shell of what God originally and still intends.

The shift in the foundation of ministry out of a call to obedience and faith to a seemingly easier mode of satisfying the customers on the surface looks to be more consoling to pastors. Progress may be more evident as their day concludes with more happy congregants, but such conclusions to their days are increasingly more difficult.

Churches are in a constant change and flux—people change, pastors change, and people are even changing denominations “as readily as they change a grocery store” (Colson 41). This constant changing is analogous to those who search for the right lure or bait to catch fish. Pastors are using the bait they think will be most effective in luring and catching the people to the Church and themselves. The problem is that what attracts people keeps changing. So, to do ministry out of this fallen approach often leaves those who fish without a fish or the loss of the fish over the long run.

The pastors who find themselves fishing in this way abdicate the throne of leadership on which God has placed them. No longer are they God’s throne of light in the darkness of people’s lives, pointing beyond the rigors of daily living to a life of hope, grace, and mercy with the Father. For so many pastors, their work has become “mostly a matter of putting plastic flowers in people’s drab lives—well-intentioned attempts to brighten a bad scene, not totally without use, but not real in any substantive or living sense” (Peterson, Contemplative Pastor 136). When ministry becomes a formality for pastors, their ministry of fluff no longer satisfies.

When the basic foundation for ministry has been weakened, or worse, lost, other external forces and sin itself are able to creep into pastors’ lives causing grave damage. Maybe dissatisfaction in ministry comes because of the failure to grasp that what they are doing is not what God wants them to be doing. For example, in the Methodist system and others, a tendency exists in some to admire the appointments to which others have been called, believing that they themselves deserve to be there. A cancerous desire to be doing what appears to be more glamorous and important exists. Those caught in a longing for the limelight do not place themselves in a position to feel the grace and peace of simply

being where God has placed them. As a result, these pastors live in a pseudo-reality that when faced with reality leaves them with a sense of falling short of their goals and being misused by the system.

Having placated the whines of the marketplace, pastors lose sight of their purpose in Christ and fail to have a grasp on ministry any longer. An emptiness and dissatisfaction in their work is the result. Writing from personal experience, Fisher says, “I learned that there is little satisfaction in performance of tasks without a clear and foundational identity” (23). Adrian van Kaam adds to the gloomy situation when stating some of the fruits of dissatisfaction: “In this way, we may induce in ourselves feelings of impotence, a slush fund of powerless rage, apathy, and despair” (320). The depressing statistics continue to mount. “The reality,” according to H. B. London, is “that fifty percent of pastors go to work feeling they will make no difference in people’s lives or their own”.

Somewhere, eventually, maybe pastors begin to realize the mistakes they have made. When Jesus entered the temple to find the house of prayer turned into a den of thieves and upon his subsequent “cleaning” out of the temple, I wonder if anyone there, especially the religious leaders, realized their mistake, the realized mistake being, as Peterson says, “work taking shape under the presence of the marketplace...[and] not the truth of theology or the wisdom of spirituality” (Under the Predictable Plant 5).

Pastors who find themselves to be moneychangers in the temple court need to read and discover what Paul had:

I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. (Phil. 4:11-13, NIV)

Loss of Call

Probably the most devastating negative result possible to ministerial crises is the loss of the pastors' calls. The call of God upon pastors' lives, in the midst of ministerial storms, serves as the anchor to keep them going. Fisher says, "My call, that grip on my soul, is the sustaining power of my pastoral ministry" (95). The call from God upon pastors' lives asks and enables those lives to be given in the fulfillment of that call. Although the obedient response to the call is pleasing to God and the pastor, it is also a call to sacrifice.

Fisher believes that "the pressure of ministry," and I would add the crises of ministry, "tends to deafen the soul" (95). In the midst of ministry, many pastors come to the conclusion that they could be doing something else that pays more and is a lot more fun and a lot less stress filled. The struggle is enhanced as pastors try to squirm off the table of sacrificial ministry to a place more comfortable and less demanding. In doing so they pull against the will of God, which leads to greater damage within the called person. H. B. London and Neil B. Wiseman warn, "[A] disconnection from our call damages ministry as much as shutting off oxygen damages the brain in us. Withholding nourishment weakens the body" (Heart 113).

If pastors are to get off the table of ministry safely, they must first remove the stake (the call) that binds and sometimes holds them there. Someone once asked Fisher, "How do I lose the call?" (23). Fred Smith, quoting a prominent minister, may have summed up nicely what thousands of pastors may be thinking when he says, "I would be glad to get out of ministry if God would let me off the hook. In fact, if he doesn't keep me in it, I want out of it" (70).

To fault pastors who want to leave or think about leaving ministry is difficult. Everything to which God calls Christians is not pleasant nor seldom easy. The thought of getting out and leaving the call behind is not the problem. Abraham was called to sacrifice his only son, Isaac (Gen. 22), and I am positive he did not want to and may have had thoughts of leaving that call behind. The problem occurs when pastors act on those thoughts and rip themselves from the grip of that call.

Peterson says, “Ministry can be a shortcut to hell” (qtd. in Martyn). A combination of Satan’s increased attack upon God’s messengers and the decadent choices of his followers themselves may drive pastors out of ministry. Nevertheless, one thing is certain—if pastors, against the call and will of God, leave it all behind, they have a spiritual problem. Dr. Maxie Dunnam gives a hint to this statement when he says, “In the midst of a thriving church setting, I felt far from God” (60). Feeling far from God is the clue that shouts the possibility of a spiritual crisis. He goes on to reveal that the result of this crisis in his life and ministry was the entertainment of serious thoughts about leaving the ministry (60). Due to the nature of ministry and the presence of the crises that go with it, the result for some pastors could be a loss of their call.

Busy-ness

The recent history of the Church has invited and, in some cases, has established the busy pastor as the expected norm. The way ministry was intended to be accomplished was exemplified in Deuteronomy 1. The task of leading and ministering to a nation was becoming far more than Moses could have possibly undertaken himself. At the advice of his father-in-law, he divided the job between twelve judges (chaps. 9-18). Somewhere between the leadership of Moses and today, ministry has evolved into an organism all its

own for which the pastor serves as its legs and mind. Mead explains what has happened: “The relationship between clergy and the laity over the years has built chronic overfunctioning into the role of the clergy and underfunctioning into the role of the laity” (Five Challenges 12).

The world thrusts its definition of success upon the church and its inhabitants and teaches them that success is reached only through commitment and sacrifice. A grave mistake is made by pastors when they erroneously believe that their state of busy-ness is a sign and indicator that they are, above all else, sold out to God and his service. Statements such as, “The word ‘busy’ is the symptom not of commitment but of betrayal. It is not devotion but defection” (Peterson, Contemplative Pastor 17), may serve to snap pastors and churches alike back into reality. The reality is that busy-ness does not always come out of a heart to please God, but rather it is an attempt to cover over weaknesses, to please those that have been entrusted to the shepherd’s care, and/or to take hold of the world’s formula for success.

Picking up the cross and following the call of God does exact a price. However, busy-ness causes a price that God never intended to be paid because of its destruction in the lives he came to build.

Physically, the price may be burnout or the loss of the family or the onset of stress-related diseases. One pastor that had succumbed to busy-ness in his life shares, “I was like a diesel engine without a governor. The faster I went, the faster I went. I got busier and busier, and my family was left out in the cold” (Ulstein 23). Pastors’ lives are filled with the busy-ness of “doing the Lord’s work,” but in the midst of the doing, they fail to realize that the thousands of good things that demand their time and strength keep

them from doing the God things (Long 27). Peterson again says, “But if I vainly crowd my day with conspicuous activity or let others fill my day with imperious demands, I don’t have time to do my paperwork, the work to which I have been called” (Contemplative Pastor 19).

Spiritually, the price of busy-ness is a distancing or a disconnection from God. Jesus often took time away from the busy-ness of his ministry to reconnect and align himself with the Father. In the busy-ness of ministry, which takes on chronic forms, the difficulty for pastors is to connect and fellowship with the Lord. Michael Lehman of Christ United Methodist Church in Florence, Kentucky, says, “I don’t think you can hear God in the busy-ness of life”. Due to the reality that the price for busy-ness—broken homes and lives—brings both physical and spiritual failures rather than the hoped-for successes, I believe Rev. Lehman was correct in saying, “Being busy is being under Satan’s yoke.”

The solution, then, to the dilemma of busy-ness in pastors’ lives is, first, to become intentional in supporting “the priesthood of all believers” by reestablishing a Deuteronomy 1 mode of ministry. The second solution is for pastors to try to serve God by tending to the specific ministries that he intended for them to do. Third, pastors should put time with God as a priority in their schedules. Richard S. Taylor addresses this last point when he states, “He must resolutely elbow his way into the busyness of the day and chisel out time for prevailing prayer” (116-17).

To avoid busy-ness as a destructive desire in pastors’ lives, they must learn what Craig Brian Larson learned: “that God has not called me to be everything to everyone” (48-49). Pastors must, though, strive to be everything to God that God intends for them to

be. The achievement of God's intention begins with time spent with God in prayer away from the activities of life.

Skepticism

Another possible result of ministerial crises may be the presence of skepticism. The fact that skepticism runs roughshod in the hearts and lives of some clergy may be surprising. Maybe, though, the presence of skepticism should come as no surprise. In Numbers 20, even Moses, the great leader of the nation of Israel, had skepticism in his relationship with God. Again, this time in the New Testament, skepticism is exemplified by Zacharius upon learning the news that God had indeed heard Elizabeth's prayer for a child and it was to become a reality in their lives (Luke 1:11-19).

Skepticism comes most readily when pastors have not experienced the felt presence of God in their lives. That, coupled with the crises of ministry, leaves some pastors no longer trusting that God is a major part of their lives and/or questioning if he is willing to aid in the pain of the battle. Over time, apathy infiltrates many pastors' lives, causing them not to care if they connect with God. Apathy alone cuts them off from experiencing the possibilities and dreams of a holy God. "Skepticism carries with it a kind of built-in excuse for spiritual entropy. It provides a twisted kind of justification for a failure to love and love is, after all, hard work" (Ortberg 27). The longer pastors go without experiencing the Holy Spirit in any real way, the harder time they have believing that a mighty God lives, let alone believing that God intervenes in daily schedules and loves unconditionally. In this state of mind, ministerial crises only exacerbate this sense of skepticism.

Self-Reliance

For many pastors, ministry has become no longer the working out of their calling but rather just a job; therefore, ministry needs to be done out of a heart for God in response to what pastors have been called to do. Maybe for many pastors their ministry begins by finding its roots in the God who called them. Somewhere, though, along the way, a dependency upon the self rather than the Spirit of God develops, and therein lie the seeds of ministry becoming merely a job. Peterson says, “The idolatry to which pastors are conspicuously liable is not personal but vocational, the idolatry of a religious career that one can take charge of and manage” (Under the Predictable Plant 4).

The cause of such a shift may be the result of ministerial crises that pastors may experience over the course of time. The cause of the crises may be external and so painful to the extent that pastors subconsciously become afraid to risk themselves in ministry any longer.

The cause may also be internal. As pastors move away from a dependence upon God in ministry to self-reliance, satisfaction in ministry becomes works oriented. For these pastors, Fisher proposes that if they were to be kept from doing their jobs, “much of the affirmation would cease” (28). Much of what is satisfying in life would no longer be present. Instead of finding joy in Christ, meaning is found in work. Feeding off works-based ministry will drive pastors to push the envelope, sacrificing themselves beyond where God has called them. To prevent burnout, Oswald sees a need for pastors to be reminded that “the redemption of the world has already been accomplished” and that their “own personal crucifixion will not add one iota to what Christ has already done” (18).

Personal, need-based ministry brings to reality Peterson's paraphrase of prophecy:

You're going to find that there will be times when people will have no stomach for solid teaching, but will fill up on spiritual junk food—catchy opinions that tickle their fancy. They'll turn their backs on truth and chase mirages. (Message 452)

The results of doing ministry in the flesh as a job are catastrophic. Doing so in and of itself causes crises in ministry. "What am I without you, but a guide to my own ruination?" (Wirt 50).

Pastors who have taken their calling and have prostituted it by allowing it to become a job separate who they are in Christ from what they do, which are two things that must go together. Larson reveals the relationship between the two when he says, "I do not seek above all to grow in my relationship through work; instead, I just want to get work done for its own sake and to reach my goals" (58). A number of pastors are leaving their calling or are unhappy, living in a joyless existence of service because of this approach to ministry. They have continued to pour themselves into their work, and they are doing so outside the power of God. "They have become dull, hollow, and uninteresting, and they know it. They are not really dull and uncreative; they have simply given so much of themselves for so long that they are burned out" (Oswald 67).

Before pastors get to this point, the effort they provide based on themselves may appear to be successful, but Foster believes that the reality of what is going on deep within will always surface and be revealed (15). What a rude awakening for those pastors who suddenly realize that the mode of operation from which they have been doing ministry has left them cold. This realization, although painful, is not altogether bad.

Until pastors realize that ministry is being done or is attempting to be done based on mere human power, they will continue blindly in a mode that will lead them to

dissatisfaction and burnout. “The pastor who would do God’s work God’s way must see that the ministry without the supernatural dimension—without the immediate and pervasive power of God—is but a juggler’s performance” (Taylor 113). Not only is the ministry powerless, but the pastors themselves are lightweights.

The self in ministry, as for all of us, must die, and it must be replaced with the power of the Holy Spirit. As Paul says, “I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me” (Gal. 2:20, NIV). Pastors need to rely on Christ to work through them rather than relying on themselves. As Tommy Tenney says, “It’s a good day to die. The more I die, the closer he gets” (63).

Spiritual Dryness

One other negative result of ministerial crises in pastors’ lives is a loss of spiritual fervor. In the midst of battle for the souls of their congregants, some pastors have lost the fact that it is also a battle for their own soul. Paul challenges pastors, in the midst of leading others to Christ and in pointing the way, to ensure that in that process, they do not forget themselves (1 Cor. 9:27).

Ministry in and of itself, even separate from the crises that come with it, by nature poses as a spiritual parasite that feeds off the pastor. London and Wiseman proclaim that “spiritual dryness and emotional starvation are occupational land mines for pastors who do their work continually in a world of half-hearted commitments, moral bankruptcies, devastating sins, and dysfunctional people” (Pastors 208). In this war, the generals (pastors) have received their orders in the war room with great excitement. Somewhere along the way, however, as they carried out the mission, some of them lost not only the mission plans but also the reason for carrying them out at all.

Kaam believes a direct correlation exists between ministerial crises and spiritual crises. He believes that the crisis in ministry will eventually take a toll upon pastors in the area of their spiritual life based on a loss in a sense of God's presence and functionality in the lives and ministry of the pastors. Kaam says, "The negative one [crisis resolution] leads to dispositions of indifference and inertia, manifesting a lasting depletion of presence, even though routine dispositions of related conditional behavior may persist" (301). Due to the fact that pastors may have conditioned themselves to function in ministry rather robotically, they may be able to continue to function with some success while being unaware that some aspects of their ministry are having a negative effect upon them, robbing pastors of God's presence in the midst of ministry.

Pastors may add to this loss in personal spirituality by neglecting to bring themselves into the Lord's presence in any intentional way. "When one has made no serious attempt to find God, he may be either callously apathetic or acutely unhappy through lack of inner stability" (Harkness 25). Again, the job of doing ministry may lend itself to spiritual dryness for the pastor. The need in all pastors is to seek God and to be fed while in his presence. As the psalmist says, "As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, O God" (42:1, NIV). Christians have a longing to know and be with God even as they are known. The problem arises out of an overlapping of pastoral duties and Christian needs. Matthew R. Saint John says the pressure of ministerial success is so strong that pastors may have difficulty in distinguishing between their professional calling and their personal relationship with God (101).

By necessity, most pastors are in prayer, in the Word, and speak in God's name. The fact may be that the dutiful practices inherent in ministry cause pastors to lose touch

with their hearts while constantly feeding their minds. “But in reading, teaching, and preaching the Scriptures, it happens: We cease to listen to the Scriptures and thereby undermine the intent of having Scripture in the first place” (Peterson, Working 61). Some pastors are tempted to approach their practices of spiritual piety with their minds and hearts not upon the Lord. They do not allow God to invade their lives, allowing a dialogue to occur. More likely, as they pray and read the Word, they are looking for a good sermon or information that will enable them to be better leaders and/or pastors. Oswald confesses that he struggled with separating devotions from sermon work:

It was difficult to read the Bible devotionally when I knew I had to prepare a sermon from these texts. I felt so much pressure to come up with something meaningful to say that I read the Bible as though I were on a scavenger hunt! Everything I read was directed towards others’ spiritual needs and not my own. (93)

By doing what Oswald did here, some pastors tend to lose that tender place of receptivity in their souls for the presence of God.

My observation is that many pastors do not know or are not seeking to feed themselves outside of their ministerial studies. As a result, the passion for Christ and being in the presence of God are diminished. In so doing, they deprive themselves of the joy, power, and excitement of doing their work with Jesus along with them, and they also deprive their congregations of the same. C. H. Spurgeon, in a lecture to his students, describes such depravity:

A graceless pastor is a blind man elected to a professorship of optics, philosophizing upon light and vision, discoursing upon and distinguishing to others the nice shades and delicate blending of the prismatic colors, while he himself is absolutely in the dark! (4)

The former Archbishop of Canterbury, Donald Coggan, presents a possible aid to this dilemma by endorsing the need for teaching in the areas of meditation, worship, and

even thinking (Foster 1). Some seminaries have course work designed to create experts on spiritual matters as well as opportunities through chapels to be fed spiritually.

Although spiritual formation possibilities exist in seminaries, a need that is largely ignored is “how to feed ourselves spiritually when we leave the seminary community” (Oswald 12). Future pastors need more instruction and courses in the area of personal spiritual formation; however, the responsibility to seek out God lies with the individual. Blaming an institution for weak areas in pastors is easier than taking responsibility for wrong choices in spiritual self-management.

Regardless of its source, spiritual dryness in pastors has led to burnout and loss of passion for ministry, in particular, and God in general. Dr. Ray Barbour of Oakland City University in Oakland City, Indiana, says that “what we have are theologians with no spirituality about them and, therefore, they are too weak to feed themselves.” If true, then even if pastors know how to feed themselves, they may be at a point where they are too far gone to do it for themselves. Oswald Chambers says, “The majority of saved souls are not fit to feed themselves” (27).

A great need for God to do what they can no longer do for themselves is present in some pastors. God must move upon their lives once again and turn their hearts toward heaven. “God must take over and purge him [pastors] in that fire that is dark for him” (Dubay 161). If God does not or is not allowed to bring pastors back into his necessary presence, “the long-range result of running on empty is horrific; becoming bitter-spirited, reduced to going through the motions, falling into ministry-destroying sin, losing intimacy with God and spouses and friends, and (if nothing else) hating our work” (MacDonald 29).

Pastors have trouble admitting that, like their people, they stand in need of a savior, guide, and friend. Like their congregations, they have feet of clay and, therefore, “they remain learners, beginners, people whose spirituality must remain central to all that we [they] do” (Carey 4). Pastors cannot have a contented sense that all is well in their spiritual lives based on the fact that their lives are lived out in service to God because all the while, their souls may be yearning to be fed. They make a grave mistake by leaving the extent of their spiritual lives in the hands or components of their ministry. In doing so, sin itself can be overlooked, and sin has a direct connection to spiritual dryness. Shelly says three signs can develop that indicate something unspiritual is going on in pastors’ lives:

One, through sin when I, in some fundamental way, betray my integrity as a Christian before God. Two, when I begin to feel an aversion for the Holy. And three, when I become alienated from those closest to me—my wife, my children, my friends. (23)

When sin is allowed to be present in the lives of pastors, an absence of Christ becomes evident in those lives. The Spirit and sin cannot coexist in the same place. As a result, the created go looking for the created in hopes of filling the void that has been left by the Lord’s departure. “Thus the soul goes whoring when it turns away from you. It looks somewhere else for that which can never be found in pure and pristine form until the soul comes back again to you” (Wirt 30).

Possible Intended Responses to Ministerial Crises

Pastors need to understand that, although ministry is laden with various and sundry problems, these problems do not necessarily have to impact them negatively. In the area of attitude, the individual alone chooses what their attitude will be. So, too, in the ministry, as pastors face crises in all of its forms, they face a decision concerning how

they will react. They can respond negatively, or they can choose to seek to respond positively by depending upon God. In John 15:11, Jesus said that he came to give joy (his joy) and that joy is not dependent upon the external circumstances of people's lives.

Therefore, as the Lord has called some to be pastors, his intention is that they would not be defeated and overcome but that through an abandonment to God and a personal relationship with him, they would discover that the anchor holds in the midst of the storm and victory prevails. The presence of God in their lives serves as the anchor, and when the storms of ministry come the relationship that exists with God serves as an enabler of victory for the pastor over the crisis.

Biblical Narratives

Through the biblical narratives, a clear picture is presented depicting victory in the midst of ministerial crises. Nevertheless, a reality remains that some difficulties of ministry inevitably await the called ones, but these difficulties do not need to be overwhelming and defeating.

In Acts 7, the stoning of Stephen is found. In the early part of the chapter, Stephen broke down the history of God's workings among the Israelites. In verses 54 ff., a crisis in ministry occurred that required his physical life. As his assailants threw rocks and stones at him, he did not cry out for their demise but simply began to pray. They stoned Stephen as he was calling on God and saying, "Lord Jesus, receive my Spirit" (v. 59, NLT). What happened next was truly remarkable, for in the midst of his dying breath he prays for those casting the stones, asking God not to hold this grievous act of sin against them (v. 60).

Rather than spend his last minutes in this world with his jury, Stephen communes

with God. He appears oblivious to what is going on around him as he draws strength from his Father in heaven. Before this event, Stephen had to remove himself from the center of his existence and allow Christ to fill him. Therefore, when the crisis fell upon him, it did so only physically. The rest fell upon Jesus himself. John Calvin's explanation of Stephen's victorious response was that "he could not pray this from his heart unless, having forgotten this life, he had cast off all care of the same" (319).

Stephen was noted as one who experienced a close relationship with the Holy Spirit (Acts 6:3). This quality set him apart as the other disciples chose him to minister with them (v. 5). His relationship with the Holy Spirit also gave him the strength that enabled him to respond faithfully in the midst of ministerial crises.

At around midnight one night, Paul and Silas found themselves shackled, beaten, and in the bowels of prison. Their future yet undetermined, they began to sing and pray (Acts 16:28). The joy of the presence of Christ was with them in their cell, and such a presence enabled them to look beyond their immediate external circumstances to the immediate internal design. Paul and Silas experienced joy even in the midst of their ministerial crisis.

Like Stephen, before the crises, Paul's and Silas' lives were sold to God, and he was the owner of their hearts when tragedy struck. Paul proclaimed that not only was he willing to suffer for the name of Jesus but he was also willing to die for him (Acts 21:13). Maybe Paul's willingness was not as hard actually to fulfill since his life had indeed already been given away to God.

Jesus epitomizes a faithful response that God intends to be relived through pastors as they experience crises in ministry. Having been beaten and bruised, mocked and

scorned, and nailed and hung to a tree, Jesus could easily have called a legion of angels to tend to him and exact a justful revenge upon those around him. Nevertheless, he did not. Jesus was not drinking from his own cup but from that of his Father in Heaven. “My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me” (Matt. 26:39, NIV). Out of this same cup, Jesus was able to say, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing” (Luke 23:34, NIV).

Abandoned to God

According to Luke, Jesus’ last words were, “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit” (23:46, NIV). At Jesus’ death on the cross, all of the rest of him was given away to God. This abandonment to God gave his biblical followers joy, peace, and fulfillment in the midst of ministerial hazards. These gifts are also available to pastors and disciples of today.

The intended response to ministerial crises may very well be releasing all the real estate of pastors’ lives over to God before and through the struggles. Paul directed Timothy in this way so that he could “fight the good fight” (1 Tim. 1:18, NIV). The weapons that are the keys to success, success being spiritual survival, are faith and a good conscience (v. 19).

Evidently, Hymenaeus’ and Alexander’s spiritual lives met with disaster from which they seemingly could not recover (1 Tim. 1:20) They had failed to pursue faith and a relationship with God and, as a result, they met with a spiritual shipwreck. This disaster of faith seems to have been of their own doing since they rejected what they knew to be true and chose not to live by or keep it.

If the antithesis to Hymenaeus’ and Alexander’s experience is to be achieved, it

requires a committed abandonment to God. Luke states that unless Christians are willing to pick up their crosses and follow Christ, they cannot be his disciples (14:27).

Kenneth L. Barker and John R. Kohlenberger, III, in their description of the disciples, also define the meaning of this abandonment to God:

We cannot detect in them one selfish purpose—neither the love of gain, nor the love of power, nor the love of praise, nor the love of ease. What we can detect—it stares us in the face—is an intense love of God, an entire devotion to the Lord Jesus Christ, an unquenchable charity for the souls of their fellowmen, both Jews and Gentiles, and a calm, steady hope of the appearing and kingdom of this unseen Lord. (35)

Increased Personal Devotions

“Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance” (Jas. 1:2-3, NIV).

A possible intended response to ministerial crises, according to Scripture, is the strengthening and effectiveness of increased trust and faith in God. An increased trust is instituted in the presence of a vital, growing spiritual life.

The devotional lives of pastors play a great role in establishing spiritual health. The Lord has taken the initiative into lives and now requires those lives to respond by drawing nearer to God. If God is going to be central to pastors’ work as he must, their objective must be to grow continually in their knowledge of God, even as they are known by God. Growing in the knowledge of God is more than just a head exercise, it must also be given time and place to speak to the heart. Peterson says pastors need some distancing from society around them “so that our theological conviction that God speaks has the time and space to hear the word he speaks and not just read about it” (Working 70). As pastors, like Jesus did, find time away to spend with God alone they discover that distancing ably.

Richard Halverson, when asked how he thought pastors could most cope with the seasons of life (including the crises of ministry), responds, “I trust they are taking time to wait upon the Lord” (Criswell, Halverson, Hayford, and Warren). The devotional life is key not only for health spiritually speaking but for ministerial health as well. Noting the importance of time spent with God, pastors cannot be legalistic with it, nor can they be passive. Either extreme can ensure lost communion with God.

Depending on particular personalities, freedom needs to be present in an individual’s spiritual foundation. Dr. Chuck Killian, a retired professor from Asbury Theological Seminary, has a significant problem with structured devotional times. “What finally brought stability and peace to this unstructured person, who today is still somewhat unstructured and delighted to be so, was the realization that my salvation was Christ’s work, not my own” (50). The key word in Dr. Killian’s statement is “stability,” which shows some form of structured devotional life in this unstructured life.

While freedom in the devotional life is exciting and freeing, it should not be viewed as an excuse to have a structured time away with the Lord only when one feels like it. “We cannot base our devotional life on our emotions. We must center it in our will. It must flow out of our sense of need” (Harper 14). The devotional life has to be “both/and.” Devotions must be disciplined, or the enemy will ensure individuals never “feel like having them.” Devotions must also be free and spontaneous to a degree so that they remain fresh and build towards a lasting relationship with God.

Prayer is very much a part of devotional life but is by no means relegated to it alone. The importance of prayer in the life of any Christian, and especially pastors, can never be overestimated. John R. Throop goes as far as to say that prayer is pastors’

fundamental work. “Everything we do takes shape and direction from it” (43). The impact prayer has upon the servant of Christ is obvious to both the Christian and to Satan. “Only prayer can cast out the howling spirits of dissension that snarl at every dream of succeeding in ministry” (Hansen 134). If ministry is going to be successful, if it is to survive crises, it will do so only as time is spent with the Lord. In fact, John Wesley said that God does not act without prayers (qtd. in Foster 31). If Satan can cause pastors to stop praying, the gap between God and pastors grows immeasurably.

Prayer is one of the most difficult spiritual disciplines for the servant of God. The power that the Church and pastors so desperately need will come through prayer. As God’s people and pastors begin to pray, the power of the kingdom of heaven is given to them. Jim Cymbala said that this power to the Church does not come through the sermon each week but comes as the pastor and the people come to “the throne of grace in prayer” (69). Because the power in ministry resides in prayer, prayer must be a primary condition of the pastorate, especially in response to crises in ministry. Although ministry is a multifaceted and splendid thing that requires the life of its shepherd, prayer must still be present. “Since most pastoral work takes place on the six days, an equivalent attention must be given to them, practicing the art of prayer in the middle of the traffic” (Peterson, Contemplative Pastor 54).

Being in the Word of God is another dimension of pastors’ devotional life that is intrinsic to their experience of God in their lives and ministry. David L. Goetz rejoices in the fact that he receives a sweeping joy from the truth of Scripture that pronounces his sonship to the Lord (29). In the Word pastors are fed, and God ministers to them. It is not just a place where messages may be found.

Yet, this fact alone does not ensure that the Bible will play all that big a role in the ministry of some pastors. “Despite the unsurpassed academic training that American pastors receive, it looks very much as if no generation of pastors that we know about historically has been so embarrassingly ill-trained in the contemplation of Scripture” (Peterson, Working 75). For American pastors, their biblical training may be some of the best in the world, but the question becomes, “What does the pastor do with that knowledge?” Pastors may simply use that knowledge as fodder for sermons and Bible studies as they slave over its message. Those who use it as fodder alone, rather than letting it form their lives, make a fatal error.

For pastors, in response to ministerial crises and for Christian living in general, Scripture needs to be reestablished as the substantive norm. Steve Harper says, “We need to make a clear affirmation of the authority of Scripture, not as one source among several, but as the norm for Christian thought and conduct” (29).

Possible Fruits of Ministerial Crises

“[W]e also rejoice in our sufferings because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope” (Rom. 5:3-4, NIV). Adversity in pastors’ lives can be strengthening, and according to this Romans passage, it is intended to be so. In fact, “If you are not having problems, you are missing an opportunity for growth” (Blandi). Much of pastors’ strides in spiritual growth occur in the throes of adversity. Saint Boneventure states that the fruit of humbling adversity is that the individual keeps a correct perspective on himself, God, and the work that is being done rather than allowing success to “lift him up on the wind of presumption” (42). Some of pastors’ greatest times of spiritual growth have come on the coattails of adversity, and

every time God has answered their cry for help with encouragement, wisdom, and a quiet confidence and peace of soul and mind.

A mistake is made when pastors think God's only part in the pain of crises is to be a healing balm. Pastors must understand God may also use ministerial crises to make them something better than they were or would have been in the absence of such traumatizing circumstances. Sherwood E. Wirt explains this growth through a prayer: "You teach us our lessons by sorrow, you wound us to heal us, you kill us that we might not die apart from you" (24).

If servants of God can come to grips with the fact that pain is an inevitable part of their ministry and that God's hand is at work in it, they can begin to approach suffering with another mind-set. Pastors too easily look at their ministerial crises and lay responsibility for them at the feet of everyone but themselves. Missing the fact that God could ever have any good intentions with a situation so painful is easy. Nevertheless, recognizing God's good intentions enables pastors to see where they are in their circumstances and then to move from there to ask, "Is God changing me and doing something in my life that maybe I could never have experienced without this pain and this suffering?" (Peterson, Contemplative Pastor 5).

For some pastors, to view their situation from the perspective of God's hand being at work through it may be a novel approach to ministerial crises in particular and suffering in general. The challenge may be for these pastors to ask themselves what their role was in the crises and how the crises can bring about positive change for them. The first part of this challenge is to recognize that part of the fault, if not a majority of it, resides within. The confession of one pastor reveals the realization that a part of the fault

lies with him. “I began to recognize the role I had played in the debacle. It was easy to lay everything at the doorstep of my opposition—to blame the failures of the board or the silence of the staff or the lack of support from the congregation” (Preston 152). Once this challenge has been met, the ministers are then in a position to allow God to teach them his lessons through them. Gary Preston, through the hardships of his own ministry, had to “learn to trust him” in and through it (150). As he did so, and as pastors do so, the fruit of crises is reaped.

Peterson sums up this harvest by saying quite matter of factly, “The truth is, there aren’t very many happy people in the Bible. But there are people who are experiencing joy, peace, and the meaning of Christ’s suffering in their lives” (Contemplative Pastor 45). Pastors can experience these also today.

Christ Centered

Many pastors lose sight of what is really important in ministry. They attempt to judge their usefulness to God by the number of individuals who decide to come hear them on a Sunday morning. The reality, though, is that the Lord is looking for people after his own heart, as was David (1 Sam. 13:14). “The desperate need today is not for a greater number of intelligent people, or gifted people, but for deep people” (Foster 1). Actively pursuing a deeper relationship with God can make pastors more effective in their ministry. George Carey states what on the surface seems very obvious, but many pastors may be missing the deeper relationship and then are left wondering what is vacant from their ministry puzzle. Carey says, “We can only reach others with the Word of God if we have been reached and are daily reached by its power and life” (3).

Numerous ways are available to get people to church. They may like the pastor,

the programs, the incentives, the music, catch slogans, and others. The goal, though, is that they be touched by the living God through servants who have been faithful in their devotion and obedience to God. Fred Smith believes that pastors who are centered upon Christ have achieved the greatest accomplishment of pastors (90). By being centered on the Lord, pastors attend to their ministry as faithful servants driven primarily out of a relationship with Christ.

Pastors are constantly trying to prove or to find their significance to the world in which they minister, therefore there are several possible negative results that have been shown to exist in response to ministerial crises. In the midst of those same ministerial crises, fruit may come forth that understands the pastors' work is for an audience of one and, therefore, seeks a place among the disciples of God. Hezekiah understood his work to be for God alone as told in the following passage:

Hezekiah trusted in the Lord, the God of Israel. There was no one like him among all the kings of Judah, either before him or after him. He held fast to the Lord and did not cease to follow him; he kept the commands the Lord had given Moses. (2 Kings 18:5-6, NIV)

The fruit is the understanding that pastors' jobs are not to meet the expectations of the world around them, nor the expectations they have placed upon themselves, but to fulfill the expectations of God for them and their ministry.

Some pastors spend enormous amounts of time and energy in meeting the expectations of others, often at the cost of forgetting whose they are. Crises in ministry can help pastors understand again, as the Lord walks with them through "the valley of the shadow," that "God did not call you [them] to forsake you [them]" (Foster 10). Ministry is not meant to be carried out in the absence of God. The Lord himself has promised never to leave nor forsake his people (Josh. 1:5) and this includes pastors in their

ministries.

If pastors would allow their ministry and their own spiritual dispositions to center on and around the person of Christ, they could well be on their way to a more well-rounded and holistic love affair with God in their personal lives as well as in their ministry. Ultimately, God is the one pleased by the balanced life and a faithful ministry.

In his book, Pastoral Grit, Larson presents ten scripturally based convictions that can serve to remind and keep pastors and their work centered down into the heart of Christ:

1. God is the one who assigns the task (1 Cor. 3:5-6);
2. God determines the scope of ministry (2 Cor. 10:13-16);
3. God gives the gifts he wants someone to have (1 Cor. 12:4-11);
4. God is the one who makes someone fruitful (1 Cor. 3:6);
5. God opens and closes doors (Col. 4:3);
6. God is the one who lifts people up (Ps. 75:6-8);
7. God bestows positions of high visibility even to the lowliest of people (Dan. 4:17);
8. By the grace of God, people have ministries (1 Cor. 3:10);
9. No ministry deserves more credit than another does (1 Cor. 3:7); and,
10. What matters to God is one's faithfulness (Matt. 25:14-30).

Ideally, these ten passages highlight a ministry that is already centered on Christ. Nevertheless, as has been the history of humankind, times of imperfection occur. At these times God lovingly, but often painfully, brings pastors back to where he wants them. Dietrich Bonhoeffer adds that only through pain can the goodness of God in lives and in

ministries even be ascertained:

Only the person, who in the darkness of guilt, of unfaithfulness, of enmity toward God, has felt himself or herself touched by love which never ceases, which forgives everything and which points beyond all misery to the world of God, only such a person really knows what God's goodness means. (qtd. in Kelly and Nelson 208)

Accountability

Another fruit of the ministerial crises is the felt and discovered need that others are used by God to come alongside of the pastors in their ministry. Maybe in the past, the community of a small group appeared to be optional, but ministry and its crises were never meant to be faced alone. "Our hearts were first not built to be able to withstand the hardships and heartbreaks of ministry without linking up with a few folks who can help us bear our burdens" (Hybels). Bill Hybels believes that without an increase in such groups "we are going to watch a steady stream of dangerous leaders, paid and lay, disappear from the rosters of leadership." Safe people upon whom pastors can call regularly to help carry the mental and spiritual baggage of the ministry need to be present.

For healthy spiritual growth, pastors need a community to gather around them who will not only cry with them but will also ask them the tough questions. Chuck Colson says, "Fellowship is more than unconditional love that wraps its arms around someone who is hurting. It is also tough love that holds one fast to the truth and the pursuit of righteousness" (13). Someone needs to be in pastors' lives who can hold them accountable for remaining centered in Christ. Through the pains of crises, the fruit of Christ is produced, but according to Kaam, when the high of the fruit wears off, pastors' temptations and previous bad habits will be all the more enticing (335). Thus, pastors

need others to challenge them constantly as they endeavor to be faithful disciples.

In this small group can be what Susan Muto and Adrian van Kaam call “Spiritual Direction in Common.” Direction in Common is not like a small group that meets to pray and fellowship together. The Direction-in-Common group meets for the sole purpose of challenging and encouraging the spiritual life of each participant directly. This type of gathering entails, among other things, the reading of a passage from a book, usually from the masters. Their disclosures are revealed by the individuals as each shares what God said to them through the text. “Key to this exercise is ... an inner availability or receptivity on our part to any text the Spirit may use to quiet our minds and open our hearts to divine direction disclosures” (67).

Balance

Sadly, many pastors today experience ministry as a constant and negative struggle. The reformer John Calvin knows why Christians’ lives have an absence of joy:

But as for us, it is no marvel if Christ does not show himself to us, because we are so set and tied upon the earth. Hereby it cometh to pass that our hearts fail us at every light rumor of danger, and even at the falling of a leaf. (313)

Out of Calvin’s explanation for the absence of joy comes the fact that pastors are to be in the world but not of the world, yet so many pastors have lost their connection to the Creator and have sought instead to settle down squarely in the neighborhood of the created. What needs to be sought and established is a balance between the work of ministry and the living out of the faith relationship with God. Craig Larson reveals the elemental importance of balance when he places equal emphasis on rest and work for effectiveness in ministry with the need for prayer. “I have found the wise balance of rest and work determines my effectiveness almost as much as the diligence with which I

pray” (67).

Pastors need to find this balancing point in order to have long-term effectiveness and joy in ministry. The answer to a call is carried out in the fields awaiting harvest and, at the same time, the connection that exists between pastors and the one who called them in the first place must be strengthened. Without this balance, pastors will continue to suffer at the hands of the crises of their work, and they will continue to suffer at the hands of their own deprived souls, all the while losing their grip on both. Peterson defines this situation by comparing it to Jesus’ visit to Mary and Martha’s home. “If there is no time to nurture these essentials [prayer, preaching, and listening], I become a busy pastor, harassed and anxious, a whining, compulsive Martha instead of a contemplative Mary” (Contemplative Pastor 23).

London and Wiseman say, “A call to ministry supplies a driving force for ministry at the same time it embraces commitment to revolutionize the world for Christ” (Heart 113). This statement draws forth the fulfillment of the call under a natural partnership of strength and purpose with God. Somewhere, though, balance is lost, and simply doing the job replaces the enthusiasm and passion.

Shelly, in an interview with H. B. London and Focus on the Family, states the necessity for a constant, ongoing reliance upon the grace and mercy of God in the ministry and lives of those called of God. Without such a connection to God, both work and worker lose their power. “So we need to be open and transparent, yet acknowledge that God’s spirit is making us adequate” (20). Through balance, pastors truly become strong where they are weak (2 Cor. 12:40).

Success in ministry rises and falls with leadership, and leadership rises and falls

with balance. If churches and pastors are to be successful in ministry, such success will be determined by how successful pastors function in their own spiritual lives.

“Everything in ministry depends on the pastor’s personal faith” (London and Wiseman, Pastors 210).

Pastors’ own pursuit of holiness gives who they are and what they do meaning. In addition, other elements of ministry are required, such as obligations and the need for accountability, but “it is the deep-seated devotion to Christ which gives discipline meaning” (London and Wiseman, Pastors 192). Just as Jesus is able to be a wonderful counselor because of shared experiences, pastors with a vital relationship with Christ are able to lead a congregation to the same. Nietzsche points out that pastors cannot reveal Christ unless Christ has first been allowed to reveal himself to pastors: “You will have to look more redeemed before I begin to believe in your Redeemer” (qtd. in Carey 3). Said another way, “They don’t care what you know until they know you care.” Pastors cannot lay out the path if they are not already on it.

Many factors in ministry beyond their control have the potential to bring confusion and frustration to pastors. At the same time, other pastors walk in the joy of Christ undefeated by the harsh realities of circumstances in which they find themselves. Jesus said in John 15:11 that he had come to give the disciples and others “his joy.” The joy that Christ places in individuals’ hearts cannot be touched or affected by the world for no matter what is going on around them, Jesus still reigns within.

In the area of their spiritual lives and balance, pastors have the ultimate control, thus giving them a handle on the greatest positive potential in their entire ministry. “Like the necessity of oxygen for human life or gasoline for an automobile, pastors’ intimacy

with Christ is the irreducible minimum for useful ministry” (London and Wiseman, Pastors 210). Throughout the history of Israel people were led by leaders after God’s own heart, and as the nation chose to remain in the hand of God, the nation as a whole succeeded. The church that is led by a pastor who strikes balance will be led into the very presence of God and into a future full of hope.

Robert Murray McCheyne writes the following to a colleague:

I know you will apply hard to German but do not forget the culture of the inner man—I mean of the heart. How diligently the cavalry officer keeps his saber clean and sharp; every stain he rubs off with the greatest care. Remember you are God’s sword, his instrument—I trust, a chosen vessel unto him to bear his name. In great measure, according to the purity and perfection of the instrument, will be the success. It is not great talents God blesses so much as likeness to Jesus. A holy ministry is an awful weapon in the hand of God. (qtd. in Saint John 92)

Review of Literature on Interviews

In doing a study of qualitative research and from a phenomenological perspective, I chose an interview process for obtaining the information of this study.

William Wiersma, in his book Research Methods in Education, determines that one interview is not enough to determine the truth although the truth may be present. He says, “There is a notion that truth resides in large numbers” (263).

Wiersma states that the procedures used for the interview need to be standardized “so that the respondents receive as consistent and identical interviews as possible” (199). A need exists for pretesting to facilitate the discovery of possible deterrents to the research that is about to be undertaken. Interviews should be scheduled at times that are comfortable and convenient to both the respondent, and the interviewer. Upon embarking on obtaining a respondent their cooperation is secured. As part of obtaining this cooperation, the respondent is made aware of the purposes for the study and how their

participation will be a part of it. In the interview itself, a good rapport is established that leads to a felt comfortableness by both the respondent and interviewer that leads to more free flowing answers and/or thoughts. In this context the interview proceeds in a business-like and efficient manner while remaining friendly. The respondent needs to be assured of the confidentiality of the interview process. This assurance also aids in the free flow of the interview. The questions need to be nonthreatening, again to provide for a comfortable setting. If a tape recorder is used, permission from the respondent needs to be secured. While in the interview the interviewer needs to be able to recognize any misunderstandings and uneasiness that may come up on the part of the respondent and be able to respond adequately by asking the question in another manner or by determining if that avenue of questioning is needed. Finally, Wiersma indicates that in gathering the responses of the interviewee, the interviewer is not to give an indication as to any kind of preferred response (199).

In standardizing the interview process from respondent to respondent, Floyd J. Fowler, Jr. and Thomas W. Mangione suggest the following in Standardized Survey Interviewing: Minimizing Interviewer-Related Error. The questions asked of the respondents are word perfect from interview to interview. As the questions are answered, the interviewer may independently proceed with follow up questions based on the respondents answers. The follow up questions must remain neutral, not leading the respondent to a particular answer or direction (33).

Summation

Ministry is spiritually draining without sufficient resourcing. Perhaps those involved in ministry are spiritually drained in a more measurable way than in other

occupations. Ministry continually exhausts the available resources of pastors, making the need for a time of feeding on Jesus all the more relevant; through him pastors receive sustenance. “God ‘resources’ us even when ministry depletes us” (London and Wiseman, Pastors 174). The living God is available to everyone who seeks him and when they find him they reap the benefits from times away with him. Although only a prayer away, a choice needs to be made to utilize that availability. Most have running water available, but if the water is not turned on it cannot be used. The spiritual pursuit of holiness in pastors’ lives has to be a purposeful effort to achieve such a goal. “This inward pursuit of Christ-likeness regenerates purpose, renews stamina, and rekindles passion” (174). The obvious benefits to pastors are a renewed and fresh sense of themselves as one loved unconditionally by God and a new purpose to mission.

The individual pastor’s pursuit of God not only empowers his/her ministry but also holds the ship together in the storms of ministry. In the ever-changing face of ministry and the subsequent roadblocks that lay before the pastor, the anchor of Jesus continues to hold through it all. “When flux, change, and transition make us sick unto death, the bedrock of spiritual practices can serve as a sure support” (Oswald 91).

In the Maranatha! tape, The Making of a Godly Man, the commentator asks, “Are you looking for God and you cannot seem to find him? Begin to worship him and he will come find you.” When Christians worship they come into the very presence of God, and in that place, out of all places, they are able to obtain a sense that everything else is under control—his control. The presence of God forms a base relationship out of which the whole of ministry can be done.

In July 1999 I had the opportunity to be on the campus of a convent. The best part

of being there was not the class or the beautiful scenery for my early evening runs. In my personal times of worship, I received the most benefit from my stay. Being in a Catholic convent, the opportunity to worship in the chapel was always available. After my run and a small dinner, I would enter the chapel just as the sun was going down outside. On my way to the pew, I picked up a wafer for my communion with the Lord. I spent the next half hour or so praying and soaking in the view in that place of peaceful worship. I experienced sheer joy in partaking of that time and communion. With a relationship with Jesus at the center of their work, a special confidence and joy remains in pastors in spite of what may occur in their lives and ministry along the way. Taylor's encouraging words proclaim that "he is a marked man—marked by faith, joy, and optimism in spite of droughts and setbacks" (115).

On one of my mother's last visits to see my grandmother, who was suffering from Alzheimer's in a nursing home, she found her sobbing. Mother quickly went to her and held her in her arms in an effort to reassure her. Grandma pulled herself quickly back together and proclaimed, "I'll be all right. I just need a couple minutes with the Lord." This saint of God no longer recognized her own daughter-in-law or son, yet she never forgot who the Son was and what that knowledge meant to her even in those last days of her life. In the midst of a failing mind, her pursuit of the Lord continued, and that journey kept her spirit strong. "An hour of solitude where 'we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ' [2 Cor. 10:5] clears spiritual, emotional, and relational cobwebs out of the corners of our lives" (London and Wiseman, Pastors 194).

Like my grandmother, pastors will suffer and go through difficult times. When they do so in the Lord, something far greater in them will outshine the darkness of their

situations, and that something is Jesus Christ. If struggling pastors could grab hold of that same something, they, too, would experience the blessed assurance of Jesus Christ.

Furthermore, Christ would enable them to live in and beyond their ministries simultaneously. Christ has promised that those who hope in him will renew their strength, mount up on wings of eagles, run and not stumble, and walk and not fall (Isa. 40:31).

“Since your ministry is linked to Omnipotence, look beyond the problems to the Power, beyond scarcity to the Abundance, and beyond the hurt to the Healer” (London and Wiseman, Pastors 195). Pastors today must, through prayer, Scripture reading, adversity, devotions, and small groups, have a dependence upon God just as Joshua did at the time of Moses’ death. Peterson suggests taking all that life and ministry have to offer and experiencing them as an act of faith and, thus, producing a maturity in the wholeness of the gospel (Contemplative Pastor 4). Jack Hayford encourages pastors by pointing out that the past, no matter how tormenting or fruitful it had been, is gone (Criswell, Halverson, Hayford, and Warren). If pastors would only minister in full devotion and dependence upon the Lord, they would find that the joy of ministry would return and it would burn brightly in their hearts as it did when they first accepted their calling to go forth for his name. If pastors would be faithful to his will and their calling, the significance and feeling that they are making a difference would return and would be experienced in their ministry.

In a story about a man approached by the Lord and told to push a huge boulder, the man pushed, but he could not move the boulder at all. With renewed determination and zest, he again pushed upon the rock; again it did not budge. So the man, frustrated and tired, sat down on the ground and said to the Lord, “I pushed as hard as I could, but I

could not move the boulder.” The Lord responded by saying, “I did not ask you to move the boulder, I only asked you to push it. Thank you for your faithfulness. Now let me move the boulder for you” (Slaughter 15). Pastors must minister as faithful disciples, trusting in God for the results.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer seemed to sum up the relationship between ministerial crises and pastors’ spiritual lives:

But now God himself had come and had drawn near to him. What made his life remarkable was simply that God was always there with him and he could no longer get away from God. It completely tore his life apart. We so often hear and say that religion makes people happy and harmonious and peaceful and content. Maybe that’s true of religion, but it is not true of God and dealings with humankind. It is utterly wrong. This is what the psalmist discovered. Something had burst open inside him. He felt as if he were split in two. A struggle flared up within him, which every day became more and more heated and terrible. He experienced hour by hour how his old beliefs were being torn out of his inner being. He struggled desperately to hold on to them; but God, standing ever before him, had taken them from him and would never give them back. And the more he loses, the more firmly and eagerly he grabs at what is left; but the more firmly he holds on to what he has, the harder must God strike to break it free and the more it hurts when it is torn away. And so the breathless struggle goes on, with God the victor and the person defeated; he no longer knows where it will all lead to and he sees that he is lost; he does not know whether he hates or loves the one who has forced his way so violently into his life and destroyed his peace. He struggles for every inch and in despair yields to the weapons of God. And his position would not be quite so hopeless were it not for the fact that God’s weapons are so strange and wonderful that they cast down and lift up, that they wound and yet heal, that they kill and yet bring life. God speaks: “If you want my mercy then let me gain the victory over you; if you want my life, then let me hate and destroy that which is evil in you; if you want my goodness, then let me take your life.” (qtd. in Kelly and Hudson 205)

In light of this research ministerial crises are a reality in the work of pastors. The effect that these crises have on the pastors seems to have a close tie to the strengths or weaknesses of their spiritual lives. The literature review suggests that pastors with a strong relationship with God tend to endure crises of ministry more positively than those

that do not.

This research also presents several obstacles that pastors experience that, unless overcome, contribute to a weakened spiritual life. The research also reveals that as the obstacles are overcome, and there is the presence of a growing edge in the spiritual lives of pastors, a possibility for fruit to be produced in pastors' lives can come as a result of ministerial crises.

These are the kind of things the chapters to come will unpack.

CHAPTER 3

DESIGN OF THE STUDY

Many pastors in ministry are experiencing crises that they find they cannot overcome. Crises in ministry are an inevitable part of that which they have been called. Yet, understanding the natural presence of crises in ministry, many find themselves ill prepared or unready for the struggles.

Pastors are going to be in car accidents (the crises in ministry) and the determining factor of their survival of those crashes will be whether they are wearing seat belts (the relationship with Christ).

The purpose of this research was to determine the relationship between the ministerial crises that occur and what part pastors' spiritual lives play in the struggle.

Research Questions

The purpose statement presents two areas of study that need to be scrutinized. The spiritual life of the pastor before and during a crisis is the first area. The second is to come to an understanding that presents the nature of the spiritual life and its work in the area of ministerial crises.

Research Question #1

What are the normal day-to-day practices of pastors in the area of spiritual formation?

This question sought to reveal the functional norm for this individual in the area of spiritual formation. What are the individuals' normal practices in developing their relationships with God?

Research Question #2

What were the impacts of ministerial crisis(es) (before, during, and after) on the spiritual lives of pastors?

This question sought to determine how various crises impacted the spiritual lives of pastors. The crises were limited to those crises of ministry.

Research Question #3

What were the impacts of ministerial crisis(es) (before, during, and after) on the pastors' view of ministry?

This question sought to equate any changes in their view of ministry as they went through the crises. Changes in view of ministry may entail a different understanding of what ministry entails. Changes may also come in the form of what pastors may determine is a part of their ministry and what they will not allow or do not want to be a part of their ministry.

Research Question #4

What impact did the crises have on pastors' spiritual lives?

This question sought to determine a cause and effect regarding the impact that ministerial crises may have had on the spiritual lives of pastors. Were pastors weakened or strengthened by the situations with regards to their spiritual lives and is there any relevance to the strength or weakness of the pastors' spiritual lives?

Subjects

The population for this study was 650 presently active clergy of the United Methodist Church serving in the Kentucky Annual Conference. Twenty-one subjects were interviewed from this population. The subjects were self-selected volunteers. No

one who had been in ministry less than three years was studied. Of the twenty-one pastors interviewed, ten of them were serving in the Central Kentucky area, and nine were serving in Northern Kentucky. Two clergy were serving pastorates in Western Kentucky.

The pastors' years of service in the ministry ranged from three years to thirty years. All of these pastors served in rural or suburban settings. Of those interviewed all but six pastors ministered in small membership churches.

Instrumentation

A researcher-designed questionnaire (see Appendix A) was presented to each pastor. The seven questions used in the questionnaire sought to provide information towards the research questions. Two weeks before the first interview, the questionnaire was pre-tested with a pastor from the researcher's local church. Upon completion of the pretest, I was comfortable that the questions would lead to the information needed to address the purpose of this study.

Data Collection

District superintendents supplied a list of clergy. From this list I contacted pastors in order to secure interview dates. Those pastors who were willing to be a part of this study agreed to a convenient date and time at which we met for the purpose of conducting the interview. Twelve of the interviews took place in the researcher's office, and nine were conducted in a church conference room. Each pastor was informed of the use of the tape recorder and how any information would be used. Each agreed to proceed as planned. Follow up questions were presented to the clergy based on their individual responses. Following each interview a time of prayer for the pastors was shared.

Confidentiality was stressed to the pastors upon the original phone conversation

and at the time of the interview.

Data Analysis

The tape-recorded sessions were transcribed into a word processor by a transcriptionist and produced into a hard copy. Each hard copy of the interviews was read through several times, marked and highlighted while looking for observations confirmed by multiple subjects.

The answers sought to these questions together seek to reveal the impact of ministerial crises upon the spiritual lives of pastors. It seeks answers to questions such as:

Do crises in ministry draw out a negative response from pastors that have weak spiritual formation practices?

Do crises in ministry draw out a positive response from pastors that have a strong spiritual life?

Do crises in ministry effect the spiritual lives of pastors?

Chapter 4 presents the findings of these interviews and Chapter 5 the summary and conclusion of this study.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

I interviewed twenty-one active pastors from the Kentucky United Methodist Church regarding the issue of ministerial crises and their spiritual lives. The analysis that follows provides the various answers pastors gave to questions presented to them during the interview process.

Demographics of the Interviews

The twenty-one pastors were interviewed from November 2002 through January 2003. A letter of permission was obtained from Bishop James R. King, Jr., the resident bishop of the Kentucky Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church to interview these pastors from his conference. Ten of the twenty-one pastors interviewed were currently serving in Central Kentucky, nine from Northern Kentucky, and two from Western Kentucky (see Table 4.1).

Table 4.1. Pastoral Demographics (N=21)

Area Serving	n	%
Central Kentucky	10	47.6
Northern Kentucky	9	42.9
Western Kentucky	2	9.5

The pastors interviewed were spread out in the number of years in ministry from three years to thirty years (see Table 4.2). Nine of those interviewed had been in ministry from three to ten years, nine from eleven to twenty years, and three from twenty-one to thirty years. I chose not to interview anyone who had been in pastoral ministry less than three years. Of those pastors interviewed two were females.

Table 4.2. Years of Service (N=21)

Years of Service	n	%
3-10	9	42.9
11-20	9	42.9
21-30	3	14.3

All of the pastors interviewed serve churches either in rural or suburban settings. Eleven pastors interviewed serve in rural settings, while ten serve in suburban settings.

The majority of churches were small membership churches ranging from thirty to one hundred in average worship attendance. Six pastors were serving churches with greater than one hundred in average worship and up to as high as six hundred regularly on Sunday mornings.

Normal Spiritual Formation Practices

What are your normal day-to-day practices in the area of spiritual formation? The pastors revealed that several means are at their disposal to the end of spiritual formation. Their practices ranged from a set devotional time to one pastor who considered the whole of his spiritual life to be found in the work he does.

Thirteen of the twenty-one pastors said that prayer was a basic element in their spiritual formation practices. Of these thirteen the times of prayer were primarily in the morning as part of a devotional time in conjunction with Scripture reading and devotional material. A few stated that they pray before their feet hit the floor-giving the day and themselves to the Lord. One pastor starts his day in prayer with his wife. They listen to a biblical scholar on television and then pray together before the rest of the day begins.

Others have divided up their prayer time into segments. Feeling that time does not allow for adequate blocks in the morning, they carve out segments throughout the day. One pastor prays for ten minutes at home, and when he gets to work he prays for another ten minutes. Doing prayer this way may be helpful for some personalities that have trouble concentrating very long. One pastor said, "I am not a guy who is for long prayers of thirty minutes; ten minutes max is about my limit before the mind starts wondering." Another pastor often does his times of prayer at the church altar while four pastors keep a prayer journal by frequently writing out their prayers.

The reading of Scripture also seemed to be elemental to pastors in their daily spiritual formation. As in prayer, how this was accomplished varied. Eleven pastors believe the reading of God's Word to be a necessary part of their day. The means by which they do so also differs. Most of the eleven read Scripture passages as dictated to them from devotional guides. Several read only that text suggested to them while others read whole chapters that contain the suggested text. One pastor said that he read the text as directed and the surrounding verses because he wanted to get into the context of what was being said. A few pastors read Scripture for the purpose of sermon discoveries. One pastor stated regarding his Bible reading, "Of course my first three years at a church I kind of stay with the lectionary, preaching, and then in the fourth year I then kind of go off the series and this and that and everything else." The sermon is the culmination of his Scripture reading. Another pastor mentioned that memorizing Scripture was part of his daily spiritual formation practice. He would later state that it was the memorized passages that kept him during ministerial crises in his life. One pastor mentioned that he used a commentary in his biblical study because it "helps me think about other theologians and

their thoughts.”

The third largest common element as reported by the pastors was the use of a devotional guide in their quiet times. Seven pastors mentioned their preference for a devotional guide to lead them through their moments together with the Lord. For one pastor the devotional guide served as a thought starter. A devotional guide helped two pastors have the freedom to fit their devotions into convenient times. When one pastor had a “spare moment,” his devotional guide filled the time.

Five pastors used other books and periodicals as a tool for spiritual formation. One pastor uses a prayer guide that encourages one to pray for 29 minutes and 59 seconds. Each day is divided up into specific categories lending a guiding hand to the pastor. Another pastor uses periodicals that are spiritual in nature. Those “ministerial magazines” help this pastor to keep up on “what’s going on.” One pastor uses The Book of Prayer for Ministers while another pastor frequents Wesley’s Sermons. Two pastors said they enjoy reading the classics, and one pastor spends some time with autobiographies. He said, “I kind of like the ones that look at it from, maybe, a different perspective.”

Four pastors felt that their accountability or discipleship small groups contributed to their regular spiritual formation practices. One pastor proclaimed, “Between Scripture, prayer, my wife, and my accountability group, those things have been the compass that I have been able to look at and listen to and see and feel as to know that I am going in the right direction.”

Three pastors look to Christian music to be formational in their lives. Through listening to these songs, “focusing on the words,” and the physical act of playing the

piano, these pastors feel drawn into God's presence.

The daily practice of pastors in the area of spiritual formation is as wide as it is deep (see Table 4.3). Some guard and protect that time and those practices as sacred and essential. Other pastors seem to work it in to their schedules but with no strong levels of commitment to make it a regular part of their lives.

Table 4.3. Spiritual Formation Practices (N=21)

Characteristic	n	%
Prayer	13	61.9
Scripture	11	52.3
Devotional Guide	7	33.3
Other Books/Periodicals	5	23.8
Small Groups	4	19.0
Christian Music	3	14.3

Obstacles to Normal Spiritual Formation Practices

Although almost all of the pastors interviewed believed something needed to be done in the area of their spiritual formation, this was made difficult because of the various pressures of their work in ministry specifically and out of their lives in general (see Table 4.4).

Table 4.4. Obstacles to Spiritual Formation Practices (N=21)

Obstacle	n	%
Busy-ness	12	57.1
Needs of Others	12	57.1
Self-Discipline	8	38.1
Selfishness	3	14.3
Sleep Deprivation	1	4.8
Age/Energy Loss	1	4.8

These obstacles cause the pursuit of spiritual formation to be difficult and in some cases seemingly impossible for an active and growing edge in their lives. Twelve of the twenty-one pastors said that busy-ness was their biggest obstacle to spiritual growth. This dilemma was summed up by one pastor:

I struggle sometimes with maintaining what I am called to be when I know there are things that I have to do. The being is so important to the doing that I cannot do everything that I need to do if I lose track of who I am supposed to be.

The obstacle of busy-ness poses a problem in two ways. First, precious little time is left for the pastors to feed themselves spiritually because they are excessively busy. One pastor said, “Once I get to the office I am sitting at my desk thinking this needs to get done and this needs to be done; I need to type this and I need to be working on that.”

As is so often the case, the pattern becomes the following trap:

Then before you know it, you quit praying or reading the Scriptures, and you have gone to doing something else, or your Scripture reading has turned from devotional to, “Oh, I have to work on my sermon” and then you start doing sermon stuff.

The fact is that ministry tasks seem to be a bigger pull for some pastors than the pull of communing with God.

The second way that the obstacle of busy-ness manifests itself is in the “tyranny of the urgent.” Deadlines and scheduled tasks must be completed by a certain time. The repeating phrase that plagues the pastor is, “Sunday is coming.” One pastor described the problem:

Crises happen in the house, you know, the kids, the weather, the day, and people in the church getting sick and having to go to the hospital, something crazy happens. The tyranny of the urgent always seems to take over at some point.

Twelve pastors determined that the agendas and pressing tasks did not serve as obstacles to them, but the people and their needs seemed to crowd out their spiritual formation practice. The flow of calls filled with concerns and conversations seem endless. Hospitals, weddings, funerals, and visitation in people's homes is a steady drain on pastors. One pastor stated that he had very little time for devotions because of the shortness of available time:

I do mine [devotions] throughout the day between running here and running there, delivering the wife, helping folks with groceries, and visiting in the area of the course of church life.

One pastor shared that a single phone call has the power to change the whole course of what was once a well-planned day.

A third major obstacle is more in the pastors' control. Eight pastors mentioned the obstacle of self-discipline as their major downfall to spiritual formation in their lives. The obstacle of busy-ness that was discussed previously is reinforced in some pastors' lives due to lack of self-discipline. If appropriate attention is not given to devotional practices and if they are not made a priority, they are forced out. One pastor believed that if he could discipline himself to get up early in the morning, making that time a priority, he could spend time with God before he ever left home. Another pastor admitted that he needed to prioritize such a time before he could get involved in anything else because once he engaged in the day's agenda, if time with the Lord had not happened, it probably would not happen at all.

The obstacle of a lack of discipline also revealed itself in the form of selfishness. Three pastors felt that selfishness was their obstacle because they sought to please themselves more than God. The obstacle becomes for them a matter of hungering not for

righteousness but of “doing what I want to do.” These pastors thought that this attitude of self-preservation caused the formation areas of their lives to become stale and boring: “It becomes a routine rather than a hunger.” The lack of hunger is clearly the result of a lack of desire and discipline to feeding themselves spiritually, and excuses are then found not to seek God.

Other obstacles mentioned fell along the lines of physical obstacles. One pastor has great difficulty sleeping at night, often getting to sleep well after midnight. Time otherwise designated for devotions is spent catching up on sleep. This pastor believed that if he could get the sleep problem regulated “all of the other things would fall into place.” Another pastor cited age and a loss of energy as an obstacle. He feels that, physically, he has been limited by having less energy to devote to spiritual pursuits, and when he does give this area of his life some time, it is often prematurely discontinued because of the onset of sleep.

Finally, one pastor believes that he has no obstacles to his normal spiritual formation practices because it falls in “a high priority department.” Nothing is allowed to interfere with this area of his life even to the point where he believes “this area of his life is his life.”

The Impact of Crisis(es) on the Spiritual Life

What are the impacts of ministerial crisis(es) (before, during, and after) upon the spiritual lives of pastors? Table 4.5 presents some of the crises that these pastors were dealing with.

Table 4.5. Crisis Encountered (N=Frequency of Answers)

Professional	n	Personal	n
Conflict with Church	7	Moving	2
Death of Young Mother	2	Financial	1
Parsonage Condition	1	Divorce	1
Dealing with Suicide	1	Injury	1
Ailing Child	1	Death of Friend	1
Former Pastor's Involvement	1	Teenage Pregnancy	1
Congregational Apathy	1		

The Spiritual Life before the Crisis(es)

Eleven of the twenty-one referred to how they felt spiritually before the ensuing crises. Of those eleven, six saw a negative aspect to their walk with Christ while five believed their spiritual life was healthy beforehand.

“The faith is the foundation that takes me through just about everything.” Only three pastors agreed with this pastor, that they were where they wanted or thought they should be spiritually when a crisis hit. These pastors found themselves to be generally happy about being ministers and doing ministry. This strength would carry them through an impending crisis.

For several pastors looking back to the time before the crisis was painful to them. One pastor revealed that doing so was a “personal recrimination.” This particular pastor discovered, upon looking back, that he had come to a place where he was devotionally dry. Another pastor found himself discontented. “I am not at peace with myself. I am on some kind of searching adventure, trying to find a piece to my puzzle.” Three pastors were not sure who or what they were about and not sure what tomorrow would bring.

Seven pastors spoke of a revelation they received while going through their

struggle. Before a crisis most of them were quite certain that they were well and balanced in their spiritual lives and believed everything was possible. One pastor proclaimed, “I was flying high and thinking that we can take the city in a matter of weeks.” During a crisis, they realized that all was not as they had originally thought.

The Spiritual Life during the Crisis(es)

What role did your spiritual life play during the crisis? Seven pastors found that when they were in the midst of a crisis, their perception of ministry and their spiritual life was changed and/or challenged. These seven seemed to exhibit an overriding presence of self-adulation. Before the crises the pastors began to depend upon themselves in the accomplishment of ministry. The onset of crisis served as a positive in that it awakened them to this self-dependency. One of the pastors responded by saying, “You lose a little bit of your humility [pride] and that kind of brought my feet back down to the ground because things hadn’t been difficult. I was kind of doing everything by myself.” These pastors perceived the need for a new dependency upon God.

Without a total loss of trust in God, these pastors found at least a divided focus in the midst of crises. An increased focus on God was present while much of their energy was directed away onto the “scars of the experience” that were being formed. The pastors desired to see God in the midst of the storm and to have full reliance upon him, but they struggled to keep such a faithful view throughout the duration of the event.

The perception of what was occurring to them was brought into clearer focus by understanding what had been done to Christ. They believed that the crises were, in part, possibly to be the expected norm. “All men will hate you because of me” (Matt. 10:22). As a disciple, pastor, and minister of the gospel, nothing less could be expected.

Five pastors responded that in the midst of their crises their spiritual lives provided for them the evidences of God's provision. These pastors had a sense that "if God is for me, who can be against me" is true. The realization that the battle is not being fought alone provided strength and encouragement for these pastors. Along with a sense of God's provision in his presence, two pastors spoke of his provision through direction and guidance as to what they were doing in the crises. One pastor shared, "I would get to praying and all of a sudden the Lord would say 'You aren't doing nothing. You are just going to get in and share and teach them how to love.'" With the reassurance of his presence and direction in the crises, the pastors also received a peace about the situations. Some greater purpose or reason existed for what was occurring even without a complete understanding of it. As a result, the situation was "not overwhelming."

With a sense of God's presence came the ability to persevere according to four pastors. Sometimes in the midst of a crisis nothing else is present to fall back upon except a relationship with God. For some of these pastors, the act of falling upon God and his subsequent response kept them and their ministries going. Based on their responses, their spiritual walk was the determining factor that "kept them alive" and served as a steadying "anchor." One pastor went so far as to say without the crisis itself and the work of the Lord in the midst of the crisis he would not continue to be in the ministry:

You look throughout the Scriptures, old and new, and people didn't grow spiritually unless there were crises. And I have to be honest with you, if it hadn't been for the crises I probably wouldn't be in the ministry today because I have grown.

The presence of God serves as the rock and steadying force that enables these pastors to persevere.

These pastors responded that the crises they experienced drove them to their

knees in prayer. They noticed a significant increase in the amount of time they were spending talking with God. Not only did they have an increase in time spent, but they also noted a marked increase in the intensity of their prayers. Through prayer, these pastors drew nearer to God providing a sense of not being alone in the crises. Out of the prayerful relationship with God, these pastors were able to go through situations with victory.

Other pastors discovered that their spiritual lives were weak, and in some cases, struggled with that realization. “I felt like one of the bridesmaids who was not ready for the groomsmen,” a pastor admitted. One of these pastors believed he was where he needed to be spiritually. He was “flying high” spiritually when the trial occurred, but he quickly “crashed and burned up” because of the effects of that struggle. The struggle caused one pastor to become angry with God. He was burdened with the crisis and with the mystery of “why,” and he felt like he had nowhere to turn.

Three pastors seemed to avoid this question: “What was the role of your spiritual life during the crisis?” Rather than answering this question, they merely rehashed a previous response to a question by rewording that response. Even after presenting them a follow up question in an attempt to get at the heart of the matter, the response was the same.

The Spiritual Life after the Crisis(es)

Five pastors thought that the crises they had experienced served them well in the area of their spiritual lives. As a direct result of the difficulties, they drew closer to God. For one pastor, the thought was that he needed to hold closely to the Lord to get through his situation and that holding on held over into others areas of life after the crisis had

passed. Another pastor felt a “renewed connection” between the Lord and him. The relationship with God had been allowed to waiver, but the spark of the trial fueled the relationship into a fresh restart.

One pastor, thinking ahead, drew closer to God in believing that he would face a similar crisis again in his ministry. In response to this belief, he spent more “time in prayer seeking God’s direction” and by reflecting with God on his actions in the previous situation.

One other pastor experienced the role of God in the midst of an aftermath of a crisis through a “peace that went beyond all understanding.” He said, “The role that it [my spiritual life] played; the eventual role that it is now playing, is this: There is a knowing deep in my heart that all is well and that God has been in control all along.”

Several pastors admitted that the crisis always came when they had a deep felt need. Out of this need, they realized the power and presence of God at work in response to their needs. As the Lord was strong for these pastors where they were weak, they came to realize that if God had not responded as he did they probably would not have survived:

If a pastoral person does not have an active, vital prayer life and knows the Scriptures and reads them, and has a depth of spirituality about his or her person and is a true follower of Christ, he or she is hurting when the crisis came, whether large or small, they’ll find themselves in a heap of trouble.

Another pastor seemed to come to understand the trouble he faced after his crisis, realizing that his struggle had been much more damaging to him because he was not where he thought he was in his spiritual life at the onset of the difficulty.

Through the crises, these pastors had been witness to God’s grace and with that came a firm realization and relief that in their storms, God would not abandon them.

Some pastors believed that the impact of the crises upon their spiritual lives gave

them a new sense of direction and purpose:

It is not about reacting in a panic about things; it's more about being proactive and spending time with God on a daily basis, enough that I have a sense of what I believe God has called me to and I know that he is faithful to his call no matter where I go or how screwed up I get.

The call, the purpose, and/or the direction that has been placed upon these pastors does not necessarily change because of difficult situations. Their spiritual lives helped maintain their mission in life. A couple of pastors said they were drawn closer to God, and the closer they got the more they discovered what God wanted for them personally.

In three cases the impact of crises upon the pastors' spiritual lives was not readily seen or understood by the pastors. For these three a sense of loss and emptiness after the crises was experienced. One pastor admitted, "I was on top of the world and then that crisis kind of brought me back down to the ground and let me know that I probably wasn't where I needed to be spiritually and professionally." With a reminder of their "own immortality," these three pastors contemplated leaving the ministry. These pastors, without a strong sense of God's hand in and through the struggles of their ministry and lives, were left to wonder about their futures.

The Impact of Crisis(es) on the View of Ministry

What impact did this crisis have on your view of ministry? Only six of the twenty-one pastors interviewed responded to this question with any reference to their view of ministry before the crisis. Ten pastors spoke of the view of ministry during the struggle, and fourteen referred to the impact of the crises upon their view of ministry after the fact.

The View of Ministry before the Crisis(es)

Several of the six pastors who referenced their view of ministry before the

residual effects of a crisis took hold spoke of an awareness of spiritual things with relationship to their ministry. One pastor was disturbed because, as he saw it, the church itself was not very spiritual. Another said that in the day-to-day tasks of doing ministry “the spiritual aspects came up.” Rather than a personal experience and seeking of spiritual formation in his life, this pastor saw his ministry as “the job,” and if spiritual characteristics appeared, they were a coincidence. Two other pastors felt strong in the faith and competent to do ministry, one so much so that, upon seeing some pastors struggle and leave the ministry, he asked himself, “What did they expect?”

The View of Ministry during the Crisis(es)

Ten pastors spoke to the effect of their crises upon their view of ministry while they were in the midst of it. Six of those ten pastors said that the ordeal had a negative effect upon their view of ministry as they were going through it.

Two pastors were surprised by the crisis. They did not expect that in ministry such struggles would exist. Now that the realization of the reality of ministry was being experienced, their thoughts turned toward other possible uses of their time besides ministry. One pastor said that while he was dealing with the crisis he would sit back and say, “What the heck am I doing this for? This wasn’t part of the deal. I can go to the airport and throw bags ... and go home at night and not have to worry about anything until the next morning at 6:30.” They thought that if this was going to be the status quo for ministry they did not want to be a part of it.

While the study began on their view of ministry, six pastors spoke of an overall negative effect on their experience of ministry and subsequently their view of ministry. They used words such as frustrated, disappointing, wasting, and quitting. A pastor

seemed to sum up the view of ministry for these six:

When you have to deal with that kind of conflict ... and you don't see any future, any possible way of gaining ground or accomplishing the goals that you have set forth to do and that God is leading you to do, then it makes you just want to say, "Okay, I quit. There has to be something else for me to do."

Four pastors thought that the crises themselves improved their view of ministry while they were in it. They came to an understanding that God was still in control, and although the experience itself was painful, it really was not about the individual; a sense that the battle belongs to the Lord ultimately prevailed. The crises helped to formulate a clearer picture of ministry and their role in it. The clearer picture of ministry freed the pastors up to focus or refocus their energies on God by "utilizing our time together to bring us to praise redemption and the restoration of the soul." For these four, a deliberated clinging to the cross for spiritual survival took place.

The View of Ministry after the Crisis(es)

Fourteen pastors responded by speaking to the effects of the crises on their view of ministry after the event had taken place. Of the fourteen that responded in this manner, only three concluded the crises with a negative perspective remaining concerning ministry. These three pastors seem to have taken themselves out of the situations by looking at them in the third person. Rather than expressing themselves in terms of what have "I" received from this situation, they described the resulting view of ministry based in terms of what has occurred to or in someone or something else. The negative "fault" lies with the work of Satan and/or the lack of work from the church. One pastor expressed his tired patience when he said, "Right now I am doing OK with it, but if I continue to go on to churches and their crises, you know, I think sometimes there is just a

better way to make a living in life.” One pastor views the church and wonders how they can call themselves Christians and have the attitudes they do. The residue left from the crises left this pastor with a view of ministry that manipulates him to the point that, if it were to occur again, it might prevent him from continuing in ministry.

Eleven pastors had a calm acceptance and an overall positive view of ministry after the effect of their crises had influenced their view of ministry. Six of these eleven pastors thought that what they were experiencing was really the reality of ministry. With this realization they were free to accept it more readily, thus enabling them to do ministry more easily on a spiritual-emotional level. One pastor expressed the effects of his crisis by saying, “Grief, horror, joy, sadness, sorrow, and humbleness are all things that played together in a complexity of emotions that cannot help but influence my journey forever and the way that I do ministry.” In ministry, as a result of the crises, a few pastors found a heightened awareness of the importance of their role as pastors. In the midst of pain, both on their part and on the part of others, those pastors sensed the importance of being administrators of the gospel of Jesus Christ to a particular situation. Five pastors resolved to continue doing what God had called them to do in spite of the crises that had occurred and/or had yet to occur. They knew that as they trusted and would trust in God the crises they faced would be met with victory. As a tool in the hands of God, the individual and the corporate church could be used for the Father’s purposes despite the flaws of humankind, and the crises themselves might be a means to this end.

Intangibles

Measuring the depth of one’s spirituality let alone making a determination of the effect of a crisis upon or in conjunction with the spiritual life in ministry is difficult. A

person's spiritual life may have had little to do with how the crisis was experienced and more to do with their own personal resolve and/or personality. For example, some pastors, based on their personality, may have the ability to experience crises without the crises affecting them much, where other pastors may experience the full brunt of crises, again based on their personality. Their felt needs then may cause them to lean more or less upon the spiritual aspects of their lives during and after the crises.

A researcher bias may be reflected in the answers provided by the pastors interviewed. Their answers may not reflect the reality of their situations but rather may be closer to responding in a manner they thought the interviewer wanted to hear or by answers one might expect of ministers. For example, the pastor may assume that because a person is a pastor that regular and strong spiritual formation practices would be a part of that person's life. Assuming this, the pastor then responds with that expected response even though it may not necessarily be the reality of that person's life.

The frequency of crises in ministry may also play a part in their responses to subsequent crises. A breaking point past which a pastor cannot be bent may be breached. The crises histories of these pastors may determine how the next ones are perceived. Questions of their spiritual state between crises may be a determining element not considered in this study.

Summary of Interviews

All of the twenty-one pastors have some form of spiritual formation practices in their lives. A great discrepancy exists between these practices, ranging in depth and passion of pursuit to incidental contact with the Holy. Thirteen pastors have active spiritual lives that include an intentional time with God on a regular basis. Eight pastors,

at the time of the interviews, found themselves with very little regular spiritual formation practices, and one had no intentions of being deliberate in his spiritual life.

Ten of the thirteen pastors that have active spiritual lives admitted that in spite of good spirituality practices, the crises were not easy to experience. Times of skepticism, doubt, anger, and pain were present. A need continued for them to pursue God because they thought they were not where they wanted to be in that relationship in or out of crises. Overall these pastors felt a stabilizing presence of God in their ministry amidst crises and beyond.

Seven of the eight pastors who were less intentional about spiritual formation in their lives were struggling with their futures in ministry. Overall these pastors have a less stable view of ministry and less of a sense of God's presence in the ministries.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The ministry of pastors begins first and foremost with their own acceptance of Christ into their lives and not with ministry itself. A successful ministry is not, as the world would believe, the growth of the church, the number of those newly committed to God, or a church that is financially sound. Although these are good events, they may not be good indicators of spiritual health and formation in pastors' lives. The fact alone that a church is growing does not on the same count relate to the spiritual nature of a pastor. The spiritual health of pastors is important due to the fact that it parlays into their responses to crises in their ministry.

The ministry of pastors begins and ends with Christ. Through spiritual formation pastors pursue a relationship with Christ first, and then out of that vital relationship, continue to pursue God for the sake of others. When pastors realize that the ministry, in general, and their lives, specifically, are all about God and making him known, pastors are freed spiritually and mentally to live in and to pursue the call of God on their lives.

Obstacles present barriers to the pursuit of a relationship with God and the fulfillment of ministry. No doubt the pain of ministry upon the journey is real, but as it is experienced in the context of a growing relationship with the living Christ, victory and joy may continually be experienced.

From the beginning of this study, I sought to put into pictures the relationship between ministry crises and spiritual formation. Pastors find themselves in a car (ministry), and inevitably a car crash (ministerial crisis) occurs. Those with a seat belt (growing relationship with Christ) can survive in wondrous ways; whereas, those without

the seat belt (weak or no growing spiritual edge) struggle to keep going in the ministry, and if they do continue an absence of purpose and meaning is experienced.

Michael W. Smith has a song that sums up well the conclusions of this study:

I'm Waiting for You

I walked this road, so very long ago.
To show the way, so you would know.
I walked the road, with holes in my hands and feet,
To make the way, come follow me.

CHORUS:

Know you are not alone, you will be free indeed,
The journey begins and ends with me.
One million miles, it starts with a step or two.
What are you waiting for, I'm waiting for you.
You run the race, thinking you've almost won,
Then you may find you've only begun.
You're on the road, thinking you're far from here,
And suddenly you find you're very near.

The Call to Relationship

Apart from ministry and the accompanying crises, a call to relationship with Jesus Christ is a constant, a drawing, based on God's initiative, to spiritual formation. In Philippians 3:14, Paul shares his spiritual goal in life: "to win the prize for which God has **called** [emphasis mine] me heavenward in Christ Jesus" (NIV). The prize to which Paul is drawn is defined a few verses before 3:14. "I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead" (Phil. 3:10-11, NIV). I believe the pastors' first call is to a relationship with Christ and, for them, a call to lead others to the same pursuit follows. Paul goes on to say in his second letter to Timothy that the messengers of God have been saved and called to a holy life (2 Tim. 1:9) and that he specifically was also charged with being "a herald and an apostle and a teacher" (v. 11)

of the gospel.

By answering the call of God to relationship and the subsequent pursuit of a relationship with Christ, a seat belt is formed that will carry and protect during the crises of ministry that lie ahead. How this relationship is pursued and strengthened is more closely examined later in this chapter.

The Walls to Relationship

Looking at the correlation between the spiritual life and ministerial crises, pastors are faced with two relationships. The first relationship is with God, and the second is the relationship between the pastor and the people to whom they minister. As these two relationships are pursued as one, pastors find a greater degree of success in the development of both. A wall is formed juxtaposed to pastors' spiritual formation when the ministry and personal spirituality are separated. In the event of ministerial crisis, if ministry has been pursued separated from a relationship with God, the pastor does not have the resources from which to draw that would enable the pastor a better survival rate.

The success of ministry is determined by a spiritual growing edge in pastors. Pastors' relationships with the living God are vital in the midst of ministry, in general and ministerial crises specifically. When ministry is enacted and experienced by pastors who have also developed a strong spiritual life, a greater potential exists for survival and fulfillment.

A pastor friend of mine was struggling for many months with a crisis of ministry that called into question his leadership style and the overall direction in which he was leading the congregation. He admitted that doing something else was appealing at times, but because of his relationship with Christ he was able to continue with the peace and

strength of God:

God is bigger than all that. It is not about reacting in a panic about things, it is more being proactive and spending time with God on a daily basis—enough that I have a sense of what I believe God has called me to and I know that he is faithful to his call no matter where I go or how screwed up I get.

The walls to relationship discussed in the following pages are easily built by pastors and threaten to undo them and their ministries if God is not pursued widely in their private lives. Israel, when faced with what seemed to them to be a leadership problem, took matters into their own hands and built a god to lead them and to be the object of their affections (Exod. 32:1-4). In the same way pastors are tempted to pursue other means, such as busy-ness, that seemingly enable them to cope with their situation. Rather than pursuing the originator of their faith, they lose themselves in a selfish pursuit of other gods.

Again, as God is sought after as a primary purpose in pastors' lives, a greater potential for peace and fulfillment in their ministry exists. A pastor who had experienced this for himself explained, "I found that works a whole lot better. I have a whole lot less stress. I have a whole lot less gray hair. My blood pressure is a whole lot lower when I go to God first."

From my work with pastors, they identified three major obstacles to the development of this relationship. The first is busy-ness, the second is a lack of self-discipline, and the third is the reality of ministry. The walls pastors have identified are surface causes to the struggles they may have; greater problems lie at the root.

The Wall of Busy-ness

The various elements of ministry (visitation, preaching, teaching, and leading) vie

for control of pastors' schedules and tend to fight against their personal need for spiritual formation. Pastors who struggle here are making decisions as to whether or not the pull of the external is going to take priority over the pull of the internal spiritual yearning.

The aspect that ministry is really never complete pushes pastors away from spending time with God in relationship. Times of worry and attention to ministry yet undone often drives pastors at such a pace as to cause some of them to race by their need to "come away to a quiet place and rest" (Mk. 6:31, NLT). One pastor confessed unapologetically that he was "a guy that has to get things done and when things don't get done then I get frustrated." A significant devotional aspect in this pastor's life was missing as a result.

The fact that pastors are pulled in many directions in ministry is a given. The expectations upon them come from themselves, God, and others. Not only do deadlines and regularly scheduled tasks fill their time, but pastors must also cope with the sudden urgency of difficulties and crises brought to them by the people of their congregation and sometimes from outside the church. Many experience a pull from the demands of home life as well.

Many pastors are aware of the battle for their time between doing ministry and being a pastor. Even with such knowledge, surrender to the external demands upon them at the expense of time needed to feed themselves spiritually almost occurs subconsciously.

The pastor that was mentioned a moment ago was faced with a wall of busy-ness. In answering God's call for him to go into the ministry, he had decided that the greater need was to accomplish the tasks of ministry rather than to develop his relationship with

God. He sought to “be” through his actions for Christ rather than “being” in Christ.

Peterson calls this choice idolatry. “The idolatry to which pastors are conspicuously liable is not personal but vocational, the idolatry of a religious career that one can take charge of and manage” (Under the Predictable Plant 4). With a busy mind-set, for pastors to pursue spiritual formation in their lives is difficult because they fail to realize that the work of ministry has become their god so they do ministry alone. Whether through fear of disappointing others or from the need to hear, a “job well done,” they are choosing to ignore their own relationship with God. They erroneously believe that through the mere practices of doing ministry all is well in their personal devotion and relationships. At the onset of crises in ministry, pastors who have ventured down this path discover that, in fact, they are found lacking.

The crashes of ministry are a sad necessity to break some pastors into the reality that being in ministry first requires being in Christ. Some pastors allow their days to be filled or allow their days to be so busy with ministry that they often have no time to speak with God. To break pastors from the mind-set that they are pleasing to God whether they spend time with him or not is difficult. They fail to realize that before an army heads into battle they first receive their marching orders from their commanders. Pastors must receive their orders through a vital relationship with Christ before they march off into ministry. By failing to spend time with God first, pastors betray the love relationship they have with God for a lesser relationship with what they are “doing” in ministry. God is left behind. As Peterson says, “The word ‘busy’ is the symptom not of commitment but of betrayal. It is not devotion but defection” (Contemplative Pastor 17). Pastors who are faced with the idol of busy-ness in their lives must ask themselves who or what is going

to be their driving force. “Choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve” (Josh. 24:15, NIV).

Most of the pastors found their lives so cluttered with ministerial activities that they actually came to the point of believing that ministry itself sufficed for personal spiritual nurture. Herein lies the difference between personal spirituality and professional spirituality. One pastor spoke, concerning his normal spiritual formation practices, said that the entirety of his Bible study consisted of simply “kicking over things I am going to say on Sundays.” Pastors like this languish in the rubble of discontentment, disappointment, and thoughts of leaving the ministry. Faith and trust upon God for the tasks of ministry and relationship are absent. The result is a serious car crash without a seat belt. Taylor says that if the pastor is going to try to do ministry outside the power and presence of God it would simply be a “ juggler’s performance” (113). As a juggler’s performance, time is the only remaining factor before all is dropped, including the spirit and passion of the pastor.

The Wall of Self-Discipline

The idolatry of choosing self over and against the calling of God continues into the second wall that pastors experience to their spiritual formation—a lack of self-discipline. The majority of the pastors I questioned knew that some form of spiritual nurturing was a basic component to their lives. Even with this knowledge, a great discrepancy between the practice of spiritual formation and what they knew needed to be done remained.

For some pastors this discrepancy is merely a matter of priority. Pastors know what they ought to do but find it not to be convenient. The idolatry continues as they fail

to do what is necessary to be fed spiritually. On a surface level, the pastors I interviewed presented lack of time, lack of sleep, and lack of resources as reasons why spiritual needs were not being met in their lives. In actuality the source of spiritual depravity in these pastors are not the fruits of busy-ness, lack of time and sleep, but the underlying conditions of laziness and loss of self-control.

In discussing the spiritual formation of one pastor, he shared that indeed he knew the importance of having a growing relationship with God and a desire to pursue that relationship. A great wall stood in the way. He explained that he had difficulty getting to bed at night and, therefore, could not awake the next morning in time to be alone with God. He felt that if he could get the sleep situation worked out that he could “discipline the rest of my day.” That may be true for this pastor, but it will not happen until a deep-seated commitment to God is present that helps him to determine that nothing else is more important than sitting at the feet of Jesus.

Martha had to learn this same lesson in Luke 10:38-42. Martha was busy doing good things, doing ministry. She was preparing her home for Jesus’ coming and food on which to dine once he was there. Mary may have been involved with some of these preparations, but a time came when that was not the priority anymore. To sit at Jesus’ feet superceded her service ministry. Jesus confirmed this to Martha when he said, “Martha, Martha, you are worried and upset about many things, but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better and it will not be taken away from her” (vv. 41-42, NIV).

Mary found time in the midst of her ministry to seek Jesus’ face. I believe that people will give time or find time for those things that are important to them. Pastors’ declaration that such time is not found for God reveals a lack of importance placed upon

the spiritual needs of their lives.

Pastors who make their relationship with Christ a priority will begin to see the wall of lack of self-discipline come down. For example, as the pastor who has trouble getting to sleep makes his relationship with Christ a driving force in his life, he will discipline himself to get to bed earlier in order to have time with God.

Both the walls of busy-ness and self-discipline to spiritual formation in pastors are deeper than merely allowing themselves to be preoccupied with lesser things. Pastors who succumb to these obstacles of self-discipline and busy-ness lack direction. Their hearts have fallen from a trust in Christ who is the author and perfecter of everyone's faith. They have taken the lazy path by allowing themselves to relinquish their time and attention to the "chronic over functioning" of which Mead speaks (Five Challenges 12). With the demands of ministry barking at the door, the quickest and easiest way to dispose of those demands is to address them. Greater effort and focus is required to ignore demands for the sake of continuing to seek to remain in God's plan and direction.

The Wall of Reality

A third wall to pastors is the clash of their expectations meeting with the reality of ministry. Many pastors go into the ministry expecting a spiritual utopia thinking everyone in the church will be on the same page, go in the same direction, and be full of love and support for their pastor.

Pastors quickly discover that ministry is, at times, quite the opposite of what they expected or were seeking when they began answering the call. The tranquility of their ministry is rocked to the core at times by conflict between parishioners or between the pastor and other individuals. The serenity of sleep is broken by sudden needs and calls to

arms/action in the middle of the night. Calmness is broken by sermons that simply do not seem to come and administrative tasks that come all too frequently. These are just a few of the rude awakenings pastors experience in ministry.

Many pastors leave seminary with an idealistic view of how they are going to perform ministry and how the church will respond and be a part of that same ministry. They soon learn that much of ministry cannot be taught in seminary. A lot of the politics, struggles, and grass roots/hands-on ministry that is done in the trenches cannot be conveyed through words.

A young pastor was learning this hard lesson when we spoke. As the crisis of ministry began to infiltrate his idealistic view, he became disillusioned with ministry. He believed that “if this was going to be characteristic of being a part of ministry” that he was “going to hang it up.” This pastor believed that he had made some progress in this area, that possibly he was no longer so hurt by the break-up of his view of ministry. He used the word “initially” as though a change had occurred. As we continued to talk about the reality of the difficulty of ministry he added, “Right now I am doing okay with it, but if I continue to go to churches and their crises, you know, I think there is a better way to make a living.” With this statement the pastor shows that either (1) he is not over the shock of ministry’s difficulties, or (2) he still has not grasped that ministry is going to have difficulties.

Pastors need to understand the reality of their calling and ministry. The reality is that God does not call pastors to an easy life; quite the contrary. Paul wrote that ministry provided an effective outlet for his calling but in the same breath contended that many were present who opposed him (1 Cor. 16:9). Ministry has great rewards, and simply

being obedient to the call is a primary cause of satisfaction. Nevertheless, ministry is not without its cross bearing. Jesus states in Matthew 8, “Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head” (v. 20, NIV). This was Jesus’ message to a teacher of the law who had determined to walk where Jesus walked. The question posed here is almost satirical. It seems to ask, “Do you know what you are thinking of doing? Do you know what it will cost you?” Ministry is a joy, but it is also laced with crises, and some of them can be intense. As ministers experience the joys and the crises, then they are experiencing the reality of ministry in today’s world.

When the exalted expectations of pastors hit the ceiling of reality, great frustration and disappointment emerged. Pastors even pondered leaving the ministry altogether. Fred Smith presents this internal crisis when he quotes a prominent pastor who privately says, “I would be glad to get out of ministry if God would let me off the hook. In fact, if he doesn’t keep me in it, I want out of it” (70). This minister faces the reality of the crises of ministry in his life, but the second part of his statement speaks volumes. The very call that took him down the road that leads to crises would also keep him in ministry.

Several of the pastors with whom I spoke shared that at different times of ministerial crises at least a fleeting thought of letting go of their calling entered into their thoughts. They also found that the call itself prevented them from following through with their moments of flight. One insightful pastor said plainly, “We have to accept reality the way it is, but you don’t have to quit.” Fisher puts to words the hold of the call upon some pastors: “By call, the grip on my soul, is the sustaining power of my pastoral ministry” (95). The very call of God on pastors’ lives enables them to rise above the would-be desolation of their souls and ministry and take them to new heights of service and love

for God.

The Role of Crises

In studying the relationship of ministerial crises and pastors' spiritual lives, the result of the presence of conflict did not always have negative connotations to it. The walls that crises present have definite drawbacks. God has used difficulties, as revealed in Scripture, to strengthen and reinforce his disciples, and he also uses trying times to reinforce his disciples today. These growth opportunities fall primarily into three areas: increased dependence upon God, an increased awareness of God's presence in their ministry, and a widening understanding of the reality of ministry.

Dependence

A story was recently told in our church that helped to illustrate the body of Christ's dependency upon each other. We were instructed to take a puzzle piece and look at it. We were to imagine that the protrusions of the piece exemplified our strengths. The indentations represented our weaknesses. We then created a picture of the church as all the pieces were brought together. The strengths of our pieces filled in the weaknesses of others, and others' strengths filled in our weaknesses.

The pastors have in the midst of crises a great opportunity for Christ to fill in the weak areas of their lives. Thomas Blandi says, "If you are not having problems, you are missing an opportunity for growth." If a positive attitude toward the crises of ministry is taken, then God can use the same in a productive way that fills the weak indented areas of the pastor's life.

One pastor felt as he started out in ministry that doing ministry was something he could do. As the crises of ministry invaded his "can-do ministry," he said that the edge of

self-dependency was worn down. “You lose a little bit of your pride and that kind of brought my feet back down to the ground because things hadn’t been difficult and I was kind of doing everything by myself.” The result of this wearing down of pride was the realization that he had not been relying on God and if he was going to do ministry successfully, he needed God’s help.

Seven pastors I interviewed took advantage of the spiritual growth opportunity presented to them through their crises. They discovered that much of their ministry was taking place within the confines of self-dependency. As these pastors discovered that they were depending upon themselves for ministry, they changed direction by placing a newfound dependency upon God and through that reliance desired to see God at work in and through their ministries.

Dependency on God enables pastors to let go of some of their own self-importance and allows them to focus more intentionally upon the ministry at hand. Calvin shares his belief that had Stephen not depended upon God fully for his life he would not have been able to see the need of forgiveness for those who were putting him to death (319). Pastors are freed to concentrate on their ministries by committing every care of their lives to God. Crisis in their ministry has a way of nudging pastors to this freeing dependency, especially when they find nothing else upon which to fall back in the midst of their struggle.

Stabilizing Presence

Another growth area found in the middle of crises is the sense that God is there with pastors. Evidences of God’s provision on the pastors’ behalf are experienced in the crises, and as a result pastors are steadied. God’s stabilizing presence offsets somewhat

the pain experienced by ministerial crises. The presence of God in their situations serves to urge pastors on in spite of what is going on around them. One pastor proclaimed, “My faith is the foundation that takes me through just about everything.” Peter’s faith may have found Jesus to be to him when he was called from the boat in the midst of a great storm. Peter seemed to see and care about nothing else except to be with Jesus. Jesus did not calm the sea, but he calmed Peter enough to take the next step of faith (Matt. 14:22-29).

A realization that the storm was not calmed for Peter, nor was the crisis of ministry calmed for Stephen who was stoned to death, nor for Paul who sang as he was bound in prison, nor for Jesus who was crucified needs to be realized. The pain that is experienced by pastors in crisis is what makes that situation a true crisis. The crisis is such that it threatens the pastors’ very existence. The threat to the pastors’ very existence serves as a positive in pastors’ lives in this case because it drives pastors to the throne of God and at the throne the crises themselves can be used of God to strengthen them. One of the pastors I interviewed said, “It [ministry] is all about the struggles and the trials and those things that go on in our lives to build perseverance and all that goes along with it. It is tough. God never promised me it was going to be a bed of roses. There are thorns in those rosebushes.” Understanding the difficulties and hardships of ministry, Proverbs 3:5-6 became a rallying cry for him and his wife: “Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight” (NIV).

Since a true crisis threatens the pastor’s very existence, a great need is present for faith and trust in the presence of God. The psalmist writes, “Keep me safe, O God, for in

you I take refuge” (Ps. 16:1, NIV) and he writes,

I have set the Lord always before me. Because he is at my right hand, I will not be shaken. Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices; my body will also rest secure, because you will not abandon me to the grave, nor will you let your Holy One see decay. You have made known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasure at your right hand. (16:8-11, NIV)

The presence of the Lord in the midst of crises is what enabled biblical characters like Stephen, Paul, Peter, and Jesus to endure intense storms of ministry. That same presence enables pastors to endure their own storms in ministry today. A pastor was dealing with a crisis that provided opportunity for very difficult questions to be asked of him. He experienced in that situation God’s stabilizing presence. It gave him “a fresh appreciation of the working of the Holy Spirit, to work in my life where I didn’t know what to say. God gives the words.” The presence of Christ provides the strength, sense of purpose, and peace needed to carry on. Peterson gives an insight to this provision when he says, “The truth is there aren’t very many happy people in the Bible. But there are people who are experiencing joy, peace, and the meaning of Christ’s suffering in their lives” (Contemplative Pastor 45).

Clear Understanding

A third area of which the pastors spoke in referencing the effects of crises upon them was that they provided a clearer understanding of ministry and their place in it.

The first step in coming to grips with the reality of ministry (namely the very real presence of crises) for pastors is a sense that “the battle is the Lord’s” (1 Sam. 17:47, NIV). In doing so they are able to understand that ministry is not about an individual—it is not about pastors except where it is involved in their growth and spiritual formation. “Rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed

when his glory is revealed” (1 Pet. 4:13, NIV).

A pastor I interviewed experienced the battle to be the Lord’s when a crisis came to his ministry. He stated that ministry was going smoothly: “I was just preaching on Sunday morning, going and visiting the old folks in the hospital when they got sick, and just the normal kind of every day things.” When the crisis came, it introduced a new dimension to his ministry. Unlike before he was now faced with questions that he could not answer and emotions he could not direct. As a result this pastor spent a lot of time in prayer seeking God’s direction on what to do and “did I do it right?” He also found himself pleasantly surprised that God would work through him in the ministry that would take place, and this discovery had a profound effect upon this gentleman. Previously ministry had been a ritual of tasks and motions, but now because God had chosen to work through him he realized that “my place in ministry is much more important than what I had understood it to be before.”

In ministry pastors have agendas and dreams that at times come under attack by crises. As pastors tighten their grip on their agendas and dreams during difficulties, their frustration is accentuated. On the other hand, as they loosen their hold on their agendas and dreams, accepting the agendas and dreams of God for their ministry (which include crises), pastors are able to focus with peace and understanding on what has actually been set before them.

Pastors who give up their right to control the ministry and accept its reality are able to grow in their spiritual lives through the crises they find there. Wirt prays, “You teach us our lessons by sorrow, you wound us to heal us, you kill us that we might not die apart from you” (24). A prayer like this can come only by a clear understanding of God

and how he addresses pastors through their crises in ministry.

Pastors who understand and accept the lessons of crises are able to move forward to accomplish the Lord's will in their ministry and are able, in the midst of crises, not to be overcome. The ministry of which they are a part is not about them or what they think it is about. They are able to do ministry with the realization that "God did not call you to forsake you" (Foster 10). As a result, their frustration is replaced with a peace and confidence in and for the work to which God has called them.

Implications of Findings and Practical Applications

My interest in this study began because I saw pastors being defeated and frustrated with some quitting as a result of crises in their ministry. I wondered why so many modern-day pastors were not finishing the race well or finishing at all when their biblical counterparts finished so well. The answer to this question has come in the strengths or weaknesses of their spiritual lives.

Many pastors have chosen not to feed themselves spiritually. They allow themselves to be captured by busy-ness, laziness, and self-dependency to the point that developing an ongoing relationship with the living Christ is suffocated. In some cases, pastors have failed to realize an intentional commit to the cross of Christ in the form of spiritual formation is a must. Pastors need to exert a lot of time, passion, and attention to the continued development of their relationship with the living God. In order to have that growing edge, pastors must be intentional. As a result of failing to be intentional, they have been caught off guard and have been surprised by the internal injuries of the crises they experience. In busy-ness, God takes a position of minimal importance. In laziness, pursuing God simply takes too much effort, and in self-dependency, God takes second

place to what pastors believe they can accomplish on their own.

Like so many other wrong choices, the choice not to pursue God in their lives may look harmless at its inception; however, the deeper this track is pursued the more harmful it becomes, affecting every area of the pastors' lives. Without a strong investment into their relationship with the Holy, when crises come, pastors are ill equipped to cope with that which is before them. Their response is one of weakness, frustration, hollowness, isolation, and dissatisfaction. In the end, the negative results that seemingly derive their origins from the crises of ministry, in fact, find their roots in a weak spiritual life. Based on a spiritual life that is lacking, the fact that these pastors are not surviving and flourishing in the fulfillment of their calls can easily be seen.

Those pastors who are flourishing and surviving have made Christ the foundation, not only of their ministries but also of their very lives. These pastors are giving the necessary time and attention to the relationship they have with God through various spiritual disciplines. One pastor said, "Between Scripture, prayer, my wife, and my accountability group—these things have been the compass that I have been able to look to and see and feel as to know that I am going in the right direction." By doing so, these pastors have placed themselves in a position not to be freed from the pain of tribulations in ministry but to grow through them. By the presence of Christ, pastors are able to move through and beyond crises, continuing their pursuit and fulfillment of their call. They do so in the strength and conviction of the One who has called them.

As a result of the strength of their spiritual lives, these pastors are able to realize God's hand in their situations and experience grace that is sufficient for whatever may come. Working out of such a presence, a peace and confidence not only directs pastors

but also accompanies them on their ministry journey.

The biblical characters survived because the relationship they had with God and the application of that relationship to ministry were one and the same. Today, the key to pastors surviving the crises of their ministries is the same. The car crashes (crises) in ministry are going to happen, and the only way to survive them is to wear the seat belt (strong spiritual life).

Implications for Existing Body of Knowledge

This study reveals that pastors, as well as all of God's people, must continue to develop a growing relationship with Christ. Unfortunately a large percentage of pastors fail to do this. The study reveals that those pastors that are growing in their relationship with Christ cope much better with crises in ministry. They realize that the wisdom, strength, love, and encouragement of the Lord are with them in the midst of the storms. This study shows that those pastors with a weak spiritual life or no spiritual life suffer in the midst of the crises. These pastors entertain thoughts of leaving the ministry and often have a strong sense of being alone in the fight.

Due to the fact that a strong spiritual life has a direct impact on the ministry journeys of pastors, they need to be reminded of this importance as well as to be provided with opportunities to learn or relearn how to feed themselves. This study shows that without a growing edge in their spiritual lives, crises in ministry could lead them to spiritual and occupational death.

Future Studies

Future studies may want to investigate the relationship of pastors' spiritual lives and crises by including research on pastors who have left the ministry. Knowing the

reasons why these pastors left may be helpful. Was their departure due to the devastation of crises in ministry that found them lacking in the area of spiritual resolve? Were their spiritual lives strong and yet the crises defeated them anyways? Did a connection exist at all between the reasons they left and their relationships with God?

Future research may also benefit by studying this relationship in other denominations to determine if what has been found is unique to United Methodists. Does another form of polity and discipline change anything?

A future study may want to include the effect of personality upon these findings. Are certain personality types more or less susceptible to strong or weak spiritual lives? Along these lines, a future study may want to look into the role of pastors' backgrounds and their spiritual relationships. Does birth order or certain life experiences affect the study's findings?

Limitations of the Study

In terms of limitations, this study utilized a convenient sample of clergy within the Kentucky Annual Conference. This sample was not representative of the whole Annual Conference.

Including pastors who have left the ministry could have strengthened this study. Doing so may or may not give credence to the findings by discovering the reasons these pastors left the ministry.

Looking into the historical rate at which pastors have been leaving the ministry may also have strengthened this study. Does a correlation exist between those rates and the events of particular historical times? In other words, was a pastor more likely to leave the ministry during World War II than during the 1990s?

Some pastors have a tendency to have biased responses to questions asked based on interest. A percentage of pastors may have had ministerial crises more recently or the crises may have had far-reaching impacts upon them thus raising their interest in the research process. Others may have had a positive experience or the crises may have been fairly distant time wise, thus possibly reducing their investment in the interview process.

The severity of the crisis may not be expressed in the responses and may play a role in the relationship of the spiritual life and the experienced crisis. Along these lines of concern, I am also concerned with the frequency of major ministerial crises in pastors' ministries. Frequency may establish a pattern where pastors' defenses are worn down to the point of destructive results.

The defeat of some pastors in ministry may have had less to do with crises of ministry and more to do with crises of decision.

Summary of Significant Findings

The following summarizes the significant findings previously mentioned throughout this chapter.

1. Crises in ministry are a natural element. Pastors will face crises in their ministry.
2. Pastors have within them, by being a child of God, that which calls them to relationship with God. Although pastors are aware of the need for God in their lives they do not uniformly pursue him.
3. Obstacles, if allowed, interrupt spiritual formation. Many things come between pastors and God. The leading obstacles brought out in this study, but may not be true for all pastors, were busy-ness, a lack of self-discipline, and the reality of ministry's

difficulties.

4. Pastors with a poor spiritual life find less hope and meaning in the whole of ministry. The crises serve to defeat pastors causing frustration, doubt, and weariness. They do not have the Lord to fall back upon or to urge them ahead.

5. Pastors experience hope and significance in the whole of ministry when their relationships with God have been cultivated. The relationship they have with God serves as their seat belt, their security and safety net, in the ups and downs of ministry providing what is needed in a given ministry event.

6. Pastors need to be reminded and encouraged to have a growing edge in their spiritual lives. Even though pastors realize the need for God in their lives they often, in the midst of ministry, lose sight of this foundational principle. They also need to be taught how to feed themselves.

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