

## **ABSTRACT**

### **BUILT TO LAST PASTORS: IDENTIFYING THE FOUNDATIONAL CHARACTERISTICS OF PERSEVERING IN PASTORAL EXCELLENCE**

by

Andrew Riley Hurst

Pastors are leaving the ministry in great numbers each year. A plethora of causes contribute to this unfortunate reality. The causes for ministry fallout are rooted in the identity of the pastor and the nature of his or her circumstances. The actual rate of pastoral fallout is unknown due to a lack of adequate tracking within most denominations, but an intuitive and personal feeling of profound loss is evident in both clergy and laity who remain in ministry. The purpose of this project was to understand what is involved in persevering in pastoral excellence. This study sought to identify the core characteristics of pastors who endure in excellence with the hope that such information can help curb the tide of pastoral demise. This study helped those preparing for ministry, those in ministry, and those who work with ministers to improve their commitment to and experience of pastoral leadership. The theological and biblical foundation of this project is primarily an in-depth look at the New Testament pastor, Paul. Seven core values of persevering pastors were discovered in Paul's life and ministry.

The primary data for this research was received through qualitative, face-to-face interviews with twenty-two United Methodist pastors from the Louisiana and Texas Annual Conferences. These pastors had twenty years of experience and were proven leaders within the United Methodist Church. A quantitative instrument was used to gain insight into each pastor's sense of current well-being. The pastoral subjects were very

willing to participate in a study addressing such a prominent concern within their denomination.

Pastoral excellence was broadly defined using the attributes of function, experience, spiritual formation, personal character, and growth. Persevering in excellence involved overcoming significant and diverse obstacles for all the pastors of this study. The vocational constant of such obstacles provided the context for life-defining crucible experiences for the pastoral subjects. Seven key persevering ingredients were discovered in both Paul and the United Methodist pastors of this study: grace-based significance, supportive community and relationships, a Pauline eschatological viewpoint, adaptive methodology, realistic expectations, spiritual disciplines, and an abiding passion and zeal for ministry. While no exact formula for persevering excellence was discovered, these seven ingredients were essential to surviving and thriving in ministry over the long haul. This study has important implications for how pastors are trained, mentored, affirmed, supported, and held accountable in the twenty-first century.

## DISSERTATION APPROVAL

This is to certify that the dissertation entitled  
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CHARACTERISTICS OF PERSEVERING IN PASTORAL EXCELLENCE

A Dissertation

Presented to the Faculty of  
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by

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## **CHAPTER 1**

### **PROBLEM**

#### **Background**

On a stormy West Texas evening in June 1988, I was ordained an elder in the United Methodist Church. Eleven of us from diverse backgrounds knelt before Bishop Louis Schowengerdt to receive the church's affirmation and confirmation of our call and to affirm and confirm our commitment to read the Holy Scriptures in the Church of God, to preach the word of God, and to administer the Holy Sacraments in the congregation. Of that eleven, a mere fifteen years later, only four of us still serve in that set-apart capacity. Other storms of other kinds awaited us in ministry. Some storms were personal and some ecclesial. Some storms were of our own making, and some were the result of the actions of others. Some storms were seemingly incidental and some catastrophic. Whatever the storms and whatever the causes, clearly servants and ministers of the gospel have abandoned their call to pastoral ministry.

What is true on the micro level of my own experience is also true throughout American Christendom. Pastors leave the ministry in vast numbers each year. Rolf Memming found that 30-40 percent of United Methodist ministers have dropped out of the ministry within ten years of their ordination (807). Roger Wilmore reports that six thousand Southern Baptist pastors leave the ministry each year. Leadership Network estimates that 1,500 staff pastors leave the ministry each month (Wilmore). Those who stay in ministry often contemplate leaving, as well. The Hartford Institute for Religion found in a survey of 4,300 clergy that 32 percent of women and 28 percent of men thought seriously about leaving church ministry in the last year (Wicai). In a recent lecture, Fred L. Hofheinz, the Program Director for Religion with the Lilly Endowment,

highlighted the crisis of pastoral ministry by quoting a survey of contemporary pastors:

Fully 80 percent of evangelical pastors believe that pastoral ministry has affected their personal lives and families in a negative way; 70 percent say they have a lower self image now than when they started in ministry and a remarkable 50 percent indicate that they have seriously considered leaving the ministry sometime in the last three months.

The problem of clergy fallout is rampant across all denominational and theological lines.

It is a problem that affects pulpit supply, clergy morale, church health, and Christianity's witness to the world. Recently The Promethean Humanist ran an article about the overwhelming problem of pastoral burnout as if to invalidate both the clerical profession and the cause of Christ (Doerr).

Pastors choose to leave the ministry for a host of reasons. Stephen Olford lists five key causes of ministry frustration: vocational bewilderment, moral breakdown, biblical barrenness, spiritual bankruptcy, and emotional burnout (Wilmore 1). Wilmore points to the unrealistic expectations of both the pastor and the congregation as the major contributors to ministerial decline (1). According to the Pulpit and Pew studies done by Duke University, "The most common reason Protestant pastors leave parish ministry is an experience of stressful conflict" (Dart). This conflict is seen in those who are forced out of the ministry due to moral failure, in those who struggle with laity in their church, in those who struggle with problems in their home, and in those whose innovative leadership hits the brick wall of "we've never done that before" (Dart). Jackson W. Carroll, the Director of the Pulpit and Pew research, recently addressed the issue at The Ernest Cadman Colwell Lecture at The Claremont School of Theology. Carroll emphasizes isolation as a primary causative factor of pastors who leave:

In one study done for our project, researchers interviewed ex-Catholic priests who had dropped out of the priesthood within five years of being ordained. *Isolation* [original emphasis] and the lack of close friendships were second only to celibacy as the most important reason for dropping

out. (14)

The Columbia Catalyst Community, which was founded to support persons in ministry, substantiates the prevalence of this concern. They quote a survey of pastors done by Fuller Institute of Church Growth that showed 70 percent of pastors report having *no* close friends (London and Wiseman, Pastors at Risk 22). Jeff Woods, Executive Minister for the American Baptists, highlights the four primary factors for clergy leaving the ministry as concern over one's call and one's fit in ministry, conflict with staff or laity in the congregation, conflict with the denomination or its officials, and concern of family needs not being met. Thomas Oden believes the pastoral office has been badly shaken and bruised and that one of the major causes of pastoral burnout is the significant "blurring of pastoral identity" (5). William H. Willimon points to the problem of ministerial fatigue, which results when the contemporary consumerist culture intersects with a pastor who feels called to meet human needs (Pastor 95). Charles A. Wickman, in an informal survey for Christianity Today, found that pastors left the ministry because they experienced a shortage of time for their personal life, too much time in committees, unrealistic standards of perfectionism, the attraction of a better career opportunity outside of the church, and feelings of isolation and loneliness (41). H. B. London and Neil B. Wiseman popularized the ongoing crisis of pastoral leadership in Pastors at Risk. They say that two primary causes for ministerial frustration and dropout are a lack of perceived effectiveness and an increased pressure to be like the megachurches (25-26). Roy Oswalt narrows down clergy dropout to the core cause of stress (33). The intuitive accumulation of data regarding the loss of clergy caused one author to respond with profound satire: "Warning: the list of endangered species is growing. To bald eagles, koalas, and spotted owls, add another: ordained pastors energized by what they do" (Asimakoupoulos 123).

Talking about the causes of clergy dropout in the abstract is difficult, but seeing such struggles fleshed out in the lives of friends and family is devastating. The year following my ordination, I received a visit from my district superintendent on the first Sunday in November. He took my wife, Janey, and I out for lunch to the Golden Corral in a nearby community. There, he asked us if we were willing to move to a recently started church in one of our annual conference's major cities. The pastor of the new church was a close friend and mentor of mine, and he had literally left town in the middle of the night. After birthing and growing the church well beyond two hundred, the conflict, power struggles, and personalities eventually took their toll on this founding pastor. He was fed up and burned out and walked away without saying a word to anyone. In talking with him years later and hearing his story, he felt as if the church he birthed had risen up and slapped him in the face. He and his family were broken and bleeding emotionally and spiritually as they left this local church and eventually the United Methodist denomination.

Janey and I had only been in our rural appointment two years when our district superintendent visited us, and things there were going very well. The people were responsive, the church was growing, and the church's self-image was being transformed. We had a sense of true fulfillment, but we were also living under the influence of the maximization complex, which says that maximum ministry is using a maximum amount of your gifts a maximum amount of the time for the most maximum influence possible. This complex leaves one with the perception that bigger is always better. We moved on a ten-day notice, which included saying goodbye to a devastated church, finding a place to live, and packing and loading all of our belongings in a Ryder truck. Our last Sunday in our church was the first Sunday in Advent. I will always remember the feelings of

profound grief, betrayal, and forsakenness experienced by the church, and I will always remember my own feelings of dismay as I shoved our fully decorated Christmas tree in the back of the truck. Taking the time to remember or look back, however, was not possible. The new church of two hundred had already dwindled to a church of forty and was in a definite crisis. The next two years were spent trying to rescue stability, raise up disciples, and re-create vision. The obstacles to church health, church growth, and effective pastoral leadership seemed endless. The congregation was filled with epidemic pain, intense disillusionment, and significant disgruntlement because of the loss of their pastor and of their contribution to his departure. The church definitely needed to be birthed anew, but it was unfortunately already well on its way as a young church with some heavy and costly baggage. The challenges and demands of this church too readily fit into my psyche of performance-based significance and a “never surrender” identity.

Our new assignment and my unhealthy proclivities had disastrous results in both my relationship with Janey and with Christ. On the one hand, my relationship with Janey was in need of some serious healing. Janey needed my love and intimacy as she faced the never-ending demands of caring for two children under three years of age, the constant hosting of church events from Sunday school to leadership teams to vacation Bible school in our home, and the continual and residual conflict of life in a wounded church. What she got from me instead was a machine-like worker who never stopped doing and never began feeling. My seeming invincibility to our situation only heightened her vulnerability. On the other hand, my relationship with Christ was also in trouble. My dysfunctional relationship with Christ became obvious to me as I sat in a district preacher’s meeting where my district superintendent asked us the Wesleyan question, “How is it with your soul?” One by one, we went around the room and shared how our



souls were either good or bad, up or down, based on what was going on in our church. One friend of mine said, “My soul is doing well today because yesterday we had five persons join our church.”

Another pastor said, “My soul is great because our youth program has doubled in size.”

One pastor shared his pain, “My soul is really struggling right now because we need a new organist.”

As I chimed right in with, “My soul is \_\_\_\_\_ because my church is \_\_\_\_\_,” I realized that who I was in relationship with Christ had become all about what I did or did not do in ministry. My revelation of spiritual emptiness and idolatry came in tandem with the revelation that our marriage was dying and probably dead. Janey wanted out; she wanted out of our relationship and out of ministry. In 1991, just three years away from ordination, she and I came unbelievably close to losing one another and leaving the ministry.

### **Purpose**

The litany of causes and personal stories previously mentioned offer insight to the challenges, struggles, and risks of pastoral ministry. The causes of ministerial fallout are found in the ministers’ personal and professional lives, in their homes and offices, and in the avoidable moral failures and the inescapable turmoil of unhealthy churches and lives. Such causes are rooted both in the pastor and in his or her environment. These causes represent, to one degree or another, the vocational constants of a life spent in ministry. While isolating and analyzing such contributive causes would be profitable, the intent of this study was to discover why certain ministers persist in the face of such struggle. The purpose of this project was to understand what is involved in persevering in pastoral

excellence. The pastoral perseverance for which this study looked is not just about surviving until retirement. It is about effective and growing leadership in the church.

### **Research Question #1**

How do United Methodist pastors understand excellence in pastoral ministry?

### **Research Question #2**

What are the obstacles pastors have to overcome in order to persevere in pastoral excellence?

### **Research Question #3**

What are the components that contribute to and sustain pastoral excellence?

### **Research Question #4**

What is the relationship or alignment between the first century pastor Paul and twenty-first century pastors who persevere in excellence?

## **Definition of Terms**

*Built-to-last* is a term used throughout this study in reference to pastors. Built-to-last in this context refers to pastors who have been shaped and formed by their experiences, values, and faith to become men and women of God who have not just survived but thrived in ministry over the course of their lifetimes. I have used this term my whole life to describe things that last: John Deere tractors, livestock fences, sturdy barns. I have also used this term to describe human realities such as a great marriage.

The term *axiom* is used in Chapter 2 when describing the specific characteristics of Paul's perseverance in ministry. An axiom is a foundational principle upon which one's life and ministry are built. Axioms are truths drawn from a specific context which have the potential to be generalized and applied in and for the lives of others.

*Pastoral excellence* is a term that describes both the character and the competence

of the pastor. Pastoral excellence involves a Christ-centered identity and effectiveness in ministry. It addresses who pastors are as sons and daughters of God and what they do as God's servant leaders in ministry.

*Pastoral perseverance* is the overcoming of obstacles and challenges in ministry. Pastoral perseverance is about lasting and being sustained in ministry. Pastors who persevere in pastoral excellence are those pastors who overcome, not just survive, in ministry and sustain a lifelong pursuit of excellence in ministry.

### **Research Methodology**

This study was primarily qualitative in nature although a spiritual well-being scale was used with the sample of persevering pastors.

#### **Nature and Instrumentation**

This research project involved conducting a face-to-face interview with the selected United Methodist pastors. Each pastor participated in a sixty to ninety minute interview with me. During this interview, I sought to develop professional rapport with the pastors and to establish a safe and confident interview environment. Nine open-ended questions were used to interview each pastor.

Before these interview questions were used with the selected pastors, they were used with a sample group of three persevering pastors from my Beeson Pastor cohort group. After these sample interviews were conducted, the questions were refined in order to heighten their effectiveness in receiving the needed research data.

Each pastor was asked to complete Ellison's Spiritual Well-Being Scale within two months of their interview. This Spiritual Well-Being Scale is a self-assessment and provides a general indication of overall well-being. The scale also specifically reports on the religious and existential well-being of the research subjects.

**Participants**

The group of twenty-two United Methodist pastors selected for the interviews and assessments met the following three criteria. First, the pastors for this study had at least twenty years of pastoral experience.

Second, the pastors in this study were serving as senior pastors of churches with an average weekly attendance of over five hundred.

Third, these pastors were effective and proven leaders within their local churches and annual conferences. They were recommended by their bishops as effective leaders in their congregations.

**Delimitations and Generalizability**

This project had three limiting factors. First, the research sample is small rather than exhaustive in size. Twenty-two pastors provided great insights and trends, but more interviews and indicators would have provided even more explicit results. Second, the qualitative nature of this project makes the results more subjective. The primary discoveries of this project came out of the face-to-face interviews conducted with the selected pastors. Third, the United Methodist emphasis of this study makes its application more particular to United Methodist pastors rather than to pastors in general. The issues of denominational turmoil, potential schism, and antiquated structure in the United Methodist Church created concerns and issues within pastoral ministry that are not experienced by all ministers. The findings of this study are specifically generalizable to pastors serving in hierarchical denominations who are also pastoring churches of significant numerical size.

### **Context of the Study**

This study was conducted with a specific group of United Methodist pastors in the early years of the twenty-first century. These pastors were successful in a declining denomination within a rapidly changing culture. They served in a denomination and within a specific calling that is at risk at the least and in a reformation at best. These ministers were but one voice among a long and faithful parade of voices who have served Jesus in ministry over the last two thousand years. While these pastors were fixed in the very fluid context of the current cultural transitioning, their experiences, wisdom, identity, and strategies of persevering excellence have served as a witness and pattern to other pastors who will follow and to all who work and relate with pastors. Local churches, Boards of Ordained Ministry, seminaries, and pastoral families have much to gain from what these surveyed pastors have taught about being pastors who persevere in pastoral excellence.

Twelve pastors in this study were serving as pastors in the Louisiana Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church. The Louisiana Annual Conference is located in the state of Louisiana, which has 43,652 square miles (US Census Bureau). Louisiana has the Gulf of Mexico on its southern border, the Mississippi River on its eastern border, the piney woods of south Arkansas on its northern border, and the Sabine River on its western border. The geographic center of the state approximates the city of Alexandria and the delta farmlands of the Red River.

Southern Louisiana is strongly influenced by its European and French Acadian roots while Northern Louisiana is more classic Deep South in its orientations and prejudices. South Louisiana is predominantly Catholic, and North Louisiana is predominantly Protestant in religious affiliation. The city of New Orleans is truly a

metropolitan city whose future is still up in the air in this post-Katrina world. All twelve pastors in this study had been dramatically affected by Hurricane Katrina. One pastor's church was still in a recovery zone four months after the hurricane. Other pastors' churches had been heavily engaged in relief and recovery efforts to supply housing, food, clothing, support, and transition for victims of both Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. This experience of ministry was fresh in the minds and hearts of those pastors who were interviewed for this study.

The Louisiana Annual Conference has 526 churches, 370 charges, and 356 pastors. The church membership in the Louisiana Annual Conference is 127,059. The average number of Methodists who attend worship each week in Louisiana is 48,063 (Rhoads, Journal S-90). Most churches in the Louisiana Annual Conference are in a rural context in communities with fewer than five thousand in population. In the Louisiana Annual Conference, eight cities have a population of twenty to fifty thousand; five cities have a population of fifty to one hundred thousand; and five cities have a population of 100,000 to 500,000. New Orleans is the largest city in the Louisiana Annual Conference with a population of 469,032 (City Population). Louisiana has twelve United Methodist Churches that average five hundred or more in worship (Rhoads, Journal). From 1990 to 2000, the population of Louisiana increased 5.9 percent from 4,442,609 to 4,468,976 (Quick Facts). During those same ten years the United Methodist Church in Louisiana went from 131,318 members to 127,446 members (Rhoads, Personal interview). The ethnic breakdown in population in the 2000 census was 62.5 percent white, 32.5 percent African-American, 2.4 percent Hispanic, and 1.2 percent Asian (Quick Facts).

Methodism was introduced to Louisiana in 1806 after the Louisiana Purchase in 1803. By 1820 two circuits, known as Attakapas and Washataw, had been established in

the state. The population of Louisiana at the time was 220,000 and the members in the two circuits totaled 209. One hundred and fifty-one members were white and fifty-eight were “colored” (Bangs). Louisiana pastors minister in an annual conference that is declining in members but diverse in opportunities.

Ten pastors in this study were serving as pastors in the Texas Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church. The Texas Annual Conference is located in the eastern and southeastern regions of Texas. The Texas Annual Conference is 330 miles from its northern-most boundary to its southern-most boundary and 225 miles from its western-most boundary to its eastern-most boundary. It is bordered by Oklahoma on the north, the Gulf of Mexico on the south, the Louisiana border on the east, and sporadic boundaries on the west. The Texas Annual Conference is diverse economically and culturally. Rural farmers, blue collar workers, business executives, cutting-edge engineers, university professors, and petroleum workers are all found in the Texas Conference. The Texas Annual Conference has 711 churches, 562 charges, and 1,172 pastors (Ervin). The church membership in the Texas Annual Conference is 277,467 (New Districts 14). The average number of Methodists who attend worship each week in Louisiana is 108,412 (Ervin). Most of the members in the Texas Annual Conference live in an urban or suburban context, but rural churches still outnumber urban churches. In the Texas Annual Conference, twenty-two cities have a population of twenty to fifty thousand; eight cities have a population of fifty to one hundred thousand; one city has a population of 100,000 to 500,000; and Houston has a population of 1,953,631 (“Population of Texas Cities”). Forty-six United Methodist churches average five hundred or more in worship (Ervin). From 1990 to 2000, the population of Harris County, the largest county in the Texas Conference, increased 20.6 percent from 2,818,199 to 3,400,578 (About Texas). During

those same ten years, the United Methodist Church in the Texas Conference increased .3 percent from 275,677 members to 276,600 members (Ervin). The ethnic breakdown in population in the state of Texas in 2000 was 52.4 percent white, 32 percent Hispanic, 11.5 percent African-American, and 2.7 percent Asian. In Harris County the ethnic breakdown was 42.1 percent white, 32.9 percent Hispanic, 18.5 percent African-American, and 5.1 percent Asian. In Smith County, a typical nonurban East Texas county, the ethnic breakdown was 67.9 percent white, 11.2 percent Hispanic, 19.1 percent African-American, and .7 percent Asian (Quick Facts). Methodism entered into Texas in 1815 when Rev. William Stevenson, the first ordained Methodist minister and the first Protestant minister to ever preach in Texas delivered his sermon in far Northeast Texas at Pecan Point in what is now Red River County. The first Texas appointment of the Methodist Episcopal Church was Rev. Stevenson to the “Peecon Point” circuit in 1918. By 1822 the Peecon Point circuit had sixty-six members, one of whom was the first black Methodist in Texas (Spellmann). United Methodist pastors in the Texas Annual Conference minister in a context that is experiencing significant demographic growth and marginal church growth.

### **Description of the Project**

This project was about pastors and primarily for the benefit of pastors and those they serve. The results of this research should also be of benefit to those who train, equip, call, and appoint pastors. The focus of the research was pastors who are currently engaged on the front lines of ministry. These ministers are primary sources of the challenges to and effective strategies of persevering excellence. This study was specifically targeted toward United Methodist pastors because of the very intense and specific needs of this denomination in regards to clergy supply and morale. I am currently



serving as a United Methodist pastor and have served in ministry in the United Methodist church for twenty-four years.

### **Theological Foundation**

The theological study of this project is essentially an in-depth look at the ministry of Paul. The focus of this study is both on Paul's actions and his beliefs. His theology undergirded his ministry and his perseverance in ministry. Paul's understanding of grace, his experience and proclamation of the Risen Lord, his eschatological framework, the essential nature of his call, his view of suffering, and his ecclesiology are all emphasized in Chapter 2. Paul's worldview and theology is what piloted and empowered his ministry over the course of three decades.

### **Overview**

Chapter 2 establishes the biblical and theological context of this proposed study with a thorough examination of the Apostle Paul, a first-century pastor who persevered in pastoral excellence. The biblical research into Paul's life and ministry provided the introduction and definition of seven axioms for sustaining pastoral excellence. Chapter 2 also introduces some of the recent approaches used to persevere in excellence in ministry. The research design is presented in Chapter 3. Chapter 4 reports the applicable research findings. Chapter 5 provides the summary and implications of the research findings and offers some suggestions for further inquiry and study.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE

#### **Biblical and Theological Foundations**

Built to Last is a best-selling book by management guru Jim Collins that describes what is involved in building a company that has long-term success. He goes into great depth to illustrate why some companies do well and others fail with the intention that his readers can learn from those who excelled and endured over time. The purpose of this project was to understand what is involved in persevering in pastoral excellence. The objective of the theological and biblical work is to take an in-depth look at a minister who was built to last, who excelled and endured in ministry until the very end of his life. By investigating the core ingredients that facilitated this first-century pastor's perseverance in ministerial excellence, my hope is that pastors who serve in the twenty-first century will have much to gain from one who "fought the good fight,... finished the race,... kept the faith" (2 Tim. 4:7, NIV). For some thirty years, the Apostle Paul's ministry was characterized by fierce fighting, purposeful racing, and resilient faithfulness. This study looks to uncover what factors contributed to his perseverance and what values kept him going until he had literally reached the world for Christ.

Some pastors are tempted to downplay such attention given to the ministry of Paul because of his apostolic status. When Paul is spiritualized or hero-worshipped, a certain nontransferability makes him irrelevant to current pastoral theology and practice. My hope is that this study will move beyond the superficial and limiting understanding that the reason that Paul persevered was just because of who he was by virtue of his genetic code, his special calling, or his unique place in church history. This thinking seems contrary to any real study of pastoral perseverance or Paul's life. If the reason

people last in ministry is simply because of who they are innately, then nothing can be added to or taken away from people's lives to help them be persevering pastors. If leadership is purely inherent, persevering leadership is not about training, equipping, or forming persons but rather simply making sure the right persons are selected. One of the core values of this project is that leaders are both born and made. Leaders are called and shaped. Rather than trying to set up an either/or discussion of the origins of leadership, I have accepted the foundational principle that impacting pastoral leaders and their perseverance in ministry is not only possible but essential for the church to maximize its influence and effectiveness in this world. Listed and described below are seven essential factors from Paul's ministry and life that made him a pastor who persevered in pastoral excellence. Each factor from Paul's life is followed by a corresponding axiom for sustaining pastoral excellence in ministry today.

### **Value That Lasts**

As a first century person, Paul's identity and value were rooted in his genetic lineage. "One's clan or kin defined the very essence of one's identity" (Witherington, Paul Quest 31). An individual's situation in life was primarily fixed by ethnicity, geography, and family. Paul often called attention to this core part of his identity (Phil. 3:5; 2 Cor. 11:22; Acts 22:3). The context of this often misunderstood boasting was always to compare and contrast this identity with the newer and truer identity he had in Christ. Paul's value was not found or placed in these typical and intrinsic identity sources. Instead, he counted them all as "loss" (Phil. 3:7). Philippians 3:8 provides insight on where Paul placed his value: "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." Paul found his

lasting value in the “surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus.” Paul’s all-important discovery of where his true value was found was especially experienced in two specific but related works of God in his life: his conversion and his call.

Prior to his conversion, Paul was an ardent Pharisee who saw strict and zealous conformity to the law as the pathway to righteousness. After his experience on the Damascus Road, he proclaimed that righteousness and salvation came by faith in the crucified and resurrected Christ. Ben Witherington, III in The Paul Quest affirms that Paul understood these two opposing approaches as “contradictory means of defining the boundaries of the people of God” (59) both before and after his conversion. In his conversion, “he simply changed sides on the issue” (59). C. K. Barrett makes the following observation of Paul’s conversion:

The content of his conversion was the discovery that the crucified Jesus was now alive. He could only be alive because God had raised him from death, and that God had done this was proof that Jesus had been right; his opponents had been wrong. (62)

What forced the change in Paul’s approach and life was a face-to-face encounter with the Resurrected Lord on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:1-6).

In 2 Corinthians 3:3-11, Paul contrasts these two opposing means as he distinguishes between the old covenant and the new covenant. The old covenant is written on tablets of stone. The new covenant is written on human hearts. The old covenant is written in ink; the new covenant is written by the Spirit of the Living God (2 Cor. 3:3). The old covenant is about the letter of the law that kills; the new covenant is about the life-giving Spirit (2 Cor. 3:6). The old covenant was glorious, but the new is “more glorious” (2 Cor. 3:7-8). The old covenant condemns; the new covenant brings righteousness (2 Cor. 3:9). The old covenant is fading; the new covenant is lasting (2 Cor. 3:11).

Paul's conversion encounter has moved him from self-sufficiency to grace dependency. His value and standing in relationship with God became based in God's activity rather than his own efforts. Such a relationship and covenant with God gave Paul a lasting confidence because it was not conditioned upon his behavior but was grounded instead in God's unconditional love. Karl Barth describes Paul's view of this new covenant:

Not because men [and women] will be better, but because God will deal with the same men [and women] in a completely different way, laying His hand, as it were, upon them from behind, because He Himself will turn them to Himself. To His faithfulness—He Himself will see to it. (32-33)

Because of God's nonnegotiable faithfulness and grace, Paul moved away from a paradigm of trying to please God to a life of trusting and humble surrender to God.

Prior to the Damascus Road encounter, Paul had intensely persecuted those who belonged to the way (Acts 9:1-2; Gal. 1:23). These followers of Jesus and their approach to righteousness apart from the law called into question the very foundation of Paul's identity and value as a "Hebrew of Hebrews" (Phil. 3:5) who saw himself as being zealous for God (Acts 22:3) and zealous for the "traditions of the fathers" (Gal. 1:14). His identity and value prior to his conversion were rooted in his performance and conformance to the law, and as such they had to be defended at all costs. After his conversion his identity and value were based in the work of Christ. This approach and understanding of identity allowed Paul to function in ministry without putting his worth in any extrinsic source such as the approval of others (Gal. 1:10). After his conversion, Paul emphasizes his weakness (2 Cor. 12:9) and his dependency in ministry (1 Cor. 15:9). His conversion was not primarily from persecutor to preacher but from one who trusted in self to one who trusted in Christ. This transition from performance-based righteousness to faith-based righteousness had a radical effect upon Paul's life and

ministry. His identity was not determined by the external circumstances of his life such as imprisonments, rejections, and conflict. Rather, his value came from the “surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord” (Phil. 3:8).

The simultaneous nature of Paul’s conversion and his call to ministry is not clear in Acts 9:1-19, but it is explicitly made apparent in Paul’s own testimony of his conversion in Acts 22:14-16. Ananias is specifically told that Saul is “my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel” (Acts 9:15). Paul is “at once” seen effectively preaching in the synagogue that “Jesus is the Son of God” (Acts 9:20). Paul explains the connection between his conversion and call in Galatians 1:15-17:

But when God, who set me apart from birth and called me by his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son in me so that I might preach him among the Gentiles, I did not consult any man, nor did I go up to Jerusalem to see those who were apostles before I was, but I went immediately into Arabia and later returned to Damascus.

The importance of Paul’s call and being “set apart” is seen in his epistles as again and again he defines himself as being “called.” “Κολεω” is used 138 times in the New Testament and thirty-six times in the Pauline epistles. “Κολεω” is used to name or identify: “Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount *called* [emphasis mine] Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a Sabbath day’s journey away” (Acts 1:12). It is also used to reference an actual verbal calling and an intentional inviting: “Immediately he *called* [emphasis mine] them; and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men, and followed him” (Mark 1:20). Paul uses “κλητοσ” to describe his specific calling as an apostle in Romans 1:1 and 1 Corinthians 1:1. His calling entails both a naming and an inviting from God. Again and again in Paul’s writings, God is the subject of the “κολεω,” “κλησις,” and “κλητοσ” (Rom. 1:1, 6, 7; 8:28; 9:24; 11:29; 1 Cor. 1:1, 2, 24,

26; 7:17, 20; Gal. 1:6; 2 Tim. 1:9). Paul understood that the identity, value, and purpose of the believer were rooted in God's work and that consequently his own calling and setting apart as an apostle were also initiated and rooted in God's work and Spirit in his life. Ministry for Paul was never simply a matter of working in a certain career. His ministry was always about being faithful to the very voice of God's Spirit. Bruce J. Malina and Jerome H. Neyrey see the importance of Paul's sense of divine commission throughout his ministry:

[I]n all his letters, Paul constantly expresses his sense of his God-given role, the will of God for him, the necessity laid upon him, and the consequent duty to obey and submit to his celestial patron. For example, Paul begins his Corinthian letters by indicating that his role and status were not of his doing; rather, he was "called by the will of God" (1 Cor. 1:1; 2 Cor. 1:1). (194-95)

Obedience to God's call was of ultimate importance to Paul.

Physiognomy offers some interesting insights into the person, character, and calling of Paul. Physiognomy is the study of what is recorded about a person's external features that, in turn, offer insight about their character (Malina and Neyrey 108). Stereotyping of persons based merely on what they looked like was common in the Ancient Mediterranean world (109). In The Acts of Paul, which is a late second century, apocryphal document, the author gives this physical description of Paul: "a man small of stature, with a bald head and crooked legs, in a good state of body, with eyebrows meeting and nose somewhat hooked, full of friendliness; for now he appeared like a man, and now he had the face of an angel" (Schneemelcher 2: 1239). While uni-brows and bald heads may not be the rave in twenty-first century America, such traits were seen as indicative of very specific character traits in Paul's day:

Physical Attribute:

- Small stature

Corresponding Character Trait:

Balanced and healthy (Malina and Neyrey 138)

- |                 |                                    |
|-----------------|------------------------------------|
| • Bald head     | Piety (140)                        |
| • Crooked legs  | Fearless and firm (140)            |
| • In shape body | Well trained and disciplined (141) |
| • Uni-brow      | Manliness (142)                    |
| • Hooked nose   | Generous (143)                     |
| • Angelic face  | Confidence and Power (144).        |

This description of Paul may be based in what he truly looked like or maybe just in what he truly was like in character and identity. No specific physical description of Paul is given in the Bible, but some references to his physical condition paint a far different picture than the one above. Second Corinthians 4:10, 10:10, 12:5-10, and Galatians 4:12-16 seem to draw particular attention to physical weaknesses in Paul, which, in a physiognomically determined world, would have been enormous potential liabilities. Paul's confidence and effectiveness in ministry had to be found somewhere other than in his physical attributes. In 1 Corinthians 2:1-7 Paul reminds the Corinthians of how he first came to them. He did not come with worldly eloquence, wisdom, or strength but in "weakness and fear" (1 Cor. 2:3). Paul emphasizes that he came "with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, so that your faith might not rest on men's wisdom, but on God's power" (1 Cor. 2:4-5). Paul's call and ministry originated from and was dependent upon God's Spirit (Acts 13:2).

Paul was a built-to-last pastor who persevered in pastoral excellence because he understood where his true value was found. Paul was saved by grace, lived by grace, and ministered by grace. The world did not give him his value, and the world could not take it away. In Christ Paul found his identity. The following axiom drawn from Paul's life and ministry is for twenty-first century pastors who desire to persevere in pastoral excellence. Built-to-last pastors do not find their worth and significance in the circumstances of their lives or ministries; their value is in God's work in their lives.



## Community That Lasts

Paul lived in a culture that was dyadic in nature. Most persons in Paul's day found their basic sense of identity from the group or groups of which they were a part. For first century persons, the core issue was not who someone is but whose someone is. The social network in which one belonged was the key to defining one's identity (Witherington, Paul Quest 31). Paul seemed to practice a modified dyadicism. He obviously understood himself as "of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee" (Phil. 3:5). Nevertheless, he also defined himself in terms that were dissonant with the norm of strict communal dyadicism. In Galatians 1:16 Paul says about his preaching that "he did not consult any man." This type of Pauline language definitely stood out in a dyadic culture. Modified dyadicism means that Paul emphasized his connection to the community but also maintained his distinctiveness in Christ. Paul often acted and communicated in a way that went against the cultural norms of his day, but he also strongly preached and lived the necessity of community. Paul repeatedly used communal metaphors to describe those who followed Christ. He described the church as a family and a well-connected body.

Thirty-four times in his letters he uses the family term *ἀδελφοί* to reference his fellow believers in Christ. In Galatians 6:10 he refers to "the family of believers" to whom fellow Christians are "especially" to do good. When Paul is describing the responsibility of the elder in 1 Timothy 3:1-7, he likens taking care of church to taking care of one's family. In Ephesians 2:19 Paul gladly welcomes the believers at Ephesus into their new home and family: "Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household." When Paul is instructing Timothy on church leadership, he equates "God's household" with "the

church of the living God” (1 Tim. 3:15).

Paul uses the metaphor of the human body to refer to the church throughout his writings (Rom. 7:4; 12:4; 1 Cor. 10:16; Eph. 4:4, 12; Col. 1:18; 3:15). First Corinthians 12:12-30 is Paul’s most explicit use of the body as a metaphor. This passage offers seven profound insights into Paul’s foundational understanding of and commitment to community. First, Paul strongly believes that unity is essential in the community of faith. He calls the church to be “one body” (1 Cor. 12:12). Believers are not to be isolated and autonomous; they are to be connected in purpose and identity. Second, Paul emphasizes that tremendous diversity exists within this unity, (i.e., “many parts”; 1 Cor. 12:12). Believers are never expected to be identical replicas of one another. They are to recognize and celebrate their God-created and Spirit-given differences in the context of unity. Third, Paul teaches the essential and profound nature of belonging to one another (1 Cor. 12:14-16). Members of the body of Christ relinquished self-possession and other group ownership and acknowledged that their true home and identity was found in the church. Fourth, Paul proclaims that members of the body of Christ are mutually interdependent on one another (1 Cor. 12:16-21). Every part of the body needs every other part to function fully. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 12:21, “The eye cannot say to the hand, ‘I don’t need you!’ And the head cannot say to the feet, ‘I don’t need you!’” Fifth, Paul exhorts the early Church that all parts of the body are necessary and valuable (1 Cor. 12:22-25). In 1 Corinthians 12:22 Paul says that the weaker parts are “indispensable.” No hierarchy of value is present in Paul’s understanding of the body of Christ. Sixth, Paul teaches that believers are to be invested and involved in each others’ lives (1 Cor. 12:25-26). Believers are to show care for each other and “if one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it” (1 Cor. 12:26). Seventh, Paul

has clear convictions that the church is Christ's body and the body has been arranged according to his purposes (12:18, 27). Elsewhere, Paul simply says that Christ "is the head of the body, the church" (Col. 1:18).

In Paul's own life and ministry he was continually connected with others. He predominantly uses familial language to describe his relationships. The three-day isolation of his conversion came to a close when a previously unknown but faithful Christ follower named Ananias laid his hands upon Paul and called him "brother" (Acts 9:17). Immediately after his conversion Paul connected with the disciples in Damascus (Acts 9:19). This newfound community of faith later risked their lives for his rescue (Acts 9:24-25). In his first visit to the Jerusalem disciples, Barnabas stood with him and brought him to the apostles and then spoke on his behalf (Acts 9:27). Paul then lived with this new family in Jerusalem with those he termed "the brothers" (Acts 9:28-30). The same brothers saved him from the Grecian Jews. Several years later, Barnabas, who had initially befriended Paul, brought him to Antioch for a year of fruitful ministry (Acts 11:25-26). This Christian community in Antioch entrusted Paul and Barnabas with a gift of aide for their Judean "brothers" (Acts 11:30). Paul and Timothy were very close to one another in ministry and in life. Paul refers to Timothy as his "true son in the faith" (1 Tim. 1:2).

Paul's continual connection to others is also seen in his ministry partnerships and numerous friendships. The Antioch community "placed their hands on them [Paul and Barnabas] and sent them off" (Acts 13:3) to minister together throughout the Roman Empire. Paul joined with Silas, Timothy, Luke, Priscilla, Aquilla, and numerous others on his missionary journeys. The lists of those greeted in his letters show the connection he had with many fellow servants of Christ. Even as he wrote from prison he had faithful

companions who undergirded him in faith and ministry (Col. 4:7-18). Paul also displayed remarkable closeness and vulnerability to those with whom he ministered in Ephesus (Acts 20:36-38).

A quick reading of Galatians 1, when taken out of context, makes Paul seem a little bit like a first century “Lone Ranger” or “Marlboro Man.” He comes across as fiercely independent and even isolationist in his approach. Witherington picks up on this Pauline tendency in his work Grace in Galatia as he discusses the impression of Paul as an isolated holy man and the perception of Paul as a “maverick” (111). From a broader view of his ministry, however, Paul clearly exhibits an obvious nonindependence. Malina and Neyrey see Paul as a “group-oriented person, deeply and permanently embedded in significant others” throughout his ministry (202). They perhaps overstate the importance of one’s community in regards to Paul when commenting on the general cultural milieu of the first century: “All persons were basically group-made persons, never self-made persons” (203). Paul’s communal and dependent nature is seen throughout his ministry. In Acts 9 Paul allowed the brothers to take him down to Caesarea and send him off to Tarsus (9:30). In Thessalonica Paul and Silas were dependent on the brothers to secure their safe passage to Berea (Acts 17:10). On arriving there, the Berean brothers had to rescue Paul by sending him away to the coast (Acts 17:14). Wherever Paul and his companions went, this network of brothers became instant family.

Paul was not alone in his love for the Lord and passion for the lost. Throughout his travels, imprisonments, and mission, he was surrounded by brothers and sisters in the Lord. Romans 16 offers a wonderful sampling of Paul’s extended faith family. Phoebe was a great help to Paul (Rom. 16:2). Priscilla and Aquilla who were long-time fellow workers risked their lives for Paul (16:3-4). Epenetus, the first convert to Christ in the

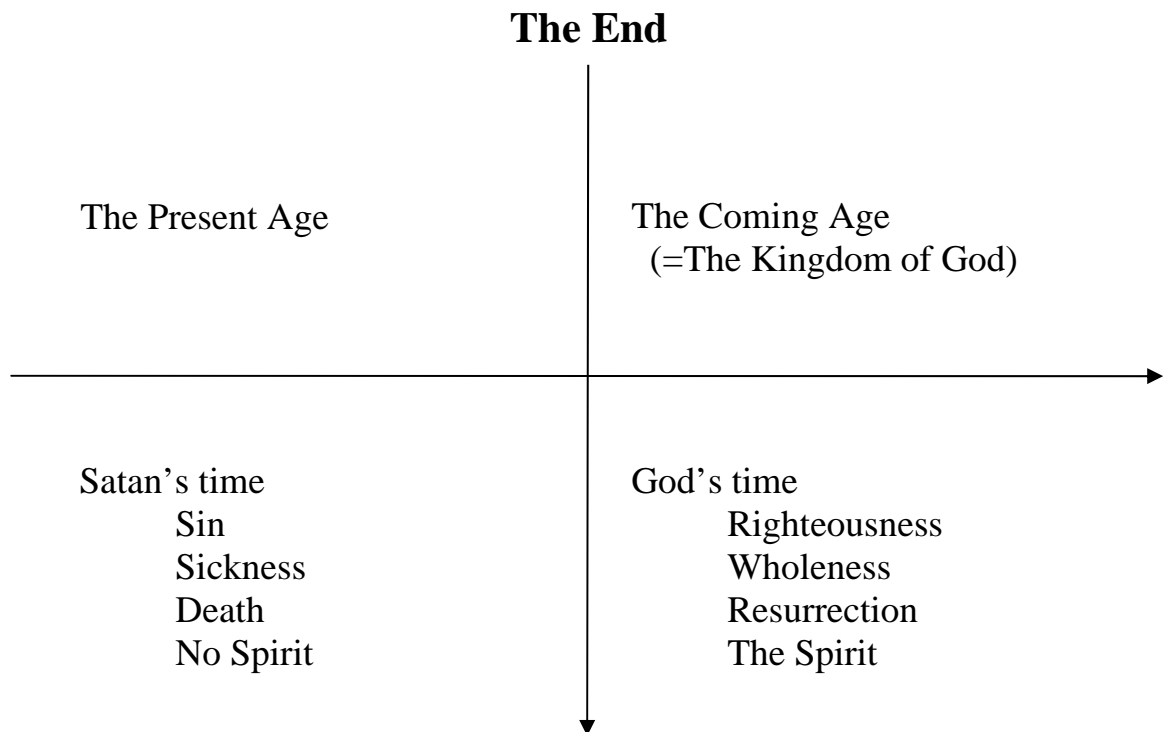
Province of Asia, was Paul's dear friend (16:5). Such references and relationships are scattered throughout Paul's other letters, as well. Tychicus was with him while he was imprisoned and writing to the Ephesians (Eph. 6:21). Epaphroditus was sent by the church in Philippi to take care of Paul. Onesiphorus encouraged and refreshed Paul and was willing to minister to Paul even while he was imprisoned (2 Tim. 1:16). Deep connections and intimate, mutually encouraging relationships existed between Paul and those with whom he ministered. Paul had an intentional and specific willingness to attach himself to other believers. Even in his struggle with the Jerusalem elders he worked with these leaders not separate from them. In Philippi Paul had a wonderful group of women who contended by his side in the cause of the gospel (Phil. 4:3).

Paul was a built-to-last pastor who persevered in pastoral excellence because community was a way of life for him. Everywhere that Paul journeyed and ministered, he served with and alongside others. Deep and interdependent relationships characterized Paul's ministry from beginning to end. The following axiom drawn from Paul's life and ministry is for twenty-first century pastors who are seeking to persevere in pastoral excellence. Built-to-last pastors do not have the luxury of autonomy and isolation; instead, they are called to a life and ministry in the context of authentic, Christ-centered community.

### **Eschatology That Lasts**

Eschatology is the view of the end of time. Gordon D. Fee stresses the significance of New Testament eschatology in the life and ministry of Paul and of the contemporary church. When asked the question, "If you were to return to pastoral ministry, what would you emphasize?" Fee immediately responds, "No matter how long it might take, I would set about with a single passion to help a local body of believers

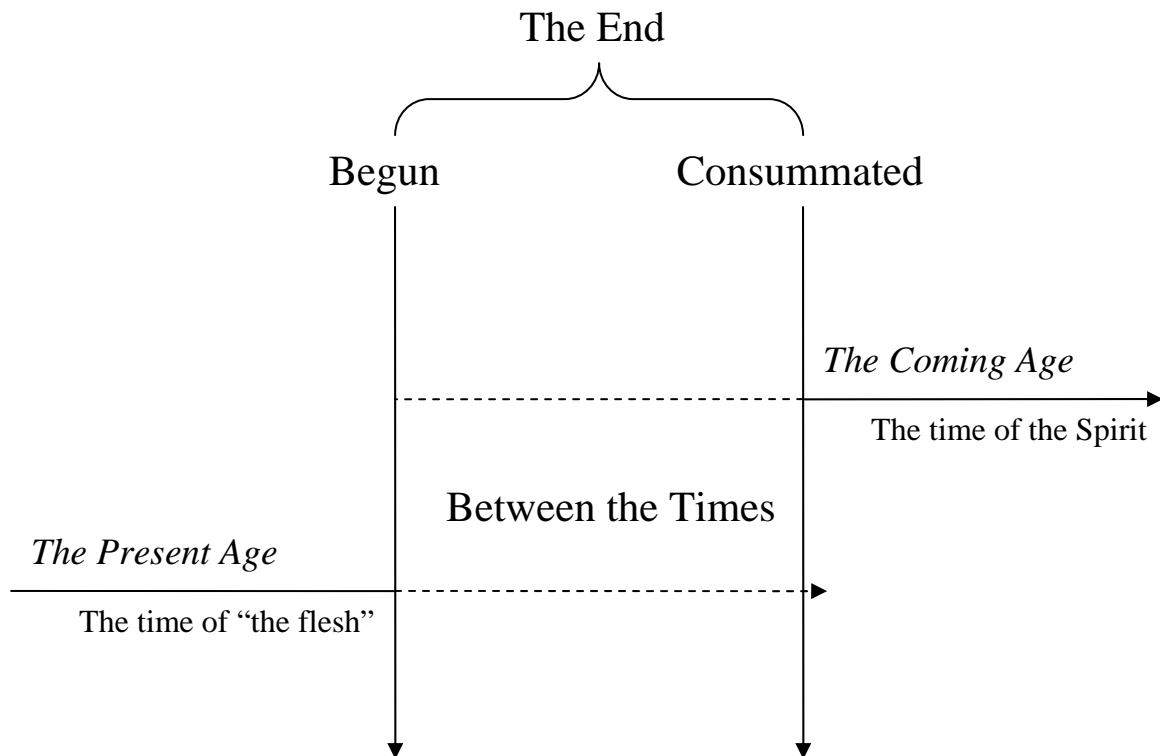
recapture the New Testament church’s understanding of itself as an eschatological community” (49). How the early Church, and particularly Paul, saw the end had huge impact on how they lived and viewed reality. Typical first century Judaism saw the Messiah bringing about a dramatic end to the present age and, in turn, ushering in the coming age. Judaistic eschatology is diagramed in Figure 2.1.



**Figure 2.1. Paul's eschatology prior to his conversion.**

The early Church and Paul had a similar but distinctive eschatological understanding. They saw that the end of the age had begun in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus and in the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Peter's preaching on the day of Pentecost clearly shows that the brand-new church saw itself as living in the "last days" (Acts 2:17) of Joel's end-time prophecy (Joel 2:28-32). The present age had

passed, and they were already living in the beginning of the end times. The early Christians believed that they had not yet experienced the completion or consummation of the end and the total coming of the future age. The eschatology of Paul and the early Church is diagrammed in Figure 2.2.



**Figure 2.2. Paul's eschatology after his conversion.**

Paul's preaching illustrated his eschatological framework. Paul preached that God's salvation of his people had already been accomplished by Christ (Eph. 2:8) and that their final salvation was still in process and not yet fully experienced (1 Cor. 1:18). Paul preached redemption as a present reality (Eph. 1:7) and also as a promised reality of a day yet to come (Eph. 4:30). Paul preached that believers have already received the "spirit of sonship" and that they already have the assurance that they are God's children

(Rom. 8:15-16). Paul also preached, however, that believers are eagerly still longing for “adoption as sons.” Such an adoption according to Paul has not yet been fully known.

Fee says that Paul sees the church as “an end-time community, whose members live in the present as those stamped with eternity” (52). Paul lived in Antioch, but his true citizenship is in heaven (Phil. 3:20). Paul was in touch with his earthly situation, but he clearly understands that the realities of the “not yet” had broken into this “already” realm. The presence of the “already” in the “not yet” is especially true in regards to the Holy Spirit whom Paul sees as both the evidence and guarantee that the coming future is present and available for every believer in the here and now (54). Paul uses three metaphors to describe the Spirit’s work in the life of the believer.

**Down payment.** Paul teaches in 2 Corinthians 1:22 that God “put his Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come.” The New Revised Standard Version says the Spirit is the “first installment,” which is a guarantee of what is promised (2 Cor. 1:22). In 2 Corinthians 5:5, Paul says, “Now it is God who has made us for this very purpose and has given us the Spirit as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come.” Ephesians 1:14 says that the Holy Spirit is “a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God’s possession.” The Greek “ἀρᾶβων” (Thayer) is used only these three times in the New Testament. “Ἀρᾶβων” is used as a technical term for the first installment of the total amount due. According to Fee the down payment “both establishes the contractual obligation and guarantees its fulfillment” (54). The presence of the Holy Spirit in Paul’s life let him know that the coming age had broken into the current age. The experience of God’s Spirit in the life of the believer is both a preview and guarantee of what is to come.

**Firstfruits.** Firstfruits is a Pauline term used in reference to Christ’s resurrection.



The firstfruits give a taste and yet also a promise of the harvest's completion. In Romans 8:23 Paul uses the metaphor of firstfruits in regards to the Holy Spirit. "Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies." The Spirit is the ripe and tasty reality experienced in the here and now, but he is also God's pledge to believers of the full harvest that is yet to come.

**Seal.** The seal is a Pauline metaphor used three times in reference to the Spirit (2 Cor. 1:21-22; Eph. 1:13; 4:30). In New Testament times, a seal was literally "a stamped impression in wax or clay, signaling ownership and authenticity, and carrying with it the protection of the owner" (Fee 55). The ownership, authenticity, and protection of the Holy Spirit is an "already" reality in the 2 Corinthians 1:21-22 and Ephesians 1:13 but is a "not yet" promise in Ephesians 4:30 where the Holy Spirit is the one who has believers "sealed for the day of redemption" that is still to come.

Paul's "already" but "not yet" perspective had two significant results. First, Paul's perspective gave him the confidence that his reality involved more than his current experience. No matter how difficult the trials and struggles, a greater and more lasting reality was on its way. The picture of Paul and Silas sitting in a prison praying and singing hymns to God at midnight after being stripped and severely flogged is a vivid portrait of Paul's eschatology (Acts 16:25).

Second, Paul knew that the not yet realities had and could break through into his day. The age of the Spirit was available to the believer through the person and work of the Holy Spirit in the here and now. The Holy Spirit was not simply to come; he was already present. The Holy Spirit in Paul's life and in the lives of those to whom he ministered was a demonstration that God's future had already been set in motion (Fee

61).

Another important eschatological term for Paul was “βεμα.” The term “βεμα” was a judicial term used almost exclusively in the New Testament to refer to the place of judgment of given leaders: Pilate (Matt. 27:19; John 19:13), Gallio (Acts 18:12-17), Festus (Acts 25:6,17), and Caesar (Acts 25:10). Βεμα was literally a “raised place mounted by steps” (Thayer). Paul exclusively used βεμα to describe the eschatological reality of standing before God’s judgment seat in Romans 14:10 and 2 Corinthians 5:10. Paul believed two important principles about the βεμα. First, all believers would appear before “the judgment seat of Christ” (2 Cor. 5:10). Second, the judgment seat was a place of evaluation and reward. Paul’s view of what would happen in the end motivated him in the present. In 1 Corinthians 9:24-27, he describes how he is running a race for an ultimate prize:

Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize. Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last forever. Therefore I do not run like a man running aimlessly; I do not fight like a man beating the air. No, I beat my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize.

Paul lived out his ministry with an awareness of the greater audience whom he served (1 Cor. 5:11). Paul even says that one of the motivating factors of his “ministry of reconciliation” (2 Cor. 5:18) is his “fear of the Lord” (2 Cor. 5:11). Paul believed that he had been given a special trust and that it was required of him to be proven faithful. His concern was not how he might be judged by a human court but rather how he fared before the court of the Lord (1 Cor. 4:1-4).

Paul is a built-to-last pastor because he knew the reality of the indwelling Spirit of God and he had a confidence that God’s reign had already broken into the here and now.

Paul also knew that something even better, greater, and more complete awaited him and his fellow believers. Paul lived his life fully cognizant that he had concurrent citizenship and that his ultimate audience was none other than the living God. The following axiom arises from Paul's life and ministry and is relevant to all pastors who desire to persevere in pastoral excellence. Built-to-last pastors do not allow the present to define reality but instead view the present from the perspective of the future. These pastors know that reality is more than the here and now and that the reality of God's Spirit is available to all who desire him.

### **Deviancy That Lasts**

In Romans 12:2 Paul proclaims, "Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind." In the dyadic world of the first century, conformity was a supreme value. In many ways Paul was a deviant to the social norms of his day. Witherington says Paul intentionally "launched a process of deconstructing some of the culture's basic assumptions about human beings" (Paul Quest 33). In a culture that was often static and unchanging and where everyone's place in life was set, Paul believed and preached that a person can experience radical change and begin a completely new life (2 Cor. 5:17; Gal. 3:28). This kind of thinking and preaching was extremely countercultural. Paul's deviancy is especially seen in his approach to boasting and in his uncompromising commitment to the gospel mission.

Paul often took the ordinary forms and structures of his day and transformed them into tools of sharing the good news (i.e., his greetings in the epistles). One of the norms of Paul's culture was boasting. He lived in an agonistic culture that valued honor over life. Social interactions outside of one's family and friends were perceived as "honor challenges" (Witherington, Paul Quest 47). As was customary, Paul often boasted of his

ethnic and religious origins. He boasted that he was “of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee” (Phil. 3:5). In Jerusalem before an angry mob, Paul boasted that he was born in Tarsus and raised in Jerusalem (Acts 22:3). Both of these cities were *πολις* of significant status (Malina and Neyrey 204). In Philippians 3:6 Paul boasted that he was “blameless” in regards to the law, which was indicative of his fervent dedication as a Pharisee. He boasted in his religious training: “Under Gamaliel I was thoroughly trained in the law of our fathers” (Acts 22:3). His ethnic and religious origins are both included as he boasted in Acts 23:6: “I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee.” Such boasting was normal honor protocol in the first century. Paul became a deviant to this protocol when he followed such boasting with Philippians 3:7: “[B]ut whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ.” His deviancy is further seen as he chose to boast in his weakness in what came across as an anti-boast. In 1 Corinthians 4:9-13 Paul characterized himself using a list of fourteen humbling phrases to describe himself: the last in line, one condemned to die, a spectacle, a fool for Christ, weak and dishonored, hungry and thirsty, one in rags who is brutally treated, homeless, a manual laborer, cursed, slandered, persecuted, scum of the earth, and refuse of the world. In another letter to the Corinthians, he again openly boasted in his sufferings for the sake of Christ:

Are they servants of Christ? (I am out of my mind to talk like this.) I am more. I have worked much harder, been in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely, and been exposed to death again and again. Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my own countrymen, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false brothers. (2 Cor. 11:23-27)

Paul says in 2 Corinthians 11:30, “If I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness.” Second Corinthians 12:1-10 is a familiar passage about Paul’s “thorn in the flesh” (2 Cor. 12:7). He concludes this passage with a statement about boasting:

[T]herefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me. That is why for Christ’s sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong. (2 Cor. 12:9-10)

Paul’s weaknesses provided one more opportunity for him to use the protocols of his day to communicate the message of Christ.

The doctrine of “sola gratia” arises out of Paul’s boasting deviancy. In Ephesians 2:8-9 Paul preaches that salvation is “by grace.” He emphasizes that salvation is “not by works, so that no one can boast” (Eph. 2:9). Paul’s emphasis was that a person’s status before God has nothing to do with one’s own accomplishments and yet everything to do with God’s grace. In a culture that was about boasting in oneself, Paul doubly exhorted the Christians in Corinth to “boast only in the Lord” (1 Cor. 1:31; 2 Cor. 10:17).

Paul’s deviant identity was also seen in his commitment to the primacy of the gospel over all other concerns. Loyalty to the group was definitely important to Paul, but it was secondary to the fulfillment of his mission of preaching the gospel. Barrett states that “Paul’s whole life was determined by one conviction. ‘All I do, I do for the sake of the gospel’” (61). Barrett is quoting from 1 Corinthians 9:23, which concludes a section of Scripture where Paul is passionately stating his “modus operandi.” Paul says in 1 Corinthians 9:22 that “I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some.” His whole life and ministry was committed to bringing people to Christ. Acts 15:36-51 records the details of the severing disagreement that took place between Paul and Barnabas over John Mark. Paul and Barnabas had been “brothers,” fellow leaders, and ministers in the gospel mission. Barnabas was the one who initially

stood with Paul before the Jerusalem elders (Acts 9:27) and who was especially set apart with him for ministry by the Antioch church (Acts 13:3). Paul and Barnabas' relationship represented years of friendship and co-laboring. Now Barnabas, known as "Son of Encouragement" (Acts 4:36), wanted to bring the unproven and fallen John Mark to share in the mission of proclaiming the gospel. Paul was resolute, however, and was not willing to let anything or anyone compromise the mission. He believed John Mark to be a risk. Paul's priority was the gospel. Everything else, even mentoring a young minister and staying in relationship with a long-time friend, was secondary. Throughout his ministry Paul pursued an unceasing passion to keep the communication of the gospel primary. As a dyadic person, Paul's radical insistence of purpose over person was truly countercultural. Persons who are from group and communal cultures are not expected to have such strong personal opinions (Malina and Neyrey 214).

Paul's worldview through which he filtered all reality and discerned and evaluated his effectiveness is found in 2 Corinthians 5:18-20. According to Paul, the purpose of ministry was to reconcile persons to God (2 Cor. 5:18). The ministry of reconciliation was made possible as Paul and his fellow believers lived as "Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us" (2 Cor. 5:20). As Christ's ambassadors, Paul's focus was not so much on the message or the messengers but on the recipients. Second Corinthians 6:3-13 displays the lengths to which Paul and his associates were willing to go in order to connect the gospel effectively to those in Corinth. Paul and his fellow ministers were intentional to remove the cultural stumbling blocks (2 Cor. 6:3), and they validated their ministry and showed the integrity of their faith "in every way" (2 Cor. 6:4) from hunger to hard work, from insults to imprisonment, from right living to right speaking, from great sorrow to great joy (2 Cor.

6:4-10). Paul and his companions spoke with great vulnerability freely and openly baring their hearts (2 Cor. 6:11), and they perilously, unconditionally, and intimately gave their affection and love to the Corinthians not knowing how they would respond (2 Cor. 6:12). In short, Paul was willing to do whatever he could to proclaim the gospel of Christ effectively. The priority of preaching the gospel took Paul throughout the known world and into the very throne of Rome before his death. His self-understanding as one “called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God” (Rom. 1:1) meant that Paul lived in profound deviancy from his surrounding culture. Paul saw his identity not so much as being defined by his social and familial context. Paul instead primarily discovered, understood, and experienced his identity through his supernatural call of proclaiming the gospel.

Paul is a great example to all who long to persevere in pastoral excellence because he was willing to be different. He was willing to use innovative techniques to bring the gospel to a needy world. Paul never settled for a comfortable conformity but rather went against cultural mores as the need arose to connect the gospel to new people groups. Paul also took the norms of his day, such as boasting, and redefined and reused them in such a way as to communicate the message of Christ more and more effectively. The following axiom arises out of Paul’s predilection toward deviancy. Built-to-last pastors will not conform to the ecclesiastical world or to the world around them but will be transformed by the primacy of God’s purpose in their lives.

### **Expectations That Last**

Paul’s expectations of ministry were anything but idealistic. Paul presents a long list of sufferings in 1 Corinthians 4:9-13 and 2 Corinthians 11:23-27. Paul considered this list to be the normative experience for those who are serving in ministry. To Paul,

suffering, conflict, resistance, and rejection were just part of the job description of being an apostle and ambassador for Christ. In 2 Corinthians 4:1-18, he discusses some of the inevitable struggles of ministry. Discouragement, temptations to deceive and distort, and lack of receptivity are all experienced by Paul and his fellow ministers. Paul describes ministers as being fragile “jars of clay” who carry around a valuable treasure (2 Cor. 4:7). Paul and his companions knew the reality of being pressed on every side, perplexed, persecuted, and struck down (2 Cor. 4:8-9). They experienced the deep reality of bearing in their bodies “the death of Jesus” (2 Cor. 4:10). They understood having “death at work” in them (2 Cor. 4:12). The full text of 2 Corinthians 4:8-10 shows the purposeful outcome of the sufferings that Paul and his companions endured:

[W]e are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body.

The purpose clause of 2 Corinthians 4:10 indicates that through Paul and his fellow ministers’ suffering, struggle, and weakness the life of Jesus is revealed to others.

In a course on the Theology of Christian Ministry, Dr. Stephen Seamands, Professor of Theology at Asbury Seminary, says, “[T]he problem with most of us who minister is not that we’re not strong enough; it’s that we are not weak enough!” Alexander Maclaren, a great British preacher of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, says, “If a man considers himself to be an iron pillar, he is of no use to God. God works through broken reeds” (qtd. in Seamands). Paul not only knew and expected the struggles of ministry, he also understood the paradox of Christian ministry that God’s strength was made perfect in human weakness (2 Cor. 12:9).

Paul was not only clear in what he expected of the context of effective ministry. He was also clear about how to deal with such afflictions and trials. In 2 Corinthians



4:13-5:10, Paul describes how he and his co-laborers responded to the challenges of ministry:

- 4:13 “With that same spirit of faith we also believe and therefore speak,”
- 4:16 “we do not lose heart,”
- 4:18 “we fix our eyes on what’s unseen,”
- 5:2 “we groan longing to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling,”
- 5:6 “we are always confident,”
- 5:7 “we live by faith, not by sight,” and
- 5:9 “we make it our goal to please him.”

Many contemporary pastors are diligently striving to avoid the things Paul assumes to be a foundational part of ministry. While being hard pressed, perplexed, struck down, and always carrying around the death of Jesus are part of Paul’s first century pastoral theology, contemporary American pastors are often more characterized by their search for career advancement and ministerial benefits. The avoidance of suffering and pain is a definite value in twenty-first century American culture. Living with the absolute preference for convenience and comfort is to misunderstand how God works in the world through what Paul calls “jars of clay” (2 Cor. 4:7).

Paul willingly sacrificed himself throughout his life and ministry. Malina and Neyrey say that Paul’s “value of constantly attending to collateral relations leads inevitably to the consequent value of ‘self-sacrifice’” (197). Paul interpreted his whole life as a sacrificial offering unto God. The teaching of Romans 12:1, “therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship,” was not a mere exhortation from Paul, but a way of life for Paul. In Philippians 2:17 he rejoices that he is “being poured

out like a drink offering.” Paul considered serving others to be an act of worship. In 2 Corinthians 9:12 the Greek word for service is λειτουργία, which has priestly connotations and is a function of worship (Thayer). Paul encourages such service in Romans 13:6, 15:27, Philippians 2:30, 1 Corinthians 4:1, and 12:4-6. Paul also modeled and taught followers of Christ to put the needs of others before their own. In Philippians 2:3-4 he explicitly tells the Philippians how to live a lifestyle of self-sacrifice. First, Paul exhorts them to “do nothing out of selfish ambition.” Next, he encourages them to “consider others better than yourselves.” Lastly, he tells them “not [to] look to your own interests but to the interests of others.” For Paul the ultimate example of such an attitude is found in Jesus (Phil. 2:5-11). To the Corinthians he wrote, “Nobody should seek his own good, but the good of others” (1 Cor. 10:24). In his letter to the Galatians, Paul says that they are free in Christ, and then he encourages them: “[U]se your freedom to ... serve one another in love” (Gal. 5:13).

One of the core values in Paul’s life and ministry was enduring perseverance (Malina and Neyrey 194). Paul knew that struggles would come, and he knew that he would experience suffering that was both external and internal in nature. Such knowledge called forth in Paul an expectation of and a radical commitment to perseverance. Malina and Neyrey point out seven linguistic expressions of endurance that Paul emphasized in his Epistles. One Pauline expression for endurance was υποφέρω. This word means “to put up with” (194). Υποφέρω is used in 1 Corinthians 10:13: “God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your strength, but with the temptation will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.” A second Pauline expression was προσκαρτερεω, which means to “keep on” (194). Colossians 4:2 is an example of προσκαρτερεω. “Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful with thanksgiving”

(Col. 4:2). A third expression used by Paul was μένω meaning to “remain” (194). Paul uses μένω in 1 Corinthians 7:8: “To the unmarried and the widows I say that it is well for them to remain single as I do.” A fourth Pauline expression is στέγω, which means to “bear with, put up with” (194). Στέγω is used in 1 Corinthians 9:12: “Nevertheless, we have not made use of this right, but we endure anything rather than put an obstacle in the way of the gospel of Christ.” Another Pauline expression is ἀνεχομαι, which means to “tolerate” (194). A Scripture that uses ἀνεχομαι is 2 Thessalonians 1:4: “Therefore we ourselves boast of you in the churches of God for your steadfastness and faith in all your persecutions and in the afflictions which you are enduring.” A sixth Pauline expression is ὑπομένω, which means “to persevere” (194). First Corinthians 13:7 uses ὑπομένω: “Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.” A final Pauline expression for endurance is μακροθυμία, which is translated patience. First Thessalonians 5:14 uses μακροθυμία: “Encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with them all.”

Paul is a great example to all who long to persevere in pastoral excellence because he did not just talk endurance; he lived it. His commitment to endurance and perseverance in the midst of all kinds of challenges and trials paved the way for God’s power to be known in and through his life. Paul expected the life of ministry to be a life of suffering, and so it was. His realistic expectations were matched by his supernatural perseverance. The following axiom arises out of Paul’s dogged determination to overcome against all odds. Built-to-last pastors realize that ministry involves suffering, and they are committed to lives of self-sacrifice and endurance fully knowing that God’s strength is made known in their weakness.

## **Spiritual Formation That Lasts**

Witherington emphasizes the trinitarian nature of Paul's identity as Jew, Roman citizen, and Christian (Paul Quest 52). Barrett highlights Paul as being simultaneously both theologian and missionary (61). David Fisher sees Paul as the ideal model for pastoral ministry in the twenty-first century (11). Malina and Neyrey call attention to Paul's collectivist nature (156). Countless works stress other attributes of Paul. No study of Paul's ministry-sustaining traits would be complete, however, without first taking a look at his commitment to spiritual disciplines.

Paul was a consummate man of prayer. The depth and breadth of his prayer life affected every aspect of his life. Paul began praying at his conversion (Acts 9:11), and the rest of his life was defined by ongoing conversation with and surrender to God in prayer. He prayed corporately (Acts 13:3) and individually (Philem. 1:6). He prayed for his fellow believers (Rom. 1:10; 2 Cor. 13:7; Eph. 1:16; Phil. 1:3-4; Col. 1:3; 1 Thess. 1:2; Philem. 1:4), and he prayed for those who did not know Christ (Acts 26:29; Rom. 10:1). Paul prayed for believers to go further in their faith (Eph. 3:16; Col. 1:10; Phil. 1:9) and for the gospel to be spread effectively into the world (Eph. 6:19-20; Col. 4:3-4; 2 Thess. 3:1). Paul prayed in tongues, in the Spirit, and fully cognizant in his mind (1 Cor. 14:14-15). Paul commanded believers to pray (Rom. 12:2; Eph. 6:18), and he needed prayer himself (Rom. 15:30-31, 2 Cor. 1:11). Paul prayed for physical survival in the midst of shipwreck (Acts 27:29), and he prayed for emotional and spiritual survival in the midst of intense conflict (Rom. 15:31). Paul prayed when he was seeking God's leadership (Acts 2-3), and he prayed when he was seeking God's leaders (Acts 14:23). He prayed when he was imprisoned and badly beaten (Acts 16:25), and he prayed in the embrace of dear friends in Christ (Acts 20:36-37). Paul believed in the power of prayer to bring healing

(Acts 28:8) and the offering of prayer as an act of loving gratitude (2 Cor. 9:14). In 1 Thessalonians 5:17, Paul offers one of the shortest and yet most powerful exhortations in the Bible: “Pray continually.” For Paul, this teaching was no casual refrain; praying continually was a way of life. Paul uses similar adverbial phrases to describe the act of praying throughout his ministry: “at all times” (Rom. 1:10), “on all occasions” (Eph. 6:18), “always” (Eph. 6:18; Phil. 1:4), “night and day” (1 Thess. 1:2), and “constantly” (2 Thess. 1:11). Much has been said and written of Paul’s effectiveness in mission, leadership, and theology. His life of prayer played a significant role in his overall effectiveness in ministry, and prayer was also a pivotal key to Paul’s lasting effectiveness and endurance in ministry.

Paul also practiced the spiritual discipline of worship and service. In fact, Paul understood serving as an act of worship, and in Romans 12:1-2 proclaims that believers are to give themselves to God in worship as his living sacrifices. Worship of God and relationship with God were never to be confined to just one moment. Paul understood life in Christ to be an ongoing offering and act of worship that involved the believer’s daily living. In 1 Corinthians 12-14 Paul specifically addresses the use of spiritual gifts in the context of corporate worship, but he points the Corinthians to a higher and more excellent way (1 Cor. 12:31)—the way of love. In 1 Corinthians 13:1-13, this way of love has profound implications not just for believers’ relationship with God but for believers’ relationships with others. Paul lived out his love for God with an unrelenting and serving love of others. An illustration of how Paul connected one’s vertical relationship with God with one’s horizontal relationships with others is seen in the structuring of his letters. In Ephesians for example, he builds a beautiful case of God’s amazing love for humanity in Ephesians 1:1- 4:16, and then he begins to explain what this love should look like in the

Ephesians' daily lives. These chapters specifically address the believers' relationships with the body of Christ, their society, their families, and their work situations (Eph. 4:17-6:9). Spiritual formation for Paul involved more than spiritual acts; it entailed a loving lifestyle. Paul exhorted the Ephesians to live a life of sexual purity (Eph. 4:19) and right relationships (Eph. 4: 24). He encouraged the believers to live in truthfulness, integrity, and control with one another (Eph. 4: 25-27). Believers were supposed to live a life of honest gain and willing contribution for the sake of others (Eph. 4:28). Paul told the Ephesians to build each other up and to get rid of the relational killers of bitterness, rage, anger, brawling, slander, and malice. He taught them to be kind, compassionate, forgiving, Christlike, and full of love for one another (Eph. 4:29-5:2). Paul instructed the believers to live carefully, wisely, and opportunistically (Eph. 5:15-16). He told them to take out the bad influences like drunkenness and depravity and to put into their lives the positive influences like godly conversations, songs, and hymns. He especially exhorted them to put into their lives the fullness of the Holy Spirit (Eph. 5:17-19). In Ephesians 5:21-6:4, Paul skillfully and insightfully addresses Christian marriage, parenting, and the responsibilities of children. In Ephesians 6:5-9, Paul encourages Christ-centered relationships between slave and slave owner. While most moderns readily critique Paul's non-abolitionism, they miss out on his powerful teaching about human relationships. Slaves are to work unto the Lord, and they are to see and treat their masters as if they were Jesus. Masters are to treat their slaves as if they were Jesus, and Paul reminds the masters that the real Master of both slave and owner is the Lord above. For Paul, right relationship with God entails and requires right relationship with one another.

Paul's spiritual formation can only adequately be understood in the context of the Holy Spirit's work in Paul's life. The Holy Spirit played a prominent role in Paul's

teaching and living. His New Testament writings include 140 references to the Spirit (Fee 28). For Paul, the Holy Spirit was the personal and powerful reality and presence of God himself (28). On at least three occasions in Acts, Paul was “filled with the Holy Spirit” (Acts 9:17; 13:9; 13:52). The Holy Spirit is the one who called Paul into ministry (Acts 13:2), set him apart, and sent him out in mission (Acts 13:4). The Holy Spirit was a constant guide and companion to Paul throughout his ministry. The Holy Spirit would not let Paul preach in the province of Asia (Acts 16:6), but the Spirit compelled Paul to go to Jerusalem (Acts 20:22). The Holy Spirit warned Paul of future calamity (Acts 21:11), and the Holy Spirit brought him great joy (Acts 13:52). Paul experienced the Holy Spirit as the Giver of wonderful gifts for ministry (1 Cor. 12:1-11). The Spirit gave these gifts at his discretion (1 Cor. 12:11) for the purpose of building up the body of Christ so that God’s people would be prepared for works of service (Eph. 4:12). In 1 Corinthians 12:7 Paul tells believers that the Spirit’s gifts are given for the “common good.” For Paul, the Holy Spirit was also the source of the Christlike fruit of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness, and self-control (Gal. 5:22). The Holy Spirit was Paul’s helper and confidant who knew both God’s heart and his heart (Rom. 8:26-27). Paul taught that the Holy Spirit dwelt and lived in those who believed in Christ (1 Cor. 3:16). The person of the Holy Spirit was central and foundational to Paul’s identity in Christ and to Paul’s ministry for Christ. Fee says that “one reads Paul poorly who does not recognize that for him the presence of the Spirit, as an experienced and living reality, was the crucial matter for Christian life, from beginning to end” (xiii).

Paul is a great example to all who long to persevere in pastoral excellence because he was a man of prayer and godly relationships. Spiritual formation happened in his life and throughout his life because of his availability and openness to the Holy Spirit. Paul’s

commitment to his own spiritual formation provided the foundation for his endurance in ministry. The following axiom flows from the life of one who never stopped being spiritually formed into the image of Christ. Built-to-last pastors will never take for granted the necessity of a deep and growing relationship with God. These pastors will instead intentionally seek to be spiritually formed and shaped through prayer and life in the Holy Spirit.

### **Zeal That Lasts**

Witherington describes Paul's identity by saying that "zeal is a key clue to understanding Paul's personality both before and after he became a follower of Christ" (Paul Quest 52). In Romans 12:9 Paul begins a list of imperatives that read like a set of core values for those who seek to follow and serve Christ. In the midst of this list, Paul exhorts his brothers and sisters in Christ "never [to] be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord" (Rom. 12:11). The Greek word for zeal used in this verse is "ζεω" (Thayer). Ζεω was the root for a family of words used in the New Testament: ζηλοσ, ζηλω, and ζηλωτης (Strong 35). Zeal was primarily treated negatively apart from Paul. James used ζηλοσ and ζηλω exclusively in negative terms, and Luke used ζηλοσ and ζηλω throughout Acts to describe jealousy. In Acts 5:17 Luke spoke of the jealousy of the high priest against the apostles in Jerusalem. In Acts 13:45 he talked of the jealousy of the Jews against Paul and Barnabus in Pisidian Antioch. In Acts 17:5 he referenced the jealousy of the Thessalonian Jews against Paul and Silas. In Acts 7:9 Luke described the jealousy of the patriarchs against their brother Joseph (7:9). Both Luke and Paul used ζηλοσ and ζηλωτης when describing the uninformed, or pre-Christian, fervency of those who were zealous for God and for the law. In Acts 18:25 Luke used "ζεω" to describe Apollos and his speaking before Apollos



fully understood the Way. Paul treated this uninformed zeal as positive in intent but negative because of its focus. He portrayed himself prior to his conversion in similar terms “zealous for God” (Acts 22:3), “zealous for the traditions of the Father” (Gal. 1:4), and “zealous in his persecution of the church” (Phil. 3:6). Paul summed up his view of zeal in Galatians 4:18: “[I]t is fine to be zealous, provided the purpose is good, and to be so always and not just when I am with you.” Thayer defines zeal as an “excitement of mind” and “fervor of spirit.” Paul’s use of zeal seemed very akin to “passion” in contemporary English. One could easily describe Paul prior to conversion by simply saying that he had a passion for God and the persecution of the church. Paul took this zealousness and passion, which was very akin to drivenness, and proclaimed it good throughout his writings. Paul told the Corinthians to ζηλω the higher gifts (1 Cor. 12:31) and spiritual gifts (1 Cor. 14:1, 12, 39). Paul commended Epaphras to the Colossians because of his great ζηλοσ for them (Col. 4:13). Paul told Titus that Jesus gave himself up so that believers might be ζηλωτησ for good works (Tit. 2:14). Paul saw how godly sorrow produced a ζηλοσ for justice in the Corinthian believers (2 Cor. 7:11). Paul’s zeal and passion entailed a total surrender of his life to God. Galatians 2:20 is a testimony of Paul’s absolute zeal and commitment to Christ: “I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.” Philippians 1:21 is a motto of absolute zeal: “For me to live is Christ and to die is gain.”

Paul is a great example to all who long to persevere in pastoral excellence because he had an undeniable passion for God and ministry. Paul’s redirected understanding of zeal became an important and effective tool in strengthening his effectiveness and longevity in ministry. His zealousness for God was contagious and drew people to Christ.

Paul's God-directed zeal is reminiscent of Wesley's comment on preaching: "I just set myself on fire and folks come to watch me while I burn" (Hyles). The following axiom of pastoral perseverance arises from Paul's passionate living for Christ. Built-to-last pastors have a zeal and passion for God that leads to an absolute commitment to Christ.

### **Conclusion of Biblical Review**

Paul persevered in pastoral excellence for three decades. He was more than a survivor in ministry; he was an extraordinary influencer of people. God used Paul literally to change the face of planet Earth. Paul's amazing accomplishments through God's Spirit would never have been possible without his commitment to persevere. Paul's perseverance was no accident. God's Spirit established seven core ingredients that made Paul's perseverance a reality. These seven ingredients became core values to Paul's ministry. The first core value was that Paul's identity and value were found in God's grace. The second core value was that Paul understood and practiced the necessity of authentic Christ-centered community. His third core value was an eschatological belief that God's Spirit and reign had come into his contemporary reality. Paul's fourth core value was his willingness to be different and his commitment not to conform to this world but to be transformed by Christ. His fifth core value was that Paul expected ministry to be filled with extreme difficulty, and so he was resolved to endure and overcome all obstacles that came his way. The sixth core value was that Paul spent a lifetime being spiritually formed into the image of Christ. The last core value that made his perseverance a reality was his unending passion and zeal for God and his purposes. The cumulative effect of these values is a life spent making a difference.

### **Corresponding Literature**

This review of corresponding literature is structured around the seven core values

of the persevering excellence as found in Paul's life and ministry.

### **Core Value of Significance**

The identity of pastors is crucial to their longevity and effectiveness. The question of where one finds worth is essential to being and becoming a built-to-last pastor. Robert McGee describes two dangerous traps that can easily ensnare pastors. The performance trap occurs when personal worth and value are determined based on what a person accomplishes. The approval trap occurs when worth and value are based on what others feel or think about a person (43-65). In either case, worth and value remain extrinsic to the person. Pastors who fall into these traps will pursue an ever illusive objective. Paul found his significance in the grace of God. The grace Paul found was the unmerited and unconditional favor of God that accepted Paul where he was and took him where he needed to be. Paul spent his whole life prior to his conversion proving his worth to himself and to his religious peers. This pursuit was disciplined and zealous but void of the true meaning for which he was longing. Paul spoke of his years of pursuing righteousness by observing the law in Romans 3:20: "[T]herefore no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin." Paul's arduous pursuit had not brought him an awareness of significance but rather a clear understanding of his own sin. God's grace and love became the sure foundation of his identity:

But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. (Rom. 3:21-23)

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast. (Eph. 2:8-9)

For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Rom. 6:23)

God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. (Rom. 5:8)

For Paul, his worth was not something to strive for outside of himself. His value came from the abiding presence and work of God's grace and love within himself. Paul's significance was received in grace not achieved by his effort.

Willimon in Pastor: The Theology and Practice of Ordained Ministry describes pastoral ministry as "an act of God" (12). Willimon emphasizes that ministry is not so much a profession as it is a vocation. Ministry is what God is doing in pastors, with pastors, and through pastors. God is the initiator. The first and primary task of ministers is to yield themselves to God (14-15). Contemporary culture does not reward such a priority. In a culture dominated by consumerism, pastors are the salespeople of religious paraphernalia. Pastors are expected to be all things to all people. Stanley Hauerwas says that pastors today are a "quivering mass of availability" (qtd. in Willimon, "Damn Preacher" 18). Willimon points out that "in an affluent, consumerist, capitalist culture, attempting to 'help people' becomes extremely problematic among the well off" (Pastor 95). Desires are seen as needs, and needs are seen as rights. Since the culture has become a vast "supermarket of desire," anyone who aims at meeting needs will be on a never-ending chase. Willimon sees the rampant consumerism of contemporary American culture as being a primary reason many pastors suffer from debilitating fatigue (95).

Willimon enumerates thirteen factors of "why some pastors call it quits" (Pastor 316-25). First, the work of the church is never done. In both individual persons and the corporate body, the work of God is never complete. For many pastors, the needs seem endless and the resources limited. Second, the church does not give pastors a clear picture

of the expectations and tasks required in pastoral ministry. Without clear boundaries and expectations, pastors are often overwhelmed. One pastor expressed the issue this way to Willimon: “When I think of my congregation and my responsibility for them, I sometimes feel as if I’m standing before the ocean, and then the bishop hands me a teacup and says, ‘Start dipping and call me when you are done’” (Pastor 317). Third, some pastors leave the ministry because the church is a haven and refuge for people who have tremendous need. Churches are supposed to be safe places for people that the world discards and wounds. The very mission of Jesus is stated in Luke 19:10: “[F]or the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost.” Sick, hurting, and needy people can often be very demanding. Dale Galloway, in his many books on small groups, refers to such a person as an “EGR.” An EGR is a person for whom extra grace is required (74). Fourth, pastors are often forced to wear masks. Pastors are required to minister to a bereaved family with deep care and concern regardless of what they, themselves, may be feeling. This mask or *persona* has its place in ministry, but the danger is that it will become a way of life and a way of hiding from reality. Fifth, pastors leave because they may be exhausted from failure. The huge investments made by pastors through preaching, counseling, visiting, and caring are not guaranteed to have huge returns. Willimon says that pastors “do a great deal of standing by helplessly as people die, their marriages fail, their cancer does not heal, their enthusiasm lags, and their old self-destructive habits reappear. It does something to us” (Willimon, Pastor 320). Sixth, the church and ministry are not valued by the culture in which American pastors live. Pastoral ministers who were once the “custodians of the nation’s civil religion” (320) have now lost status and fallen in disrespect in the general culture. Seventh, many pastors serve in situations of institutional decline. Pastors serving in declining denominations or declining churches

often feel as if they are being trapped and brought down by the context in which they serve. Eighth, pastors quit because much of the church and its ministry is intellectual in nature. Pastors often neglect and ignore their physical and emotional needs. Ninth, pastors leave the ministry because they are poor time managers. They let the trivial replace the essential on a regular basis and soon find that they have nothing left to give. Tenth, pastors exit ministry because ministry can often be messy. Those pastors who have a high need for order and exactitude will often struggle with the ambiguous and muddled reality of dealing with the issues of real persons. Eleventh, pastors leave because they and the people they serve get in major conflict with their denomination. One pastor who left the Methodist church said, “When you are going north on a south bound train, it is hard to feel as if you are ever making any real progress” (McClendon). Twelfth, many women pastors leave because they are the victims of sexist attitudes of those within the church. Thirteenth, pastors leave because evil forces are at work to distract and destroy pastors. If Satan can destroy the pastor, he also brings down the pastor’s family, the pastor’s church, and the credibility and witness of the church in the world.

Willimon responds to this great list of pastoral hardships and struggles by emphasizing the constancy of pastoral vocation. Willimon says that, “our ultimate defense of pastoral work is simply that we have been called” (Pastor 334). Pastoral ministry is not a burden but a blessing and a joy because pastors are doing what God wants them to do and being who God wants them to be. “It is a matter of response to a divine summons, of saying yes to work together with God, a work not of our own devising, but of God’s” (334). Willimon proclaims what Paul lived out. The pastor’s identity and worth are found in God’s activity in them. Pastors who measure their worth

by their product or circumstances are missing out on the marvelous nature of God's grace and joy, and they are vulnerable to Willimon's daunting list of factors.

Bill Thrail, Bruce McNicol, and Ken McElrath describe the values that need to be fostered in order to secure one's excellence in leadership. The primary aim of their writing is to express what is involved in cultivating an environment that facilitates excellence of character and influence. These authors are convinced that "the ultimate determiner of the nature of our leadership" is character development (1) and that God's grace is crucial to healthy character development (29-30). They define character as the inner world of motives and values that shape the actions of leaders. Paul's values and beliefs are thoroughly shaped by his experience of God's grace in his life. Paul knew firsthand the unconditional and unmerited love of God. Paul proclaimed that he was "the worst of sinners" (1 Tim. 1:15-16). This understanding of his own sinfulness was just the first part of the story for Paul. The rest of the story is that "here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: *Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners* [emphasis mine]" (1 Tim. 1:15). Paul's identity and story is one in which God's grace always had the last, best, and most defining word.

### **Core Value of Community**

Some of the most exciting work being done in the area of sustaining pastoral excellence is coming out of the Pulpit and Pew project at Duke Divinity School. Scores of research projects are being undertaken under the Pulpit and Pew umbrella to address the following three sets of issues. The first issue is the state of contemporary pastoral leadership. Pastoral fallout and other current trends affecting pastoral ministry are of special interest because of how this and coming generations of ministers are being affected. The second issue involves discovering and defining good pastoral leadership in

this twenty-first century. The third issue is the development and growth of good pastoral leaders. Two questions that the Pulpit and Pew researchers are asking are what can be done by local churches, denominations, and seminaries to enable good pastoral leadership to come into being more frequently, and how can pastoral leadership be nurtured and supported more directly?

Many excellent articles and resources have been published from the Pulpit and Pew project, and many others are still to follow. One of the most insightful resources came from Carroll who is the Pulpit and Pew project leader from Duke Divinity School. Dr. Carroll presented the Ernest Cadman Colwell Lecture at the Claremont School of Theology in September 2002. In this lecture he offers four essential characteristics for what he calls “cruciform excellence.” This term originated after a paper presented by Christine Pohl reflected on the meaning of excellence in ministry. Pohl lifted up four factors at the heart of the Christian gospel. First, at the center of the minister’s preaching and hope is a crucified Savior. Second, the kingdom of God privileges the least and the last. Third, while pursuing holiness and excellence, Christians must also recognize the ongoing reality of human sinfulness. Forgiveness, restoration, and healing are essential. Fourth, the pastor’s own motives and efforts in ministry are a mixture of sin and grace (Carroll 8).

In the Colwell Lecture, Carroll gives four characteristics that are indispensable to enduring in a ministry of “cruciform excellence.” First, cruciform excellence is a communal project (9-10). Isolated and autonomous leadership increases pastoral burnout and limits pastoral effectiveness. Pastors who desire to persevere in pastoral excellence have to realize that true ministry is not their job but the responsibility of the *λαός*. This wonderful Greek word is used throughout the New Testament in reference to the whole



people of God. Apostles, teachers, elders, deacons, all followers of Christ are the λαος. R. Paul Stevens offers an in-depth, and sometimes radical, exploration of being called, serving and ministering as the whole people of God. The primary challenge found in Stevens' work and also in Carroll's lecture is for the contemporary American church to take seriously the biblical witness of being the λαος of God. For centuries, the Church and clergy have deemphasized the role of the laity and facilitated and encouraged a hierarchy and division within the body of Christ between lay and clergy. Clergy are not separate from the λαος. They are merely one part of the λαος (24-49). The result of this division in local churches, and the United Methodist Church in particular, is a passive and disengaged laity. Laypersons tend to understand ministry as something that is done to them and for them rather than through them. Ministers who are seeking "cruciform excellence" must become aware of the powerful teams to which they have been called. Paul ministered as one among many and constantly gave ministry away to others.

Second, cruciform excellence is costly. My high school football coach told his players, "[N]othing that is worthwhile in life is free, and anything that matters requires a great price." Carroll says that what is needed in today's world is a resiliency that is made up of toughness and elasticity (11).

Third, cruciform excellence requires agility. The information age has brought both the opportunity and challenge of exponential change. It truly is a brand new day where pastors must be guided more by principles than policies. Pastors who have this kind of agility will be able to apply the gospel message to the diverse needs of their assigned communities of faith. If the gospel is to make a difference in people's lives, it must be packaged in relevancy and authenticity. Such communication and ministry involves adaptation but not accommodation.

Fourth, cruciform excellence involves staying connected. One of the primary causes of why ministers leave pastoral ministry is isolation. Staying connected and cultivating and maintaining friendships is nonnegotiable for experiencing a healthy and lasting ministry. Carroll strongly states his case in the Colwell Lecture: “[I]n discussions that we have had with numerous pastors and denominational leaders about pastoral ministry and in our national survey, the issue of clergy friendships has emerged as of signal importance for sustaining ministry in challenging times” (14). Lillian Daniel, who is also a member of the Pulpit and Pew colloquium, tells of her own experience while serving on her denomination’s Committee on Ministry: “As we heard case after case of sexual misconduct, a common theme came through. They generally told stories of loneliness and isolation from their peers” (qtd. in Carroll 14). Ministers who long to endure must remember that God created human beings not just to be in relationship with him but also in relationship with each other. Throughout the creation narratives of Genesis 1 and 2, God’s creation is repeatedly (nine times) described as “good.” Only one “not good” reference to creation can be found in the Genesis accounts. God said, “It is *not good* [emphasis mine] for man to be alone” (Gen 2:18). Paul understood the essential nature of humanity’s need for authentic community. His life and ministry were filled with those who stood with him and for him as friends and family in Christ. Even in the midst of isolating circumstances like his various imprisonments, Paul made sure he stayed connected with his brothers and sisters in Christ.

London and Wiseman wrote Pastors at Risk in response to a survey of the needs of five thousand pastors. They address these needs by encouraging pastors in the areas of family care, self-care, and spiritual care. London and Wiseman directly link pastoral survival to a healthy marriage (70-94). According to one study, 81 percent of clergy and

their spouses do not spend enough time together; 71 percent have conflict over money; 70 percent do not think they have enough income; 64 percent have communication difficulties; and 53 percent have trouble with their children (71). These statistics only confirm that pastors and their spouses suffer from the same concerns as other married couples although to a larger degree. The conflicts and problems within marriage are often magnified by the context of ministry in a local church. Unhealthy marriages can also be highly detrimental to both effectiveness and longevity in ministry. “The risks of ministry are minimized when a marriage is maximized” (Asimakoupoulos 123). The Apostle Paul also linked the health of one’s marriage to effectiveness in ministry in the pastoral epistles (1 Tim. 3:2, 12; Tit. 1:6). At the top of Paul’s list of criteria for both elders and deacons was the requirement of healthy family relationships: “the husband of but one wife, a man whose children believe and are not open to the charge of being wild and disobedient” (Tit. 1:6). Elders are not asked to be first great teachers or loving shepherds. They are first asked to be “above reproach” (1 Tim. 3:2) and “blameless” (Tit. 1:6). Such characteristics are found in those pastors who have healthy relationships with those that God has placed closest to them in their family. Who persons are in relationship with God is directly correlational to who they are in relationship with others. Loving God with all one’s heart, soul, mind, and strength involves loving others as oneself.

Paul had no desire to live a life of isolation. He was thoroughly committed to deep and abiding relationships with others. Paul knew he needed the support, accountability, mentoring, provision, and even rescue of his brothers and sisters in Christ.

### **Core Value of a Pauline Eschatology**

Paul’s understanding of eschatology impacted his experience of God and ministry to others. Paul clearly believed that the age of the Spirit had broken into the present. In

his view Paul understood that the Spirit of God and the grace of God were not abstract future expectations but very certain realities for Paul. This Pauline view of eschatology provided a growth-ready environment for new believers and new leaders in the early Church. Thrail, McNicol, and McElrath describe a similar kind of environment necessary to develop fully functioning, Christ-centered leaders. They use the metaphor of a ladder to explain what is required in creating an environment of leadership and character development. Their character ladder has five essential rungs held together and made strong by two indispensable rails. The first ladder rung is “trust God and others with me” (61-74). Paul’s blinding encounter with Christ on the road to Damascus led to his fully trusting in God, his trusting of Ananias, and his trusting of the Damascan brothers in a daring rescue that lowered him over the wall in a basket. He literally had to place his life in their hands (Acts 9:25). This kind of trusting in God and in others is evidenced throughout Paul’s ministry.

The two all-important rails of Thrail, McNicol, and McElrath’s metaphoric ladder are an environment of grace and relationships of grace. Paul’s whole life and ministry was founded and built on grace. His relationship with God and others involved him being accepted without merit and being loved in spite of his atrocities and sin. Paul’s conversion, call, and entire ministry were founded in grace.

Rung 2 of the character ladder is “choosing vulnerability” (Thrail, McNicol, and McElrath 75-89). Paul’s very conversion arose out of the soil of vulnerability. Saul, the self-sufficient, driven leader, was forced to be led “by the hand” (Acts 9:8) into Damascus. Paul was helpless, frail, and completely vulnerable in Damascus until an unknown and seemingly insignificant believer named Ananias came and laid his hands on Paul. His vulnerability led to his availability to God and to others. Thrail, McNicol, and

McElrath point out that “the greater the degree of influence, the greater the potential for a leader to lead a lonely and hidden existence, where people only see what the leader wants them to see” (85). Paul’s influence increased exponentially after his conversion, but he continued to choose vulnerability and partnership. In Antioch Paul was a very committed part of a team of ministers. He and Barnabas and the whole group of believers there experienced an awesome work of God’s Spirit. Paul was just one of several key leaders and team members. “In the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen (who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch) and Saul” (Acts 13:1). The church in Antioch was what Thrail, McNicol, and McElrath call a “shelter” (85), and it was also the first place that believers were called Christians (Acts 11:26). Paul chose to minister in vulnerability and weakness alongside others throughout his ministry. His belief and experience that God’s power is made perfect in weakness (2 Cor. 12:9) led to a ministry of affirming his own weaknesses so as to confirm God’s grace and power. Paul’s dyadic nature found him conditioned to understand the essential importance of one’s growth and development in the context of a team or group.

Rung 3 of the character ladder is “aligning with truth” (Thrail, McNicol, and McElrath 91-108). Paul had formal religious training under Gamaliel as a boy (Acts 22:3), and he had formal theological training by Jesus Christ, himself, after his conversion (Gal. 1:12). His entire ministry and life was built upon the truth of who Jesus was, the truth of the Holy Spirit’s presence in the here and now, the truth of God’s unconditional love and available grace, and the truth of believers’ need for each other. Prior to his conversion, Paul lived by a set of assumptions that drove him to persecute the followers of Jesus. One of his pre-conversion assumptions was that Jesus was dead and

gone and that his band of trifling followers needed to be silenced. On the Damascus Road, Paul came face to face with the truth that Jesus was not dead but very much alive. This one utterly profound revelation of truth transformed the totality of his existence. Paul's theology, his relationships, his purpose, his present, his future were all forced to come into alignment with this ultimate truth.

According to Thrail, McNicol, and McElrath truth alignment involves functioning in your God-created and God-intended purposes. Paul received God's call and God's gifts for ministry, but his status as the premier leader in the early Church came about through time and God's providence. Paul willingly functioned as a respectful servant of and fellow minister with his ministry associates and the Jerusalem elders. His influence upon the weighty decision of the Jerusalem council was of untold importance (Acts 15:12). He faithfully served in mission and organized leaders in churches throughout the known world. Paul faithfully exhorted these churches through his letters. By the end of his life Paul had become the most influential Christian of all time. His lasting effectiveness did not come because he hungered for power but because he willingly and passionately served using his gifts in alignment with God's purposes for his life.

Rung 4 of the character ladder is "paying the price" (Thrail, McNicol, and McElrath 109-22). Paul paid the price at every turn. He was flogged, beaten, imprisoned, stoned, impoverished, and constantly in danger for the sake of Christ (2 Cor. 1:23-28). Paul proudly tells the Christians of Galatia, "[F]inally, let no one cause me trouble, for I bear on my body the marks of Jesus" (Gal. 6:17).

Paul also paid the price through self-discipline. Paul's commitment to discipline led him to experience his God-designed potential and purpose. In 1 Corinthians 9:24-27, Paul talks about running a race and competing in a boxing match. He describes whipping

his body and life into shape for the great contest of preaching the gospel. This passage speaks of Paul's ongoing quest of discipline and faithfulness. The result of this quest is heard in Paul's confident claim of 2 Timothy 4:7: "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith."

Rung 5 of the character ladder is "discovering your destiny" (Thrail, McNicol and McElrath 137-48). Thrail, McNicol, and McElrath say that "all of us long for the fifth rung. In our hearts, whether we aspire to large or small dreams, we hope to leave an enduring legacy" (138). Paul discovered his destiny in the beginning of his ministry and continued to experience the unfolding of that destiny throughout the course of his ministry. Paul's destiny was found in his conversion as he was claimed in grace as God's chosen child and in his call as he was claimed in purpose as God's apostle. Paul's destiny was to know Christ and to make him known (Acts 22:14-15). He truly was "Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God" (Rom. 1:1).

Paul's eschatology was not just a character-developing environment. It was a view and experience of reality that emphasized the presence and ministry of the Holy Spirit in the here and now. Brian Dodd says that Paul "describes all ministry, and therefore all leadership, as dependent upon the Spirit's gifting and empowerment" (23). The presence and work of the Spirit in the life of every believer meant that ministry was not of human origin. The early Church was not built by human agency and ingenuity but by the presence and enabling gifts of the Holy Spirit working in and through those early believers:

Paul's power came from above. He was a servant of the living God, who had anointed and empowered Paul in extraordinary ways by the Holy Spirit. The Spirit was a crucial part of his self-understanding of his effectiveness and a key component in his theology. (26)

Dodd contends that pastors today have overspent themselves in pursuing the methodologies and techniques of the world while losing what is core to their calling. He asks a penetrating question of every Christian leader using Paul's own question to the Galatians. "Having started with the Spirit, are you now ending with the flesh?" (Gal. 3:3). Dodd issues a straightforward challenge to all twenty-first century pastors:

If we drift from that empowered place, if we "end with the flesh," we gut the gospel of its transforming and marvelous power. When we fill up the space with our self-will and self determinations to "do it my way," the presence and power of the Spirit are pushed out. (26)

Paul had all kinds of training and an abundance of gifts and aptitudes, but he chose to trust not in himself. He says, "[B]ut whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ" (Phil. 3:7). Paul's predilection of relying on God rather than relying on self is what allowed the Spirit of God to use him in such a mighty way. The way that pastors view the world and the presence of God in the world have drastic implications for the way in which pastors are able to lead and serve. If contemporary pastors are ministering with a worldview where God's power is far gone or far removed from the present, those pastors will be forced to work and live as if the results were all up to them. This approach to ministry will lead to destructive drivenness and inevitable burnout. Paul persevered because he saw the present in terms of the future, and he never stopped depending on the Spirit's power and provision.

### **Core Value of Pauline Deviancy**

Because of Paul's willingness to be different from his surrounding culture, Paul, led by the Spirit, created whole new models and forms of leadership to ensure that the gospel reached across cultural boundaries. Carroll explains that cruciform excellence requires agility. For Carroll, agility is not how fast, nor especially how hurried one lives



in today's world, but agility is what enables one to respond faithfully, innovatively, and appropriately in this constantly and rapidly changing world (12). Carroll says the truth is that "agility is contrary to what many clergy and lay Christians prefer" (12). Carroll emphasizes that effective ministry in today's world is not done by manual or blueprint; rather, it often demands thinking outside the box in order to adapt to the rapid changes taking place in the church and the world. This kind of agility requires a deep grounding in God's Word and a profound awareness of one's target audience. Paul's deviancy is similar to what Carroll calls agility. He is willing to employ various innovative means and methodologies in order to proclaim the gospel effectively. Throughout his ministry Paul made insightful adaptations to make sure he connected the gospel to the world in which he lived. One example of adaptation is the way in which he brought the gospel to the Gentile world without requiring their cultural conformity to Judaism. Paul lived a life of agility. Because he was in touch with the various cultural contexts in which he ministered and also primarily committed to the gospel, he was able to connect the gospel relevantly to diverse audiences in the ancient world.

Paul lived in a world where boasting and self-exalting were the standard protocol. Paul took such boasting and turned it upside down by again and again emphasizing his weakness and dependency on God and others. Collins in a recent high profile book on leadership entitled Good to Great labels the most effective and dynamic leaders as "Level 5" leaders. Collins says that Level 5 leaders are not charisma based but humble and diligent in nature. Paul was a Level 5 leader committed to drawing attention away from himself and toward God:

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

is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption. Therefore, as it is written: “Let him who boasts boast in the Lord.” (1 Cor. 1:27-31)

In this passage Paul uses words like “foolish,” “weak,” “lowly,” “despised,” and “things that are not” to describe himself and the Corinthian Christians. By focusing on his neediness, Paul was able to proclaim God’s greatness.

One of the key points of deviancy for Paul was his ecclesiology. In Galatians 1:1 Paul emphasized that his apostleship was “*sent not* [emphasis mine] from men nor by man, but by Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead.” In Acts 13:1-3, Paul and Barnabas were set apart and sent out for ministry by the hands of the Antiochian believers and leaders under the direction of the Holy Spirit. Paul was clearly set apart for ministry, but he never functioned in ministry with a hierarchical separation from those with or to whom he ministered. According to George H. Williams, the separation and classification of “*χλῆρος*” did not happen until the second century (28). By the fourth century, the Pauline teaching that ministry belonged to the *λαός*, the whole people of God, was a distant memory:

The proliferation of lower orders below the rank of deacon and the erection of a hierarchy above the level of the bishop, accompanying the establishment of Christianity as the moral cement of the Empire in the reign of Constantine, brought about the gradual disaggregation of the corporate ministry in a face-to-face fellowship. Thereupon the various orders of the clergy came to be thought of as the ecclesiastical counterpart of the succession of officers or the *cursus honorum* through which is a magistrate normally advanced in the service of the State. *Thus the ministry became more of a career than a calling* [emphasis mine]. (29)

Paul had a view of the church as an organism, a body, made up of many and diverse parts that were all essential to its God-directed function and calling. As the centuries past, the church became more maintenance oriented and more institutionally structured. A

hierarchy of leadership and a division of labor led to those who did ministry and those who received ministry. Such a state was far removed from the ministry of all believers as described by Paul in Romans 12:1-8, 1 Corinthians 12:1-31, and Ephesians 4:1-16.

Dodd portrays Paul as the consummate team player: “To be a Christian leader—to lead ‘in Christ,’ in Paul’s terms—is a team effort in which each person contributes gifts and the whole is much healthier and stronger than any individual” (105). Paul taught that all Christians were called to and equipped with gifts of ministry (1 Cor. 12:7-11). His teaching of the organic nature of the body of Christ involved his belief that his effectiveness in ministry was tied to the ministry effectiveness of the whole body. Paul assumes the interconnectedness of the hand and the eye and the foot. He was committed to being a team player. Paul refers to those who ministered with him as his partners and fellow workers (Rom. 16:3; 1 Cor. 3:9; 2 Cor. 6:1; Phil. 1:5; 4:3; Col. 4:11; Philem. 1:24). Paul’s humility and dependency on others is a paradigm of leadership and ministry that desperately needs to be rediscovered in contemporary pastoral leadership. This ecclesiastical paradigm was only possible because Paul served and led in a manner that was radically different from his first century Judaistic and Romanic context.

### **Core Value of God-Given Expectations**

Paul’s expectations for ministry were nothing like those of contemporary pastors, but his expectations were consistent with what he experienced in ministry. This congruency may have been difficult to experience, but it allowed him to be prepared for what would come.

In a Pulpit and Pew report, Dean R. Hoge and Jacqueline E. Wenger describe the seven main motivations for leaving church ministry: conflict in congregation, conflict with the denomination, burnout and disillusionment, preference for another type of

ministry, allegations of sexual misconduct, family needs, and family problems such as divorce (28). Hoge and Wenger conclude that “the main factors pushing local church ministers away are organizational and interpersonal” (15). As a part of Hoge and Wenger’s research, they asked those who were formerly serving as pastors “what recommendations they would like to make to their denominations” (13). The former pastors expressed three major concerns and recommendations. First, they recommended their denominations provide more support and connection. While such support seemed desirable to these former pastors, it also seemed improbable due to the obstacles inherent in their denominational systems:

The two most obvious sources of support are from denominational leadership or from other clergy. Pastors found it difficult to confide their problems in denominational leaders because they did not want to jeopardize future calls and promotions. They felt constrained in seeking support from other clergy because of the enormous competition that exists among them. (13-14)

Second, former pastors recommended pastors be given more information when moving or considering a move to a new church location. Third, former pastors expressed concern that their denomination lacked purpose or direction.

Paul’s expectations are in sharp contrast to pastors today. Paul expects conflict, resistance, and suffering as ongoing ingredients of vital and effective ministry. Paul was committed to connecting with other believers and valued and needed their support in his life and ministry. He never limited such support, however, to the ecclesiastical hierarchy of his day. Paul found support from those to and with whom he ministered. In all his struggles, conflicts, weaknesses, and suffering Paul especially found his support in the grace of God. “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness” (2 Cor. 12:9).

Carroll says that cruciform excellence is costly. Pastors often enter the ministry

with a set of expectations derived from a culture of convenience rather than from the call of God. Carroll calls on pastors in a rapidly changing and even dangerous world to be “like a black gum tree against thunder” (11-12). The black gum tree bends in the fiercest of storms but never breaks. The challenges and difficult tasks that constitute pastoral ministry and life today are not going away, but neither must pastors. Ministers must stand strong in Christ in the midst of life’s storms. Carroll says that “developing resiliency is a fruit of engaging in regular spiritual disciplines, corporate and personal disciplines in which we proactively put ourselves in a position to be overwhelmed by God’s grace” (12). Paul’s commitment to spiritual disciplines and to acknowledging his own weakness paved the way for God’s grace and strength to be evidenced in his life. Edwin M. Leidal, Jr. lifts up two essential qualities that have been proposed as foundational examples for all effective leadership: “[T]hey are perseverance and the acceptance of realistic limitations: holding on and letting go” (vi). Paul had a firm grip on his call and his purpose for ministry. He also knew the value of letting go because he understood that he had weaknesses and limitations. Most importantly, Paul knew that the work of the gospel was far greater than himself: “For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain” (Phil. 1:21).

In an attempt to inform contemporary pastors on what they can expect in ministry, London and Wiseman describe fifteen hazards of ministry that are causing disillusionment in contemporary pastors (Pastors at Risk 30-51). While these hazards are part of the contemporary scene of ministry, most are not new or exclusive to twenty-first century pastors. Paul faced many of these same hazards.

The first hazard for pastors is that they suffer from the “Walk-on-the-Water Syndrome” (32). In Acts 14 the people tried to treat Paul and Barnabas like gods, but they strongly reacted by tearing their clothes and rushing into the crowd. In the midst of the

crowd they shouted, “Men, why are you doing this? We too are only men, human like you” (Acts 14:15). Pastors are part of the λαός of God. They are not any different than any other followers of Christ. They are human. Pastors hurt and bleed, struggle and sweat, succeed and fail just like anyone else.

The second hazard for pastors is disastrous personal problems. Pastors have to take care of their marriages, families, and finances or they will be rendered ineffective. Pastors have personal and faith crises. Paul’s thorn in the flesh and his major conflict with Barnabas are two examples of his personal problems, but these points of weakness became opportunities rather than hazards in his ministry. The “thorn in the flesh” led him to trust more fully in God’s grace. The conflict over John Mark with Barnabas more resolutely fixed the centrality of proclaiming the gospel in Paul’s life.

The third hazard is church member migration. Church membership is often taken lightly in today’s context. This trend has resulted in lower expectations of members and a lessened covenantal connection between members and members and pastors and members. This migration of members forces the pastor to address the issue of the source of personal worth in his or her life. The pastors who are addicted to the approval of others will always find that they are competing for the affection and attention of persons rather than depending on the leading and affirmation of God’s Holy Spirit. Paul’s ministry required that both he and his congregants moved from place to place. A long-term pastorate for Paul was one year. Somehow, Paul avoided the temptation in such short-term opportunities to pull back his commitment to intimacy. He entrusted himself to the people of God wherever he went, and they readily became his family. Family talk and terms of endearment are used throughout his epistles.

The fourth hazard is media-shaped preferences. While Paul did not have media to

shape his congregation's preferences and worldviews, plenty of other outside ideologies threatened their fidelity. The Gnostics and Judaizers tried to capture the minds of his converts and convince them to depart the gospel he proclaimed. They tried to twist and add to his teachings. The Judaizers offered grace *and* circumcision. Paul addressed their threat very clearly in his letter to the Galatians:

It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery. Mark my words! I, Paul, tell you that if you let yourselves be circumcised, Christ will be of no value to you at all. (Gal. 5:1-2)

Paul understood that a battle was raging for those God had called him to serve, and so he expected nothing less than all-out war. In Ephesians 6:12 Paul says, "For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms."

The fifth hazard is that people are distracted. In contemporary America, people have unending opportunities of entertainment driven by ever-expanding technological advancements. The distractions in Paul's day were shipwrecks, imprisonments, and major outbreaks of famine and persecution. Paul took such distractions in stride as he traveled throughout the world proclaiming the gospel.

The sixth hazard facing pastors today is consumerism. The consumer mentality of the late twentieth and early twenty-first century echoes the Epicureanism, dualism, and hedonism of Paul's day. Consumerism reduces everything, even truth, to the whims and preferences of the consumer. The escalation of consumerism means the once *avant garde* slogan of Burger King, "Have it your way," has now become the norm rather than the exception in the business and church world. The danger that faced Paul and that faces twenty-first century pastors is that the human consumers and seekers will take precedence over the God who seeks. When pastors let consumerism take precedence, they will

become more defined by their culture and circumstances than by God. Once he is lost, they too will be lost.

The seventh hazard facing pastors is the suffocating expectations under which they live. Paul lived under similar expectations in his pre-conversion days. No matter what Paul did and no matter how zealous for the law he was, he could never do enough. Paul was set free from such expectations by a profound encounter with the living Christ and his unconditional grace. Paul's value rested not in the circumstances of his life nor in the approval of others, but in the unearned and unmerited love of God (Rom. 5:8). Pastors who are trying to meet all the expectations of their congregation are living in bondage rather than the freedom that Paul proclaimed in Galatians 5:1.

The eighth hazard facing pastors is the loss of absolute truth. The decimation of absolutes in this postmodern age is a foregone conclusion to which ministers of today must adapt but not surrender. The ancient Mediterranean world in which Paul ministered was a polytheistic culture with a pantheon of gods and values. In such a context, Paul never stopped preaching the truth of Christ's sacrifice and resurrection on humanity's behalf.

The ninth hazard facing today's pastors is money struggles. Paul's money struggles went far beyond most contemporary ministers. He boasted of being hungry and thirsty (1 Cor. 4:11; 2 Cor. 6:5; 11:27), ill clad and homeless (1 Cor. 4:11; 2 Cor. 11:27), and of suffering hardships (2 Cor. 11:27). Paul never allowed his financial or material needs to interfere with ministry. These needs deepened his dependency on God. Paul's tent making never made him materially wealthy, but it did open many doors and allow his partners in ministry and him to survive.

The tenth hazard for contemporary pastors is dwindling public confidence.



Pastors have lost status and even rapport in recent decades. Instead of being seen as pillars of integrity, pastors are viewed as untrustworthy. Paul also understood the reality of not being highly favored. In 1 Corinthians 4:9-13, Paul says that he has been treated as one on parade at the end of the line, as a spectacle, as a fool, as one who is dishonored and slandered, and as the scum of the earth.

The eleventh hazard for pastors today is dysfunctional people. These persons are often needy and demanding. The increase in marital and family instability has resulted in an increase of persons with dysfunctional characteristics. Paul encountered not just the dysfunctional but the demonic (Acts 16:16-18) and not just the dysfunctional but the destructive (2 Cor. 11:23-26). Paul never expected ministry to be easy or without conflict. He never expected the worldly to act as if they were godly. Paul experienced resistance and hostility everywhere he went, but he never gave up.

The twelfth pastoral hazard is spiraling pastoral defection where falling out of ministry becomes almost contagious. John Mark abandoned Paul and Barnabas, yet Paul stayed faithful to his calling. Paul would not be deterred from his call to preach the gospel even though others were struggling. In 1 Corinthians 9:24-27, Paul describes his focus and single-mindedness. He was in an all-important race for an all-important prize. His training was purposeful, and his discipline was sure. Others might be disqualified, others might not finish the race, but Paul says, “I myself *will not be* [emphasis mine] disqualified for the prize” (1 Cor. 9:27).

The thirteenth hazard for pastors today is sexual infidelity. Sexual immorality was rampant in the Greco-Roman civilization. The sexual issue that occurred in the Corinthian church involved incest between a man with his father’s wife (1 Cor. 5:1). Paul addressed the issue of sexual immorality by reminding the Corinthians that the body is

the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 6:19). He exhorted them to “flee from sexual immorality” (1 Cor. 6:18). Along with the Jerusalem leaders, Paul endorsed the teaching that converts to Christianity had to abstain from sexual immorality (Acts 15:20). Just as sexual immorality is a pivotal issue in twenty-first century churches, it was a decisive issue in Paul’s day. His purity as a single man in the first century was of utmost importance for the integrity of the gospel he proclaimed.

The fourteenth hazard facing pastors is a crisis of leadership. London and Wiseman observe that leaders shrink from leading in today’s world. In a day desperate for influence, the church has a shortage of courageous leaders. Paul, too, faced a leadership crisis. Paul had to raise up leaders in a church that had none. Everywhere Paul ministered, he gladly worked with others and raised up those who would become leaders of leaders long after he was gone.

The last hazard for today’s pastors is loneliness. The effect of this hazard is seen across denominational lines as pastors feel removed from their peers and parishioners. Pastoral loneliness is often enabled by the teaching that ministers cannot be close to people in their congregations:

A minister fully equipped for his work will usually be a spirit by himself, above, beyond, and apart from others. The most loving of his people cannot enter into his peculiar thoughts, cares, and temptations. In the ranks, men walk shoulder to shoulder, with many comrades, but as the officer rises in rank, men of his standing are fewer in number. There are many soldiers, few captains, fewer colonels, but only one commander-in-chief. So, in our churches, the man who the Lord raises as a leader becomes, in the same degree in which he is a superior man, a solitary man. The mountain-tops stand solemnly apart, and talk only with God as He visits their terrible solitudes. (Spurgeon 87)

C. H. Spurgeon’s approach to pastoral friendships is sadly the experience of many contemporary pastors. Paul, however, was intimately and passionately connected with those he served. He was also deeply committed to those with whom he served in

ministry. He “longs” to see the Romans (Rom. 1:11; 15:23), the Philippians (Phil. 1:8; 4:1), the Thessalonians, (1 Thes. 2:17; 3:6), and Timothy (2 Tim. 1:4). In Acts 20:37, Paul and the Ephesian leaders weep and pray together and kiss and hug one another when they are forced say good-bye. Paul was no stranger to isolation, but he was also no stranger to expressing his need, love, and friendship for others.

This list of hazards is not unique to the contemporary pastor. The unique reality is that ministers of the twenty-first century have expectations of ministry that set them up for demise. Obstacles, hazards, suffering, struggle, and weakness were not happenstance for Paul or for pastors through the centuries. For Paul, they were core to his eschatology and a part of his strategy for effective ministry. Paul’s obvious weaknesses and repeated trials meant that persons were not drawn to his strength but rather to God’s power.

Unrealistic and unmet expectations of churches for pastors and pastors for churches can be debilitating. Donald P. Smith describes seven internal conflicts and crises that come from unclear and unrealistic expectations. The first internal conflict is the crisis of integrity. Pastors experience the feeling of falseness because of the discrepancy between one’s beliefs and one’s true situation. The second internal conflict is the crisis of power. This crisis occurs when pastors think they do not have authority, recognition, or the ability to influence change. The third internal conflict is the crisis of capacity. This crisis comes when pastors question their own ability to use the authority or power they do have. Fourth is the crisis of failure. This crisis occurs when the pastors’ leadership and ministry become paralyzed by the fear of failure. The fifth internal conflict is the crisis of destination. Pastors begin to feel concern over the direction of their churches and career. Sixth is the crisis of role. Pastors here have great concern over who will get to define their roles and over what those roles will be. The seventh internal

conflict is the crisis of meaning. Pastors facing this crisis are wondering if their ministries really matter (65-66).

Gary L. McIntosh and Robert L. Edmondson say that “the ultimate result of unrealistic expectations is burnout and, for many, a departure from ministry” (62). They report that pastors feel pressure to have the ideal family and that pastors’ spouses feel pressure to be an ideal role model. They found that 63 percent of pastors said that congregational expectations created problems in their marriage (62). In a survey of pastors who had resigned from their churches, McIntosh and Edmondson found that 47 percent of the pastors said that unwritten congregational expectations were a factor in their decision to resign. McIntosh and Edmonson give these words of advice to parishioners in regards to supporting their pastors:

There are few areas more important to a pastor’s continued success than the area of expectations. Your pastor *cannot and should not* [original emphasis] meet every expectation voiced in your church. Instead, he must be a leader who reshapes them. (65)

McIntosh and Edmondson encourage pastors and churches to take five specific actions to address expectation conflicts. First, pastors should define themselves using biblical parameters of the job and also realistic parameters of their own pastoral gifts. Second, pastors must intentionally and clearly communicate who they are called to be to the entire church. Third, congregations need to ask their pastors to commit to doing a few things well. Fourth, congregations need to ask pastors to delegate. Fifth, congregations need to protect their pastors from “pastor abusers” (66-68).

Ministry in America is a twenty-five year old study that foreshadows the current crisis of pastoral expectation. At the time this study was the most exhaustive research of ministry ever undertaken in North America. It was funded by the Lilly Foundation and involved the survey of thousands of pastors representing forty-seven different

denominations. The purpose of the study was to discover what churches expect in a beginning minister. In treating the expectations of United Methodist pastors, F. Thomas Trotter observed three emerging issues in 1980. First, Trotter raised the question about the origins of the emphasis on interpersonal modes of ministry that were conditioned by disciplines such as psychology, social science, and therapeutic practice. His concern was whether or not this apparent emphasis had any scriptural and theological roots. Second, Trotter wondered if the Methodist sense of an evangelical movement had been lost to parish maintenance. Third, Trotter wondered if the classical United Methodist themes had been relegated to denomination rhetoric (Schuller, Strommen, and Brekke 455). A significant part of the expectation problem for the contemporary United Methodist church and its pastors is that United Methodist Christians and pastors have forgotten who they are and who God has called them to be. They have left their theological moorings and their ecclesiastical heritage. Without such grounding, United Methodist pastors are left guessing at which expectations are essential and which are peripheral.

The issue of clergy expectations is of great consequence for contemporary pastoral perseverance. Pastors today tend to focus on the expectations that have to do with career and minimize those expectations that have to do with call. Pastors aim at minimizing the difficulties and maximizing the benefits and thus set themselves up for a fall. Because Paul's expectations maximized struggle, he was able via God's grace to maximize his endurance.

### **Core Value of Spiritual Formation**

Paul's practice of spiritual disciplines was foundational to his identity in Christ and his identity as a minister of the gospel. These disciplines provided him access to the deep resources of God's grace and love that would sustain him throughout a lifetime of

ministry. Dodd points out the centrality of prayer in Paul's ministry: "[P]rayer is the steam engine that powered the ministry of the apostle Paul" (123). E. M. Bounds observes that "Paul had the idea that his movements were hindered or helped by the prayers of his brethren" (151).

Andrew Murray lifts up Paul as "a pattern for prayer." Paul exhorts his fellow believers to follow his example on seven different occasions (1 Cor. 4:16; 11:1; Phil. 3:17; 4:9; 1 Thess. 1:6; 2 Thess. 3:7, 9), and Murray adamantly encourages believers to follow after Paul in prayer. Murray addresses Paul's prayer life from three perspectives. First, he describes Paul's habits of prayer. Paul prayed on all occasions. Prayer was not just an activity that Paul did; it was a way of life:

[Paul] had such a sense that everything must come from above, and such a faith that it would come in answer to prayer, that prayer was neither a duty nor a burden, but the natural turning of the heart to the only place whence it could possibly obtain what it sought for others. (105)

Paul was a man of constant prayer (Rom. 1:9; 1 Cor. 1:4; Eph. 1:16).

Next, Murray explains the content of Paul's prayers. Paul prayed for believers to be established in the Christian life. Paul prays for the Ephesians to be both enlightened and strengthened. In Philippians Paul prays for them to have spiritual knowledge and understanding of God's will. In Thessalonians he prays for God's love to increase and for the people to be established in holiness. Murray says that Paul's prayers are "proof that he seeks for them the very life of heaven upon earth. No wonder that he is not tempted to trust in any human means, but looks for it from heaven alone" (106-07).

Finally, Murray explores Paul's requests for prayer. Murray points out that by requesting prayer Paul is showing that prayer is not the special prerogative of the apostle; rather, prayer is also the task and call of "the humblest and simplest believer" (107). Paul's requests also prove that Paul himself was dependent upon the prayers of his

brothers and sisters in Christ. After preaching for more than twenty years and traveling around the world as a missionary, Paul is still asking for prayer. For Paul, “united, continued waiting on God is the only hope of the Church” (107). Paul asks for prayer from his fellow Christians with great earnestness because he had great confidence that God would act in response to their praying.

Eugene H. Peterson describes the spiritual void within contemporary pastoral ministry. With great conviction he says that pastors have forgotten their primary calling to work the threefold ministry of praying, reading Scripture, and giving spiritual direction (3). These spiritual disciplines are essential to the character and ministry of the pastor. Prayer is an act in which pastors bring their attention before God. Reading Scripture is an act of attending to God’s voice and action in human history. Spiritual direction is an act of giving attention to what God is doing in the person to whom God has called pastors to minister (3-4). Peterson calls pastors to a renewed and healthy asceticism where pastors go into a disciplined training routine in order to be the persons that God has called them to be in ministry (16-17).

Peterson sees busyness as one of the primary obstacles to living a life of attentive prayer before God (64-65). Busyness is a plague of contemporary American culture, but it is also a disease easily caught by those who define themselves via traditional forms of productivity. Ministers must stay convinced God is calling them to more than activity in the worldly sense of that term. Peterson gives a beautiful description of the struggle and the mission of the pastor:

I realized that among the considerable demands on my time not one demanded that I practice a life of prayer. And yet prayer was at the very heart of the vocation I had entered. I was entrusted with nurturing a living conversation with the people with whom I was living and the living God. I had not agreed to be a moral errand-boy doing the good deeds in congregation and community that the others in the press of their serious

business of getting on in the world didn't have time for themselves, but had accepted *responsibility for personally listening to and answering the word of God* [emphasis mine] and guiding others into a similar listening and answering that constitute our mature humanity. (64)

The reason that so many pastors have nothing to give and nothing to say is because they have not first given themselves to God in prayer. Henri Nouwen raises a similar concern:

The central question is, are the leaders of the future truly men and women of God, people with an ardent desire to dwell in God's presence, to listen to God's voice, to look at God's beauty, to touch God's incarnate Word and to taste fully God's infinite goodness? (qtd. in Dodd 121)

The spiritual void in pastors is deafening. Pastors need to hear the call to prayer and to a spiritually wholistic ministry. Only pastors who are spiritually formed can be and become pastors who are spiritually forming. Paul was indeed a powerful model of prayer and spiritual discipline for the early Church, and by God's grace he can become a powerful model for pastors today.

### **Core Value of Zeal**

During the course of this study, I have often asked colleagues and even mentors in ministry, "What has kept you in ministry all these years?" While I have heard many insightful responses to this question, the most disheartening reply has been one that I have heard on several different occasions: "The reason I have stayed in ministry is because I did not have any where else to go." Bernie Taupin wrote the lyrics for Elton John's Candle in the Wind. The chorus, which describes the life of Marilyn Monroe, begins, "and it seems to me, you lived your life like a candle in the wind." A "candle in the wind" is an apt description of what far too many ministers have become. The problem is not just that pastors are influenced more by the expectations of others or are invariably affected by the values of culture. One of the primary pastoral difficulties is that their metaphoric candles have lost their flame and fire for God. Pastors who hang on until



retirement are the antithesis of the zeal and passion found in Paul.

Peterson uses strong language to describe the demise of pastoral integrity and zeal:

American pastors are abandoning their posts, left and right, and at an alarming rate. They are not leaving their churches and getting other jobs. Congregations still pay their salaries. Their names remain on the church stationery and they continue to appear in pulpits on Sundays. But they are abandoning their posts, their calling. They have gone whoring after other gods. What they do with their time under the guise of pastoral ministry hasn't the remotest connection with what the church's pastors have done for most of twenty centuries. (1)

A crisis of leadership and zeal is prevalent among contemporary American pastors.

Peterson says that "the pastors of America have metamorphosed into a company of shopkeepers" (2). Kenneth L. Carder of the Center for Excellence in Ministry at Duke University Divinity School says that pastors have a low level of satisfaction with their effectiveness. Only 36 percent of pastors report being "very satisfied" with their "overall effectiveness." Pastors reported feeling the greatest inadequacy in the area of "reaching people with the gospel." Carder's study found that 78 percent of pastoral respondents considered reaching out their area of least effectiveness (1). Lucille Lavender, a pastor's wife, has written a straightforward book in which she describes from the inside some of the key concerns of pastoral ministry in America today. She believes pastors have lost their zeal because the "primary priorities of Paul and his early preachers" (141) are being exchanged for other demands. Pastors today are called upon to be the chief administrators of all church activities, the counselor, the receptionist, the custodian, the customer service representative in the complaint department, the moderator at church business meetings, the attender of all church meetings, the officiator, the writer, the invocationer, the lecturer, the visitor of the sick, the recruiter, and the socializer (141-42). When the pastor is asked to have zeal for so many things, she or he will be left with zeal for nothing.

Winthrop S. Hudson observes the zeal of ministry in the Puritan Age by quoting the seventeenth century pastor and theologian Henry Scougal:

The *great business of our calling* [emphasis mine] is to advance the divine life in the world; to make religion sway and prevail, frame and mould the souls of men into a conformity to God and superinduce the beautiful lineaments of his blessed image upon them; to enlighten their understandings and inform their judgments, rectify their wills and order their passions and sanctify all their affections. (184)

Richard Baxter, the prototypical Puritan pastor, declares that “the first and great work of the ministers of Christ is to acquaint men with that God that made them and is their happiness” (qtd. in Hudson 184). The zeal of the Puritan age had its abuses to be sure, but many pastors of that era joyfully took to the work of preaching, teaching, and tending their flocks. A typical week for the Puritan pastor included preaching two services on Sunday, visiting parishioners throughout the week to counsel, admonish, and exhort, entertaining and hosting multiple meals in the parsonage, studying, reading, and praying in the mornings, and reconciling any conflicts between members (182-84). The activities of pastors of that era were never allowed to undermine the primacy of proclamation. The key to the influence of Puritanism in English life was gifted preaching (185). Church historian, Thomas Fuller, describes the preaching of the puritan pastor Henry Smith:

His church was so crowded with auditors that persons of good quality brought their own pews with them, I mean their legs, to stand upon in the aisles.... Their ears did so attend to his lips, their hearts to their ears, that he held the rudder of their affections in his hands, so that he could steer them whither he pleased. (qtd. in Hudson 185)

This kind of preaching and pastoral leadership had a zeal and passion reminiscent of the zeal of Paul.

Concern about the lack of zealousness in pastors is nothing new. In 1848 John James wrote An Earnest Ministry the Want of the Times. James says that “our own personal religion is the mainspring of all our power in the pulpit” and “whatever other

deficiencies we have, the chief of all lies in the heart” (qtd. in Neibuhr and Williams 230). His words of yesteryear challenge pastors of today:

An unrenewed man, or one with a lukewarm piety, may preach elaborate sermons upon orthodox doctrines, but what are they for power and efficiency, when compared with those of the preacher, who feels as well as glories in the cross, but as the splendid coruscations of the aurora borealis to the warm and vivifying rays of the sun? (qtd. in Neibuhr 230)

Trying to minister without zeal is not only ineffectual; it is exhausting. Persons without what Jeremiah calls “a fire shut up in my bones” (Jer. 20:9) are prone to depletion. Zeal and passion are not optional ingredients to pastoral effectiveness and excellence. Pastors from every age, from Paul until today, have needed a renewed zeal.

At the 2005 Beeson Leadership Institute held in Nashville, London described a pivotal time in his ministry when God renewed his zeal for Christ and restored his passion for ministry. London and Wiseman also record this encounter in “A Fresh Encounter with God”:

A life-changing renewal came to me after I had been a pastor for 15 years in Salem, Oregon. I was a pastor of a spiritually vibrant church, but I still saw myself as a phony. I went through the right motions without the right motives. I saw myself accomplishing about what anyone could do if given the same opportunities. My success, however, was not comfort enough. I needed healing, revival.

One night in a dark, silent church when no one was present, I fell across the altar in a mood of spiritual desperation. I began to pray the most humiliating prayer you could imagine.

I prayed, “O God, I want out of this. I want out of ministry. I’m not worthy of this church. I’m artificial and a playactor. You need to get me out of this. I would appreciate it if You could get me out gracefully. But if it is not graceful, that’s OK too. I just can’t go on with this pain inside.”

At that point, I humbled myself. I admitted to God that I was not authentic. I acknowledged that I was inadequate. I confessed that I was an unworthy vessel, full of cracks and holes. I admitted that I was running on spiritual empty.

At that moment, the presence of Christ came over me with empowerment and meaning. The Lord seemed to say in that moment, “Now, I can use you.” The results of that encounter with the Lord changed my whole life. It revolutionized my ministry. (77-78)

Pastors today need a renewal of zeal and passion, calling and purpose, grace and healing. Pastors need to be reminded once again of their profound need for and abiding partnership with the living God.

### **Conclusion**

This review of literature points to the great need for perseverance in ministry today. Without perseverance, ministers will be lost. Without ministers, the church will be lost. Without the church, the world will be lost. Persevering in pastoral excellence is readily observed in the life and ministry of Paul and far too often readily missed in the life and ministry of contemporary clergy. The crisis of pastoral fallout has provided a wake-up call to American Christendom, and much research and reporting is being undertaken to help buttress the pastoral profession. Seven key factors to pastoral perseverance are established in this research, but these factors will have no impact until these seven core values are established in the heart and life of the pastor.

After winning his seventh Tour de France, Lance Armstrong observed, “Pain is for a while; quitting is forever” (Rose). The church needs a new and renewed generation of pastors for whom quitting is anathema. Pastoral leaders are needed who are willing to persevere in pastoral excellence so that the purposes of God will be victoriously experienced again and again in and through his church.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **METHODOLOGY**

#### **Problem and Purpose**

Ministerial fallout is rampant in pastoral ministry today. This sad phenomenon is true in all denominations of American Christendom. The challenges, struggles, and risks of pastoral ministry are significant, and many pastors are lost due to conflict, lack of support, loneliness, and personal concerns. Contemporary pastors experience the press of unrealistic expectations and the occupational hazard of handling the things of God without knowing the presence of God. While much has been written and said about why pastors are leaving ministry, little research has been done about why pastors continue to minister in the face of these great obstacles. The causes for ministry fallout represent, to one degree or another, the vocational constants of a life spent serving Christ in ministry. The intent of this study was to discover why certain ministers persevere with excellence in spite of the struggle.

The Apostle Paul is a pattern for life and ministry in Christ. He is especially a powerful example of persevering in pastoral excellence. He exhibited seven foundational characteristics that allowed him to survive and thrive for decades in ministry. Paul was grounded in grace, connected in Christian community, open to God's Spirit, called to a definite purpose, clear in his expectations, committed to spiritual disciplines, and filled with zeal. At the end of his ministry, Paul was able to tell Timothy, "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith" (2 Tim. 4:7).

The purpose of this project was to understand what is involved in persevering in pastoral excellence. The persevering pastors of this study are United Methodist pastors who have not just survived but who have proven themselves as effective leaders in the

church.

Four primary research questions guided the extent of this study.

#### **Research Question #1**

How do United Methodist pastors understand excellence in pastoral ministry?

#### **Research Question #2**

What are the obstacles pastors have to overcome in order to persevere in pastoral excellence?

#### **Research Question #3**

What are the components that contribute to and sustain pastoral excellence?

#### **Research Question #4**

What is the relationship or alignment between the first century pastor Paul and twenty-first century pastors who persevere in excellence?

### **Population and Sample**

The participants of this study were United Methodist pastors who were serving in a North American context. Because this study was primarily qualitative in nature, the population and sample were identical. The twenty-two United Methodist pastors are representative of other persevering pastors within both Methodism and Christendom, but the data collection was limited to just these twenty-two.

### **Instrumentation**

This project was an evaluative study in the descriptive mode that was accomplished through both quantitative and qualitative means. The goal of the research was to collect data from pastors that would aid in understanding what is involved in persevering in pastoral excellence in today's world. The Ellison's Spiritual Well-Being Scale was used to help discover the pastors' spiritual state and condition. The use of the

qualitative research interview was extremely beneficial because of its ability to uncover phenomena not otherwise easily quantifiable. Because of the depth of answers, these interviews were especially helpful in isolating the characteristics of pastoral perseverance.

This research project involved conducting an interview with the twenty-two selected United Methodist pastors. These pastors met the following three criteria: (1) they had twenty years of pastoral experience; (2) they were serving as senior pastors of churches with an average weekly attendance of over five hundred; and, (3) they were recommended by their bishops as effective leaders in their congregations.

On 31 October 2005, the bishops of the Louisiana and Texas Annual Conferences were sent an e-mail explaining the purpose of the project and asking them to recommend pastors to this study who met the criteria of experience, church size, and proven leadership (see Appendix A). Bishop Hutchinson of Louisiana recommended twelve pastors for this study. Bishop Huie of the Texas Annual Conference recommended forty-two pastors for this study. Next, a letter was sent to the recommended pastors explaining the project and inviting them to be participants in the study (see Appendix B). In this letter they were asked to participate in a sixty to ninety-minute taped and confidential, face-to-face interview and to complete the Ellison Spiritual Well-Being Scale. These letters were followed up with a phone call within ten days of when the letters were mailed. The purpose of the phone call was to confirm their participation and to set up the research interview. This phone call was followed up by an e-mail (see Appendix C) that confirmed the date and time of the interview and asked the pastors to provide some preliminary information about obstacles and excellence in their ministry. The interviews were conducted in the Houston area, the State of Louisiana, and East Texas in December

2005 and January 2006. Each pastor participated in a sixty to ninety-minute interview with me. During this interview, I sought to develop professional rapport with the pastors and to establish a safe and confident interview environment. The face-to-face interviews used nine questions that appropriately addressed the research questions of this study (see Appendix D).

My Beeson Pastor Cohort group of three persevering pastors served as a pilot test group before these interview questions were used with the selected pastors. The results of this process facilitated the refinement of the questions themselves and their final ordering.

After the interviews, the pastoral subjects received a thank you letter (see Appendix E) and a copy of the Ellison Spiritual Well-Being Scale (see Appendix F) by mail. Each pastor completed the Spiritual Well-Being Scale within two months of their interview.

### **Data Collection**

The first instrument of data collection was a sixty to ninety-minute, face-to-face interview with pastors conducted in their office or at a location of their choosing. The interview was audio-taped and partially transcribed to aid in data analysis. The pastoral interviews consisted of two sections. The first section of questions helped build rapport and gain insight about the subjects' background. The second section of questions dealt with the pastors' personal experience of the issues surrounding pastoral perseverance (see Appendix D). Notes were taken during each interview and then filed according to the emerging insights and characteristics of persevering pastors. The transcription of the audio tapes was also filed by category. The categories used in data analysis were inductively created and defined using the pastoral responses.



The second instrument of data collection was Ellison's Spiritual Well-Being Scale. Ellison's scale discovered the sense of spiritual well-being in the research subjects. This quantitative instrument also yielded insight into the religious and existential well-being of the pastoral subjects. The Spiritual Well-Being Scale (SWBS) is one of the most widely used measures of spirituality. Craig Ellison developed this instrument to measure religious and existential well-being in 1983. Ellison conceptualized spiritual well-being as two-faceted. His scale addresses both the vertical component of one's sense of well-being in relationship with God and the horizontal component of one's sense of satisfaction with life in general. The SWBS has relatively high test-retest reliability. Test-retest reliability coefficients have been found to be .88 to .99 for religious well-being, .73 to .98 for existential well-being, .82 to .99 for spiritual well-being. The internal consistency reliability coefficients range from .82 to .94 for religious well-being, .78 to .86 for existential well-being, and .89 to .94 for spiritual well-being (Hill and Hood 383). Some researchers however have raised questions as to the validity of Ellison's structure of factors. The SWBS has been found very useful to both clinicians and researchers (Hall, Tisdale, and Brokaw 400-01). After receiving the completed well-being scales, the results were recorded and analyzed.

### **Confidentiality**

The pastors who worked with this study were guaranteed complete confidentiality in the initial invitation letter, in the follow-up phone call, at the beginning of the interview, and at the conclusion of the interview. The integrity of this study and the openness of the respondents depended upon making sure that the data gathered during this period of research was both anonymous and confidential.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **FINDINGS**

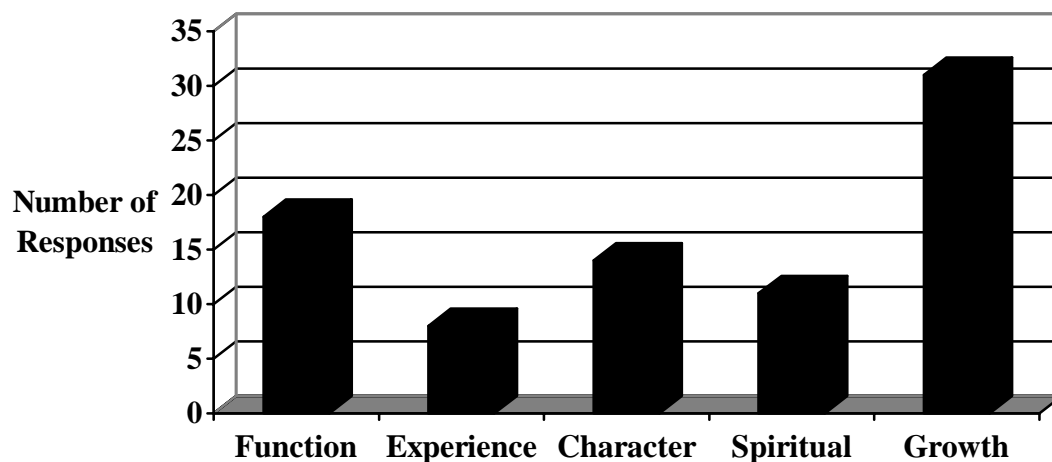
The purpose of this project was to understand what is involved in persevering in pastoral excellence. Four research questions have guided this study: How do United Methodist pastors understand excellence in pastoral ministry? What are the obstacles pastors have to overcome in order to persevere in pastoral excellence? What are the components that contribute to and sustain pastoral excellence? What is the relationship or alignment between the first century pastor Paul and twenty-first century United Methodist pastors who persevere in excellence?

#### **Pastoral Excellence**

The first research question was operationalized by the following two questions from the face-to-face interviews with the selected pastoral subjects: “How would you define excellence in a brief one or two-sentence definition?” “Think back to a time when you felt like something had gone really well, when you were really pleased with the outcome of what was happening in your ministry. Describe what made this experience of excellence a reality.”

In response to the question, “How would you define excellence in a brief one or two-sentence definition?” the twenty-two pastors in this study gave eighty-two distinct answers. The pastoral subjects’ responses were placed into five categories: excellence as function, excellence as experience, excellence as character, excellence as spiritual, and excellence as growth. The excellence as function responses were those that described excellence in terms of excellence of program or activity. Excellence in this context was some action done or accomplished because of the pastor’s leadership. An example of a definition of excellence in this category was given by a pastor whose church had

experienced phenomenal growth. “Excellence is outreach and involvement in the community, relevant proclamation of the gospel, vital music and singing...” The excellence as experience responses were those that described excellence in terms of emotion or intuition. An example of excellence as experience came from a pastor who said, “I don’t know how to define it, but I know it when I experience it.” The excellence as character responses were those that described excellence in terms of who someone was in their behaviors, relationships, and attitudes. These interview responses focused on identity issues. One pastor said, “More and more, excellence in ministry has come to mean integrity in ministry.” The excellence as spiritual answers were theological in nature and often times described excellence as being faithful to God. The excellence as growth responses described excellence in terms of improvement, increase, or maximization. Figure 4.1 shows the frequency with which the pastors characterized excellence using these five categories.



**Figure 4.1. Definitions of excellence.**

The excellence as function responses gave a very informative list of the duties

that pastors feel called to perform in their local churches in the modern era. Pastors were committed to reaching out to their communities, effective preaching of the gospel, providing excellent worship opportunities, encouraging and leading their staff and laity, quality pastoral care, capable administration of the church, offering the best programs in the community, effectively using their spiritual gifts, empowering and equipping the laity, good stewardship of all resources, bringing and connecting people to new life in Christ, casting God's vision for the church, and making disciples. In this long list of duties, those functions affirmed by three or more pastors were effective preaching, leading people, pastoral care, and empowering and equipping the laity.

When the pastoral subjects described excellence as something that was experienced, they talked about excellence as something they felt or observed from a sensory perspective. One pastor of a large and growing urban church said, "I may not always be able to measure it, but I'll know it when I see it." Another pastor who had been in the ministry for thirty years said that excellence was all about "having a ball in ministry." Another pastor who had a record of long-term effectiveness in ministry said, "Excellence involves clarity or vision, quality relationships, and appreciation for healthy processing." Other pastors couched excellence specifically in terms of experiencing God: "the enveloping love and presence of God," "meaningful and powerful worship," and "a deep awareness of God's grace."

The pastoral responses that dealt with character and identity issues illustrated the pastors' commitment to self-excellence. The list of character concerns coming from the pastoral subjects included honesty, boldness, doing one's best daily, not following a predetermined script for ministry, making a personal investment, integrity, leading by example, treating others with respect, keeping a good sense of humor, and loyalty to the

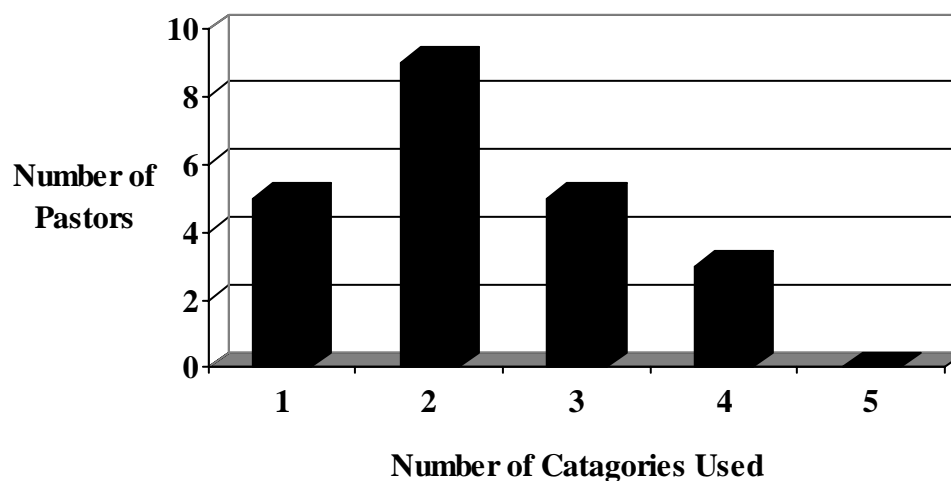
United Methodist Church. The only definition that occurred three times in the above list was doing your best. One pastor who was leading a stable and growing church said that “excellence in ministry is doing the best you can wherever you are.”

While almost all of the definitions of excellence given by the pastoral subjects reflected a spiritual concern or issue, eleven responses specifically addressed spiritual and theological themes. The most repeated response was that excellence was about faithfulness to Christ. Five of the eleven answers focused on fidelity. Other definitions given by pastors emphasized personal and corporate renewal, being in God’s presence, being incarnational, living a life of stewardship, and building the kingdom of God.

The most expressed definition of excellence by far deals with issues of growth; 38 percent of the pastors’ responses were in this category. Pastors talked about growing staff, growing attendance, growing giving, growing membership, growing disciples, growing serving, growing people in prayer, and growing self. The pastoral subjects used terms such as maximization and quantitative and qualitative growth. Several pastors used the term “effective” when talking about excellence and then defined effectiveness as positive quantitative growth. One pastor of a growing and dynamic congregation said, “Numbers indicate results in people’s lives. They create a sense of excitement and are a sign of the manifestations of the Spirit.” Another pastor who was currently transitioning a church that had been declining for years said that “any discussion of excellence needs to include the word effective.” A pastor who had completed three decades of ministry and who was serving a vital and growing congregation said, “Excellence is not just growth in numbers; it involves a growth in spirituality of the church.”

The pastoral subjects gave brief but informative responses when asked to define excellence. All but five of the pastoral subjects defined excellence in multiple-category

terms. Figure 4.2 describes the number of pastors and the number of categories they used when defining excellence.



**Figure 4.2. Breadth of definition.**

The second operational question from the face-to-face interviews regarding excellence in pastoral ministry was, “Think back to a time when you felt like something had gone really well, when you were really pleased with the outcome of what was happening in your ministry. Describe what made this experience of excellence a reality.” The pastoral subjects’ answers to this question were varied, but three clear insights arose from their responses. First, all twenty-two pastors experience of excellence was based in their initiating positive transition in their congregations. The research subjects associated excellence with their ability to be catalysts for change within their churches. The pastoral subjects listed the following areas of change in their churches:

- The church moved from being clergy to lay centered.
- The spiritual commitment of the church deepened.
- The church grew in its understanding of itself as a part of a sacramental

tradition.

- The church went from paying 12 percent of its apportionments to paying 100

percent.

- The church members took ownership of reaching out beyond themselves.
- The church caught a vision for lay-based, outreach-oriented ministry.
- The church transitioned from a negative place to a church that felt “abuzz.”
- The church developed a healthy and active ministry team and a new staff

structure.

- A divided church became a united church; a low expectation church with a record of negativity experienced growth and a renewed sense of vision and purpose.

• “Since the hurricane, our church has less people and less money, but our ministry is more real and more relevant than ever before.”

- The church engaged in the meeting of real human need.
- The church claimed a future in the midst of urban decline.
- The church doubled its mission budget and radically multiplied its missions

involvement.

- The church was in decline but this past year had record growth in attendance

and giving.

- The church multiplied in growth over the last ten years.
- The church birthed a new and effective ministry to the college campus.
- “I built consensus and unity where there was extreme division.”
- “We became a church called to reach beyond ourselves.”
- The church stepped out in faith in spite of the obstacles.

- The church connected people to Christ who had never been connected before.

The second insight about the subjects and their experiences of excellence was that they tended to see excellence in their current pastoral assignments. Fourteen out of the twenty-two pastors described a specific experience of excellence in their present churches. Of the eight pastors who did not use their contemporary situation, four were in the first year of their appointments. The pastors' focus on their present ministry situations and their commitment to optimism were present throughout the interviews. Pastors articulated the importance of a positive attitude and spirit in their current ministry situations in statements such as, "You have to believe your church is the best church in the annual conference;" "I made it my job to let these people know that they were a great church;" and "Every church we ever went to, we expected it to be a good and great church."

The third insight about the pastors in this study was that their experiences of excellence were tied to their personal passion. This connection between passion and excellence was explicitly true for seventeen of the pastoral subjects. One pastor who communicated his desire to be a "good soldier" in the United Methodist Church described excellence in terms of liturgical and sacramental renewal. Another pastor who had a passion for "reaching the lost" described excellence with tears in his eyes by talking about reaching an average of at least one soul for Jesus Christ per week for the last three years. One pastor who said, "I always try to remember what the gospel has done for me and what I know it can mean and do for others," described excellence in terms of connecting people to Christ who have never been connected to him before. One pastor who had a passion for doing not just "the effective thing but the right thing, not just what works but what has integrity," explained his experience of excellence by describing how

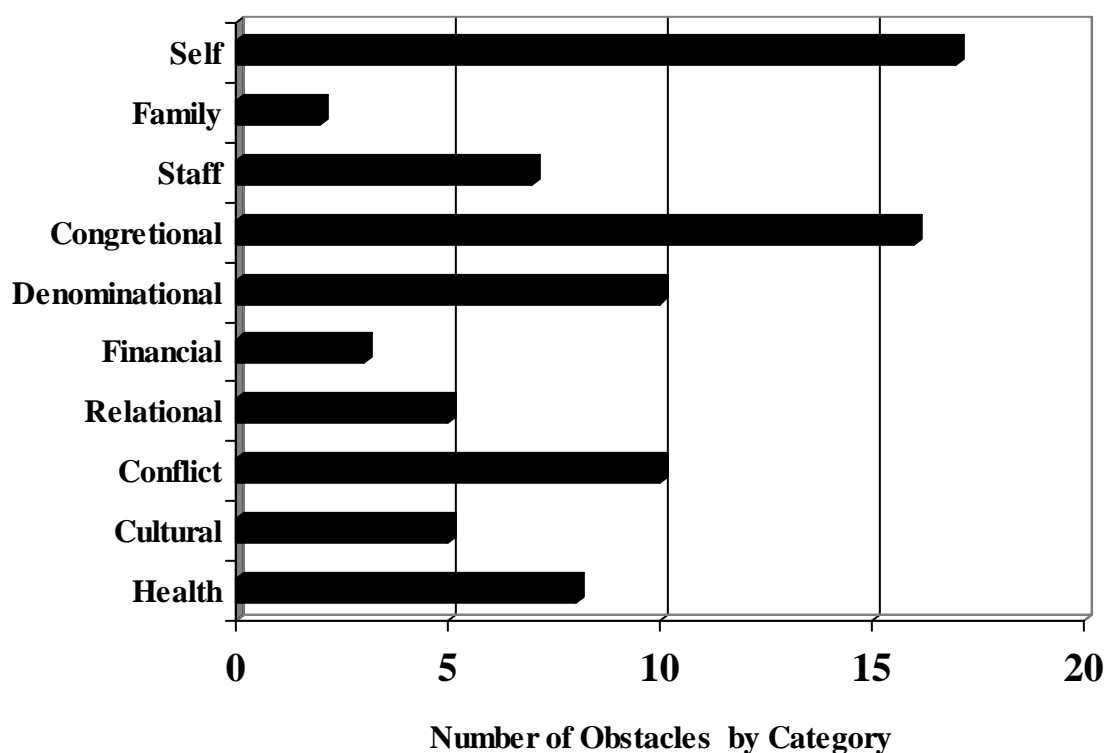


his church had partnered with a needy neighborhood and church in their community.

### **Pastoral Obstacles**

The second research question was operationalized by asking the following three questions from the face-to-face interviews. The first operational question was, “What are some of the major obstacles that you have encountered in ministry?” The second operational question was the italicized part of this question: “*Think back to a time when you faced a significant obstacle in ministry. Describe it.* How did you deal with that obstacle? How did you overcome? How did you work through it?” The third question that operationalized research question #2 was the italicized part of the following question from the face-to-face pastoral interviews: “*Think back to a time when you felt like leaving the ministry. Describe what happened.* Why did you stay?”

When the pastoral subjects were asked to name or share some of the major obstacles they had encountered in ministry, they listed eighty-three different obstacles. These obstacles were grouped into ten major categories: issues of self, family issues, staff issues, congregational issues, denominational issues, financial issues, relational issues, conflict issues, cultural issues, and health issues. Figure 4.3 shows the number of obstacles listed in each category.



**Figure 4.3. Significant obstacles.**

The pastors in this study listed seventeen obstacles they had experienced in themselves during their ministries. The category of self had the highest number of responses from the pastors in this area. The responses in the self category included tendency to micromanage, struggle to balance personal and professional life, discomfort with CEO model, inexperience, dealing with overwhelming demands, allowing pastoral call and energy to be sidelined for other agendas, tension between the prophetic and pastoral, conflict avoidance, lack of discernment, lost sense of calling, lack of self-care, identity enmeshed in church, and personality type. One pastor said, “The longer I’m at it, the more I realize that my own fallenness trips me up more than anything else.” Nine pastors specifically addressed the obstacle of their personal need for affirmation. One pastor simply said, “I like to be liked.” Three pastors talked in depth about how they felt

their coming into ministry had been shaped by their own needs for approval and affirmation. Everyone who described the need for affirmation as an obstacle in their own ministry was very much aware of how this need set them up for failure. One pastor who had served in several very large churches said, “Approval addiction is a terrible disease. ... So many things about the church fuel the beast of approval addiction.” Another pastor said, “If you try to do ministry by making other people happy, you will truly be frustrated and probably end up leaving.”

Family issues were weighty obstacles in the lives of the pastoral subjects. Five pastors had been through painful divorces. In each case, the pastor’s wife left him. Four of the wives were involved in extramarital affairs. One pastor described some of the struggles his wife had with ministry: “She told me that most men had their own job, their own house, and their own church. Most men had three different things, but it’s all one with you.” She felt that they had no privacy and no sense of separation from the church. She “hated folks coming and evaluating the parsonage.” Other pastors also talked about the pressures on their families. One pastor’s family felt the pain of persecution when he found himself and them in a very resistant and evil situation. This pastor was accused of having an affair, of being the grand wizard of the Ku Klux Klan, and of caring only about his own ego. He voiced his deep hurt and anger:

“I can take criticism. You can talk about my hairdo and maybe I’m not as in shape as I need to be, and, yea, I do get ahead of where I need to be sometimes.... I know myself,... but leave my family and my dogs out of it. It’s one thing to get me, but leave my kids and my family alone!”

Another pastor who currently serves a large suburban church talked about the struggle his wife had with the constricting lifestyle in which she feels she was forced to live. For her the church never goes away. Every weekend was committed and evening meetings were the norm. Another comment heard again and again from pastors had to do with the lack

of time they gave their families. One pastor whose children are already grown said, “I have this gnawing sense that I haven’t given my family the time they needed.”

Staff issues and obstacles were also prevalent in the pastoral subjects. Pastors dealt with disloyalty, mutiny, incompetence, immorality, relational triangles, antiquated structures, and the lack of staff. Some of the pastors’ struggles with staff were rooted in their own management styles. One pastor struggled with an entrepreneurial style and another with a laissez-faire style. Pastors also dealt with the struggle of an inherited staff. One pastor compared the reality of coming into an already existing staff to a “mail order bride.” He said, “There is no loyalty, no commonality of vision, no cohesiveness, and no chemistry.” On larger church staffs the problems of turf warfare and entrenchment almost caused one pastor to leave the ministry.

The issues and obstacles within the pastors’ congregation were the second most prevalent response to the question, “What are the major obstacles you have encountered in ministry?” The congregational obstacles included the issues of transitioning from a staff-driven church to a lay-driven church, of biblical ignorance and theological struggle, of changing the church culture, of the benign treating of the faith and the substantive issues of today, of low congregational self-esteem, of small thinking leaders, of diverse generational cultures, of a small church mentality, of church-wide discouragement, of the amount of time required to turn a bigger church around, of resistance to growth, of resistance to change, of a maintenance mentality, of inertia, of complacency, and of the backlash of growth. Issues of transitioning and growing the church are repeated throughout this list. One pastor whose church was experiencing fast-paced growth described the obstacle of resistance this way: “There is an antigrowth mentality that smaller is better.” Another pastor who had led several churches through transition said

that he thought people were instinctively driven to protect the status quo. Another major area of obstacles within the congregation was theological issues. One pastor who saw the great spiritual and biblical hunger of his churches described the Methodist Church as “a desert land in want of water.” Another pastor said that “tremendous biblical ignorance” existed in his church when he went there. Still another pastor emphasized not so much the lack of knowledge but the lack of action. He said, “We should be more intense and intentional” about applying faith to the substantive ethical issues of our day. A final major area of obstacles within the pastors’ congregations was the self-image issues of the church. The low self-esteem caused not just a resistance to pastoral leadership but a paralysis of ministry.

The pastoral subjects listed ten obstacles in the category of denominational issues. One pastor pointed to the “culture of noncommitment in both clergy and laity” that created an environment that worked against vision and growth. Another pastor said one of his obstacles was “the system and all that comes with it.” He said, “We just have to learn to live within it and be creative.” One pastor who had lived the reality of a bad appointment said that “pastoral miss matches” can be a problem. Isolation and lack of quality relationships were seen by some as a result of the United Methodist system. Another obstacle in the United Methodist Church was following dysfunctional or immoral pastors. One pastor who had followed a pastor who had committed adultery and a second pastor who had been arrested for solicitation of a prostitute talked of the deep need for healing in those abused churches. A major area of denominational obstacles had to do with theological training. One of the biggest struggles for one pastor was “fulfilling ministry and education requirements during the beginning days of ministry.” Another pastor commented on the lack of preparation he received when making the transition to

his very first church. Six pastors described a gap in their theological training. No pastor complained about their academic or theological training, but on issues such as leadership, conflict management, transitioning churches and staffs, empowering and equipping the laity, casting vision, and leading staff and other leaders, the pastors felt ill prepared.

Three financial issues were experienced as obstacles for the pastoral subjects. The pastor of a fast growing church said his church was always dealing with the issue of simply not having enough money to do all that God wants them to do. Other pastors were experiencing overwhelming debt that was defining the mission of their church. Seven pastors talked about the drain of leading their churches through capital campaigns.

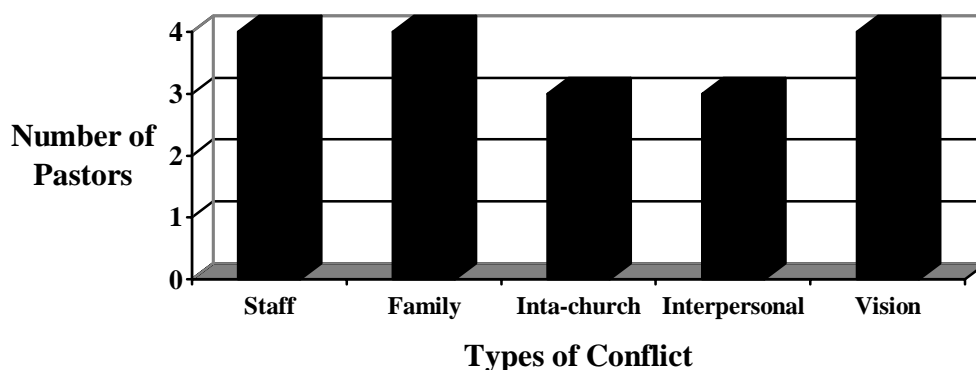
Issues of conflict were prevalent in ten of the pastoral responses. Pastors experienced and observed conflict both personally and corporately. In smaller churches the hardest conflict was with key and entrenched leaders and families. Two pastors had experienced significant conflicts with a senior pastor when they were serving as associates. One pastor said that when he came to his current church it was “on the brink of splitting.” The pain, bitterness, and lack of trust were overwhelming. Three pastors talked about the “conflict of dislocation.” This conflict occurs when the church is growing at a rate such that already involved members begin to feel left out. Four pastors talked about the reality of competing and conflicting visions for the church. The more vested persons were in their visions for their church, the greater the level of conflict was. One pastor experienced bitter conflict because his theological persuasion was different than that of his church. Another pastor said that the hardest thing about ministry was “seeing the way that Christians treat each other.”

Five pastoral answers dealt with the obstacles of the surrounding American culture. One pastor said that the syncretism between American culture and American

Christendom was a huge obstacle to his ministry and to the church today. The racism of the South was a recurring obstacle for three pastors. The high demanding, consumer-oriented, materialistic culture was an obstacle that several pastors noted. One pastor listed the cultural shifting of the last twenty-five years as an enormous obstacle. He said, “We are no longer a church culture. Church is no longer a high priority. More and more it is a struggle to reach people for Christ because of our growing secular mentality.”

The final category of pastoral obstacles was health issues. Pastors talked about the effects of stress and burnout upon their lives physically, emotionally, relationally, and spiritually. Pastors talked about the stress of constantly having to deal with people and all their issues. One pastor described in detail the stress and constant demand of preaching: “The pressure of keeping sermons fresh, deep, relevant, and entertaining can be very draining.” Another pastor said that leading a large church with its unending demands creates considerable stress in his life. One pastor said that “being a Jack of all trades” was stressful to him.

The second operational question for research question #2 was, “Think back to a time when you faced a significant obstacle in ministry. Describe it.” When the pastoral subjects were asked to share about a specific and significant obstacle in their own ministry, eighteen of the twenty-two pastors talked about an experience of conflict. The pastors described staff conflict, family conflict, intra-church conflict, interpersonal conflict with members, and vision conflict. Figure 4.4 shows how many pastors experienced each type of conflict.



**Figure 4.4. Pastoral conflict.**

The staff conflict experienced by these pastors was profound. One pastor said, “I got to where I hated coming to church.” Another pastor’s staff conflict was described as “mutiny.” All but one of the staff conflicts involved firing a staff person, and all involved making a major staff transition. Inevitably, a pastor’s conflict with staff members also affected the pastor’s ability to minister to that staff person’s constituency and family. The toil, time, and emotional energy required to deal with such conflict was devastating. One pastor said that while he was addressing the conflict, he felt his call and purpose in ministry were “sidelined.”

Four pastors shared about their divorces when talking about a significant obstacle in their own ministry and lives. One pastor’s divorce came when both he and his wife were actively leading and serving on staff in a growing, nine year old congregation. He said, “The demands of the church diminished the amount of time and energy we had for our relationship.” Another pastor’s divorce came in the middle of a very troubled church where his family was under tremendous pressure and where he, himself, was personally and physically threatened. All four pastors saw their leadership in the church not as a



cause but as a contributive factor to their divorce. Ministry heightened their marital problems rather than initiated them.

The intra-church conflict described by pastors happened in the church itself, both prior to and during the pastoral subjects' leadership in their churches. One pastor came into a church where the previous two pastors had entered into marital affairs. He found a church that was divided, discouraged, and bitter where unhealthy and opposing leaders were well-established on different leadership committees. Another pastor made the transition from a very healthy seven hundred member church to a very unhealthy church with over two thousand members. His new church was terribly conflicted with financial improprieties, unattractive worship, and a church leadership who refused to pay their apportionments. The "core DNA" of his new church came from a much-beloved and long-tenured pastor whose sexual orientation was in question. This much-beloved pastor had cast a vision for a very high form of liturgical worship. The pastor who followed him in ministry came into the church and tried to force too much transition too soon, and while there he went through serious marital difficulties. The pastoral subject from this study was the next pastor into this conflicted situation. By the time he got there, the church was hurt, confused, angry, and even rebellious. Another pastor in this study came into a church on the verge of splitting because a previous pastor had rushed the church into a relocation plan. The plan had been approved in a very controversial vote with 59 percent in favor and 41 percent opposed. The pastor said that when he got there the people were in a great deal of pain with a low degree of trust.

Three pastors shared stories of significant interpersonal conflict. One pastor who was in a fast growing new church told of the betrayal of a trusted friend at a very crucial time in his church's development. This so-called friend became a "backstabbing" and

“undermining force” in this still fragile congregation. Another pastoral subject told of an experience from his early days in ministry when a member who owned a certain car dealership reacted strongly to his family buying a mini-van from another source. The conflict came to a head in the narthex of the church just a few minutes before the church’s annual Christmas Eve service. The pastor stuck out his hand to greet the car dealer. The car dealer pulled back his hand, and said, “Piss on you.”

“Pardon me?” said the young pastor.

“You heard me,” said the dealer. “I said, piss on you.”

The young pastor explained that he had bought his new minivan from his wife’s cousin. The car dealer replied, “How much does he give to this church?”

The pastor said, “Well, I don’t think that’s really the point.”

“No son, that’s exactly the point!”

Such interpersonal conflict was what made the above pastor in this study think about leaving the ministry.

The vision conflict about which pastors talked in this study came as pastors were leading their churches through important change. Two pastors experienced vision conflict in a new church situation where their churches were growing to a greater degree than some key laity desired. The pastors both had a vision for reaching as many people as possible with the good news of Christ while the laity was committed to a medium-size church that never grew beyond a certain point. One of the pastors experienced this vision conflict in two close personal friends who were charter members number two and three. One evening after they had dinner together, one of the pastor’s friends said, “I hope our church never gets beyond five hundred.”

He replied, “Are you going to stand at the door and tell them they can’t come in?”

Another pastor's vision conflict came as he led his church into racial inclusion with the addition of an African-American pastor. The pastor in this study definitely knew it was the right thing to do, but some very influential members of his church began to grumble behind the scenes. The conflict came to a head as the pastor went to the "Nineteenth Hole" at the most exclusive country club of his city to let them know that the African-American pastor was God's will for the church and that he was "willing to go to the mat if necessary for this one."

The last pastor's vision conflict came because he took a stand for the centrality of worship. He came to a church with a rich and renowned musical program for children and teenagers. The choirs for both the children and teenagers practiced during the Sunday morning worship service. When children and families were missing worship to be involved in the church's choral program known as "chapel choir," the pastor asked a key question, "Is there any other time when our chapel choir could practice so that children could also be involved in worship?" This question touched a raw nerve in the church, its leadership, and its staff, and the battle began for the future of the church.

Four pastoral subjects did not share experiences of conflict. Instead, three pastors shared about congregational concerns and one shared about a needed paradigm change within himself. One pastor's church was in great debt and a slow decline. When asked, "What would it take for you to feel successful in this situation?" he replied, "Oh nothing special, just get rid of the debt and double the church in size." His reply was followed by a huge, huge, huge belly laugh that seemed both sarcastic and cathartic. Another pastor's congregation was a downtown, declining situation and seemingly, invincibly resistant. The third pastor had an issue with his congregation because its numerical growth and its demands for ministry were far outpacing its resources. The one pastor who needed the

internal change was serving as pastor of a very large congregation. His whole ministry prior to that appointment had been about fast-paced numerical growth and pleasing the church. In that large church he had to face his own addiction to approval. He said, “Approval addiction can drive you, but it can also kill you and at Timbuktu,<sup>1</sup> it damn near killed me.”

The third question that operationalized research question #2 was the following inquiry from the face-to-face pastoral interviews: “Think back to a time when you felt like leaving the ministry. Describe what happened.” Sixteen of the twenty-two pastors said they had thought about leaving the ministry. One pastor quipped, “Only a couple of times today.” Three pastors had jobs beyond ministry all lined up but backed out of those positions before leaving their churches. The most prevalent cause for wanting to leave ministry was just being “tired of it.” The “it” described by the pastoral subjects was the people, the never-ending demands, the conflict, the unmet expectations, and financial needs. One pastor said of the people he struggled with, “You put your whole life into something and the people you are trying to reach and spiritually form are just so nonchalant about it all; people can be so petty and hateful.” A pastor who was feeling the pressure of overwhelming demands said, “Sometimes, I just want to coast a while, but the demands and needs just never seem to stop.” The conflict that grew tiresome was with the staff, key leaders, and abusive parishioners. The unmet expectations arose in a pastor who expected every church he led to have significant numerical growth. The financial needs that almost caused one pastor to leave occurred early on in his ministry.

### **Pastoral Perseverance**

The third research question was operationalized by asking three questions. The

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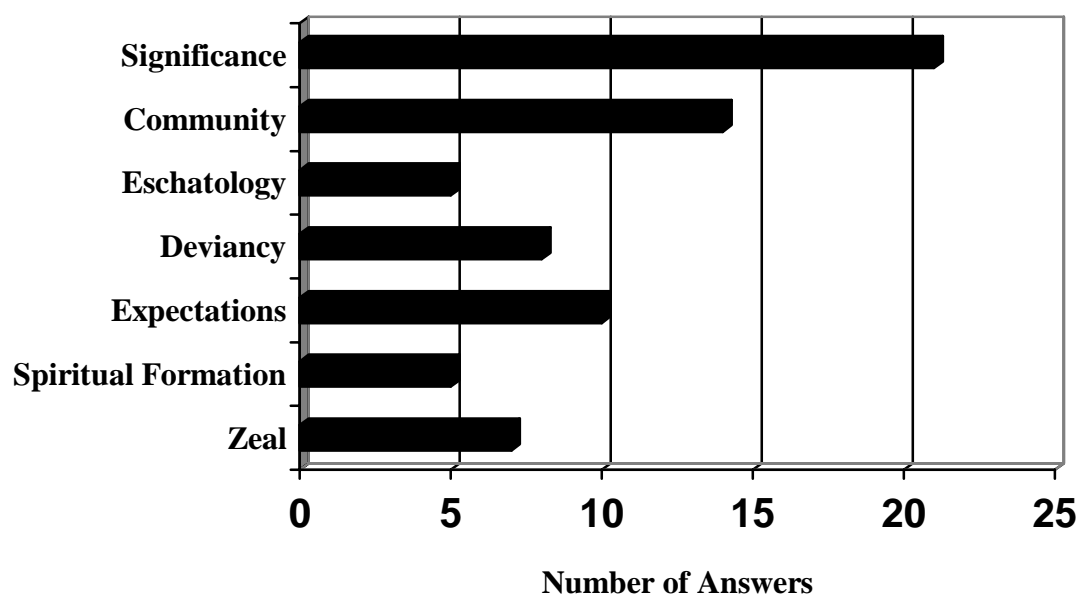
<sup>1</sup> Timbuktu is a pseudonym.

first operational question was the italicized part of the following question from the face-to-face interviews: “Think back to a time when you faced a significant obstacle in ministry. Describe it. *How did you deal with that obstacle? How did you overcome it? How did you work through it?*” The second operational inquiry for research question #3 was the italicized part of this question: “Think back to a time when you felt like leaving the ministry. Describe what happened. *Why did you stay?*” The final operational query for research question #3 was, “If you think back to the beginning of your ministry and someone gave you advice or if you wish someone would have given you advice about how to make it or persevere in ministry, what might that advice have been?”

The pastoral subjects in this study were able to face and overcome a wide range of obstacles. The pastors’ responses to the issue of dealing with, overcoming, and working through a significant obstacle were very informative. The pastors’ answers were delineated into the Pauline categories and core values from Chapter 2: significance, community, Pauline eschatology, Pauline deviancy, God-given expectations, spiritual formation and zeal. Pastoral responses that dealt with the issue of significance were those answers that specifically described a persevering strategy involving one’s relationship with God and/or one’s sense of calling. An example of a significance response came from a pastor who faced huge adversity and experienced attacks of anxiety. He said he was able to overcome because he discovered that his “well-being was not in the congregation but in Christ and his grace, in Christ and Christ alone.” Pastoral answers that pointed toward the importance of Christian community and relationships were those that fit into the community category. A community response came from a pastor who experienced a family crisis over a decade ago: “After my divorce, my next church was a very healing place.” The pastors who shared about a vision of God’s intervention and presence in both

the present and the future were placed into the Pauline eschatology category. One pastor who went through a great trial in the early days of his ministry career gave a response that demonstrated the importance of an eschatological approach when he said, “I did some consulting which allowed me to see beyond the place that I found myself.” The pastoral responses that exhibited the primacy of purpose and an open flexibility with methodology fit into the Pauline deviancy grouping. A pastor who had led several churches through transforming transitions talked about how he persevered when a church he was serving was adamantly opposed to his leadership, “I held on to God’s purpose for our church even when certain projects and programs were failing.” Pastoral answers that dealt with the whole issue of what to expect out of ministry came under the classification of God-given expectations. A pastor who had experienced unbelievable persecution said that he had learned to expect that people will always get in the way of God’s plans. Pastoral answers that mentioned the importance of spiritual disciplines were grouped into the spiritual formation category. A pastor who found himself overwhelmed by the demands of his church said that “the renewal of his devotional life” had been truly lifesaving. Those pastoral responses using phrases that described a zeal, tenacity, or unrelenting passion were placed into the zeal category. One pastor whose church had been directly impacted by Hurricane Katrina talked of the importance of an inward tenacity.

The pastoral subjects used seventy-one different responses when answering the question of how they worked their way through a significant ministry obstacle. Figure 4.5 shows the frequency of how the pastors’ answers fit into the seven categories of perseverance.



**Figure 4.5. Persevering through obstacles.**

The most prevalent pastoral responses were in the significance category. Twenty-one of twenty-two pastors specifically mentioned their sense of call as an important contributing factor to their persevering through a time of significant challenge. All twenty-two pastors told the story of their call to ministry during the face-to-face interviews. The initial intention of asking the pastoral subjects to share about their call to ministry was simply to establish rapport and begin to build a context of each individual pastor's lifetime of ministry. As the pastoral subjects shared their stories, the primacy of call to their sustaining excellence in ministry became obvious. Though each call to ministry was unique, the pastors' calls went through five well-defined stages. These stages of call development were often sequential, but in a few pastors some of the stages were concurrent. The five stages of call development as observed in the twenty-two pastoral subjects were exposure and growth in Christ, experience of a supernatural call,

struggling and processing of call, affirmation and confirmation of call, and advancement and further refinement of call. Stage one of call development varied greatly among the pastoral subjects of this study. Seven pastors came from unchurched family backgrounds, eleven pastors were involved in some way in a local church, and four of the pastoral subjects had fathers who were Methodist ministers. Stage two, the actual experience of God's call, came in the preadolescent years for two pastors, the adolescent or teenage years for eight pastoral subjects, the college years for ten pastors and the post-college years for two pastors. College was a very formative time of faith and call development for all the pastors. Stage three struggling and processing involved much inward searching and questioning of motives and directions. One pastoral subject whose father was also in ministry said of his time of discerning and processing his call, "I was fearful that it was wrapped up in my dad in ways that I didn't understand." Another pastor who had a profound call of God when he was sixteen said, "I struggled to understand and accept the legitimacy of my call." Another pastor who experienced a conversion to Christ and a call to ministry in college described himself as "running" from his call. Stage four of call development is where pastors experienced both informal and formal affirmation for their call. Support came from campus ministers, family members, youth ministers, pastors, district superintendents, work associates, and in-laws. Several pastors told how their pastors had taken the time to mentor them in their call. Official confirmation came through their ordinations. Stage five of call development occurred through seminary and ministry opportunities of various kinds. One pastor who started out with an undergraduate degree in Christian education found himself taking small step after small step until through a bizarre but God-driven set of circumstances he arrived at his first pastorate. Pastors described their calls as unfolding, maturing, deepening, and "both



narrowing and broadening at the same time.” Many pastors took a tour through youth ministry or associate ministry along the way. The importance of God’s call to each pastor was especially true when each pastor described how they persevered and overcame in ministry. A pastor who had gone through a divorce said, “God called me, and he didn’t stop calling me because of my struggle.” A pastor who experienced considerable struggle in a rural church said “remembering his call” was crucial to his survival. A pastor who was in a fast-growing and fast-transitioning church told of the resistance and conflict caused by growth. To overcome and persevere, he resolved to “stay true to the vision and calling that God had given.” One pastor summed up the importance of call in his persevering in ministry by telling a story from Will Campbell’s Brother to a Dragonfly. In this story a young mainline pastor from the South is befriended and mentored by a Baptist pastor who is very effective in ministry but also very irreverent in life. The older pastor smoked, drank, and cussed. One day on a hunting trip the older pastor turned to his young protégé and asked him a rhetorical question: “Son, I suppose you’re wondering why I’m in the ministry anyway? Because, I’m called God-damn-it! I’m called God-damn-it!” This story spoke of the irrevocable and unconditional call of God to the pastoral subject who shared Campbell’s story as a part of his response to what has kept him in ministry.

Two recurring concepts that arose in pastors when facing obstacles that fit into the category of significance were systems theory as popularized by Edwin H. Friedman and self-differentiation. Systems theory comments were heard in six face-to-face interviews. Self-differentiation was used by ten different pastors to describe their strategies of overcoming. The pastoral subjects used the term self-differentiation to describe the delineation and separation of their identity from the circumstances of life and ministry

they were experiencing. Self-differentiated pastors are those who do not find their worth or significance in what they do in ministry but rather in who they are in Christ.

The pastoral subjects gave fourteen responses in the community category. Pastors found relational support to help them persevere in ministry from family, ministry colleagues, parishioners, long-time friends, outside consultants, professional counseling, district superintendents, and bishops. A pastor who had faced turmoil in his church and home stated with passion, “You just can’t make it alone!” Another pastor who had faced significant staff conflict made the following comment about the danger of isolation and importance of community: “Isolation is one of the greatest dangers of the ministry. It’s not just about being lonely and having a lack of support, but it’s in isolation that pastors are most tempted.” The pastoral subjects seemed divided on the issue of where they found and were willing to find supportive community. Most pastors felt more drawn to the friendships they had cultivated and experienced within their local congregation, while a few leaned more toward their colleagues in ministry. The hesitancy with finding support and relationships within one’s own church was stated by a pastor who had experienced some significant betrayal:

I definitely avoid friendships with church members. I practice that old proverb, ‘friendly with many and friends with none.’ When you get really close to parishioners, you cease being their pastor because you make casual that relationship you have as their pastor. It can hurt the nature of authority you have as their pastor and servant leader.

The drawback of finding one’s community in friendships with colleagues in ministry was a sense of jealousy and competition and a perceived lack of trust. A pastor who spent his whole life in the church knew firsthand the struggles of ministerial friendships:

The United Methodist Church believes in connectionalism, but it doesn’t happen. The district superintendents haven’t strongly encouraged this to happen, and pastors are not going to go beyond their leaders on this. Pastors in Methodist churches have a huge trust issue with each other. Our

system, our structure almost mitigates against trust. We compete. What you say in confidence will become the gossip in the conference. Without trust, you cannot have accountability.

Another pastor who had a passion for the potential for support within the United Methodist structure said, “Connectionalism means connectionalism!” One pastor who had known great success within his annual conference found the connection more theoretical than real. He said that when he attends annual conference he feels like an “unknown outsider, like a kid looking for a place to sit on the first day of school.”

Another pastor who grew up in another denomination says that “[we] Methodist preachers, despite what we sometimes do to each other, we are colleagues; we are not competitors.” Seven pastoral subjects mentioned specifically that they had connected with a self-selected small group of colleagues.

Five pastoral responses to the question, “How did you overcome?” emphasized the importance of an eschatological view to working through difficult times in ministry. Again and again, pastors talked about staying true to “God’s vision.” One pastor who faced a disastrous situation in his local church and in his family said, “I just kept on believing that God could change things.” Another pastor who had consulting experience used those skills both in and outside of his church and while doing so was reminded that his life and ministry were greater than his current situation.

Eight responses fit into the category of Pauline deviancy. These responses were shared by pastors whose overcoming was facilitated by their commitment to keep the gospel central and their willingness to employ new methodology. One pastor facing resistance because of his passion for racial inclusion decided to “confront those head-on who were being subversive.” Another pastor who felt the tremendous pressure of turning a large church around was led by God to take his church through a yearlong process of

developing a mission statement and core values for his seemingly rudderless church.

Other pastors were willing to let certain programming initiatives die while still keeping God's purpose on the forefront. One pastor whose church was at a splitting point when he first came developed a key but simple twofold strategy of reestablishing the value of unity in his church: to love them and to let them know over and over again that they were a great church. This pastor said, "Before I could cast a vision for tomorrow, I had to let them know about who they are today." Another pastor who was sent into a horribly divided church described his approach for restoring unity: build relationships, build confidence, and always practice strategic inclusiveness.

Ten different pastors talked about the importance of God-given expectations when overcoming and persevering in ministry. These pastors understood that the struggle, hardship, and conflict in ministry are not anomalies to ministry but rather the status quo. One pastor said that ministry had to be "weathered." Another pastor talked about the inevitability of losing families in the midst of gaining families. Another pastor overcame and persevered because he finally acknowledged his own pastoral mortality (i.e., one way or another, eventually, he would have to leave the church he had birthed). He said, "At first, that realization disturbed me, but then it liberated me." Another pastor who had experienced a difficult staff and church situation finally came to terms with the reality of significant conflict in ministry. For a good part of his ministry, he had been able to skirt the issue, but as his pastorates grew larger, so did the conflict. This pastor said, "I knew that laissez-faire leadership would no longer cut it. I could no longer leave things alone and expect them to get better."

Five pastors noted specifically the importance of spiritual formation practices to their overcoming of obstacles. One pastor learned important self-care disciplines at a

regional counseling center. Another pastor in a high demand and high stress situation said that time alone with God was an absolute necessity. One pastor who was in a situation of huge debt and high expectation said that he survived because of a “dogged commitment to devotional life and spiritual life daily.” Another pastor experienced a restoration and strengthening of his devotional life after he and his wife went away on an important and beneficial renewal retreat. Though only five responses were in the category of spiritual formation, the context for so many other answers was spiritual formation. Several pastors had experienced profound surrender to God in the midst of their ministry challenge and personal struggle. One pastor called his time of struggle his “Aldersgate experience.” Another pastor told of being so overwhelmed with all the demands of ministry and finally getting to the place of praying, “Lord I just don’t know if I can do this.” He said he felt “that if I didn’t turn it over to him I was going to die.” In the immediacy of that situation, the pastor heard God’s voice say, “Peter,<sup>2</sup> I never meant for you to do this alone.” Another pastor who had reached a point in ministry where he could not “go another step” described an encounter with God that changed his life and ministry. As he was driving in his car ready to quit his church and leave his call, he heard a song entitled God Can Make a Way. In deep pain, brokenness, and defeat with tears streaming down his face, this pastor prayed, “God, if you can make a way, show me the way through this, and show me how to lead this church to become the church you want it to be.” In that moment this pastor acknowledged that the church he was serving was God’s church not his church.

The last category of response to the issue of how to overcome was zeal. Seven pastoral responses dealt with the importance of zeal and passion to pastoral perseverance. A pastor under unjust pressure and expectations said that he remained resolved “to stay

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<sup>2</sup> Peter is a pseudonym.

faithful to use my gifts and graces no matter what else was going on.” A pastor facing seditious racism in his congregation said he was “willing to go to the mat” for what was right. One pastor who went into a church with a history of negativity and decline talked about being “bullheaded” and “sticking to his guns” in order to do that which God had called him to do. The zeal and passion in all twenty-two pastors was evident as they shared both their struggles in ministry and their resolve to continue serving Christ.

The second major operational question for research question #3 was “Why did you not leave the ministry?” Sixteen of the twenty-two pastors said that they had thought about leaving ministry. When those pastoral subjects were asked about why they stayed in ministry, their responses gave further insight into persevering in pastoral excellence. Once again, the pastors’ answers were delineated into the Pauline categories and core values from Chapter 2: significance, community, Pauline eschatology, Pauline deviancy, God-given expectations, spiritual formation, and zeal. The sixteen pastors were more specific when answering this question than when answering the previous operational question about overcoming a significant obstacle. The prior question had seventy-one different responses, while the question of why they stayed in ministry received only thirty-three distinct answers from the sixteen pastors.

Issues of significance were observed in each pastor’s reason for staying in ministry. All sixteen pastors emphasized the importance of their call when making the decision to stay in pastoral ministry. One pastor said, “It’s beyond personal preference; it’s like a marriage; it’s a done deal.” Four pastors emphasized their God-given competencies and gifts for ministry. One pastor who had experienced profound resistance said, “The grace of God has got me here, and it is the grace of God that will keep me here.”

In the category of community, pastors gave six responses. One pastor told of the importance of his daughter's input in his life. After he had already finalized plans to move out of ministry, his fifteen year old daughter said, "Daddy, stick it out. Daddy, stick it out." Another pastor described how a key group of leaders in his church had rallied around him in a time of great persecution. Still another pastor told of how his whole church had responded in great grace and support at a time of his own brokenness.

Two pastors described the importance of an eschatological viewpoint when deciding to stay in ministry. One pastor who almost left the ministry early on in his career feels that the reason he stayed was the God-directed circumstances of his life and the intense praying of some close family members. He specifically pointed to Jeremiah 29:11: "For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future." This pastor believed that God had both his present and his future firmly in his hands, and that God would see him through and beyond all challenges.

Two pastors gave answers that were in the category of Pauline deviancy. This category emphasizes the primacy of the gospel mission and the importance of flexibility and adaptability in fulfilling that mission. One pastor said that he stayed in ministry because he remembered what a difference the gospel of Christ had made in himself and in others. He said that regardless of what happened, God gave him "a renewed desire to live out that call." The other pastor stayed in ministry because he knew that much was still undone in reaching the world for Christ, and he wanted to be a part of the "unfolding work of God."

Three pastors talked about how their ability to stay in ministry was affected by their expectations that ministry would involve intense challenges and struggles. One

minister said that he and his wife had a saying that put things in perspective for them, “I hate people.” This pastor went on to explain that what he meant was that people always had a way of doing some of the most destructive things and of being a roadblock to God’s intended purposes. Another pastor said that struggling with people was “the nature of the business.” The same pastor said that “wherever there are people, there will be boneheadedness.”

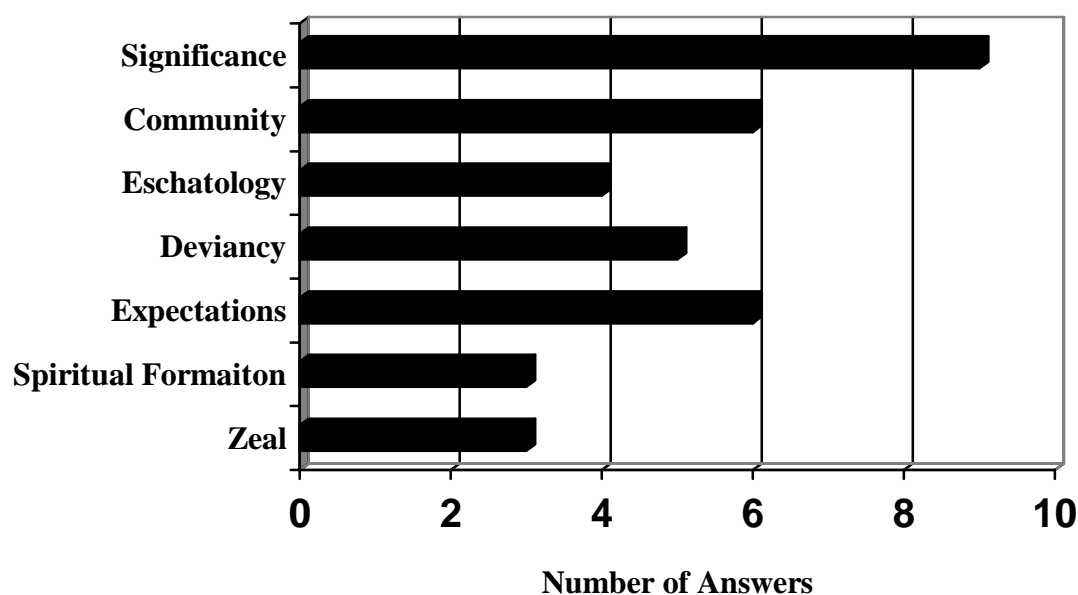
Three pastors emphasized the importance of spiritual formation for staying in ministry. One pastor found the spiritual direction of a priest and renewed prayer life essential to surviving and continuing in ministry. Another pastor talked about the ongoing but absolutely necessary struggle of finding time alone with God. The other pastor talked about the importance of a Sabbath and renewal leave for being sustained in pastoral ministry.

Three pastors noted the importance of zeal and passion in staying in ministry. One participant was the pastor of a very large church and had always had great success in prior ministries. After four years of seemingly no significant growth or turnaround, he believed he was beating his head against an “unmovable wall.” He was burned out and ready to quit, and then he had an experience of profound surrender. Through that experience his “resolve to do what I do now has never been stronger.” Another pastor said “I always strive to get better. I am never satisfied. It never gets stale.” The third pastor said, “This is why God put me on this earth. If I’m not going to do this I might as well crawl under a rock and die.”

The last operational question to research question #3 was, “If you think back to the beginning of your ministry and someone gave you advice or if you wish someone would have given you advice about how to make it or persevere in ministry, what might



that advice have been?” The pastoral subjects gave wonderful and insightful responses to this question that dealt with ministry advice in general, but only thirty-six answers were relevant to the issue of sustaining pastoral excellence and persevering in ministry. Figure 4.6 shows the breakdown of the categories of advice given by the pastors.



**Figure 4.6. Persevering advice.**

The pastoral subjects gave nine answers in the area of significance. Two pastors said that being yourself and not trying to be anybody else was important to persevering in ministry. Three pastors said that having a strong call was essential to staying in ministry. One pastor gave advice echoed by seven other pastors in their interviews: “If you can do anything else besides ministry, then do it.” Another piece of advice echoed in various interviews but shared explicitly in response to this question was, “Don’t let your church be a stepping stone; be willing to stay.” This advice came with the challenge to “find your significance in your call and not in your career.”

Six advisory answers encouraged or promoted the development of healthy relationships. One pastor who had been through some tough transitions of late said, “Build a group of cheerleaders around you.” Two pastors from different conferences and different backgrounds advised finding and utilizing strong mentors. One pastor emphasized developing strong relationships that foster accountability. Another pastor recommended finding “people in the congregation that you can go to, where you can be yourself, let it all hang out and know that it will be OK.” Another pastor who had experienced the pain of betrayal said, “Keep close to the people of faith that you know you can trust and be honest with them.”

Four answers were given that stressed the importance of God’s work both in the present and in the future. One pastor’s advice turned to his hope that “someday, I will hear Jesus say, ‘well done my good and faithful servant.’” One pastor who was significantly influenced by Ken Callahan advised pastors to keep a vision of God’s future continually before you. One pastor who had a track record of strong leadership in the church gave this eschatological advice: “Take the church with utmost seriousness. The church in all its different manifestations is the literal body and presence of Christ on this earth.”

Pauline deviancy was heard in four pastoral answers. One of the pastors talked about doing whatever is necessary to connect the gospel to people. He said, “Be flexible, but always keep a solid foundation.” Another pastor said that his whole ministry was about “trying to make a difference in someone’s life on behalf of someone who has made all the difference in my life.” This pastor said, “The main thesis of my ministry is Jesus Christ makes a radical difference in your life.” A pastor who saw himself primarily as a “pastor-teacher-preacher” said that he would advise himself and others to “be willing to

be adaptive.” A pastor who is known for his visionary leadership said, “Fight only those battles that affect the cause of Christ.”

Advice that focused on having realistic, God-given expectations for ministry was given in six answers. One pastor gave advice that expected the reality of conflict: “Keep your friends close and your enemies closer.” Another pastor described ministry through terms of challenge: “Ministry is the most difficult, trying, and painful challenge of your whole life, BUT [original emphasis] it’s worth it because you will be blessed by God and his favor will be upon you.” One pastor told of the advice given him by an older minister who was very close to him. The advice came as a shock because this well-respected minister was very devout and reverent. His advice to our pastoral subject was, “There is a lot of chicken shit in the ministry, and no matter what makes you love it so much, you have to be willing to deal with all the chicken shit to do the thing you love.” One pastor who was effective in his local church and had also served on the bishop’s cabinet said, “All churches carry challenges and struggles; that’s just part of ministry.”

The spiritual formation advice came from three pastors. One pastor gave the advice of taking a weekly Sabbath and of taking spiritual renewal seriously. Another pastor said, “Spiritual life and devotional life are keys to perseverance.” A third pastor gave advice about keeping a strong prayer life. He said, “Your prayer life keeps you close to God and keeps reminding you of your dependence upon him.”

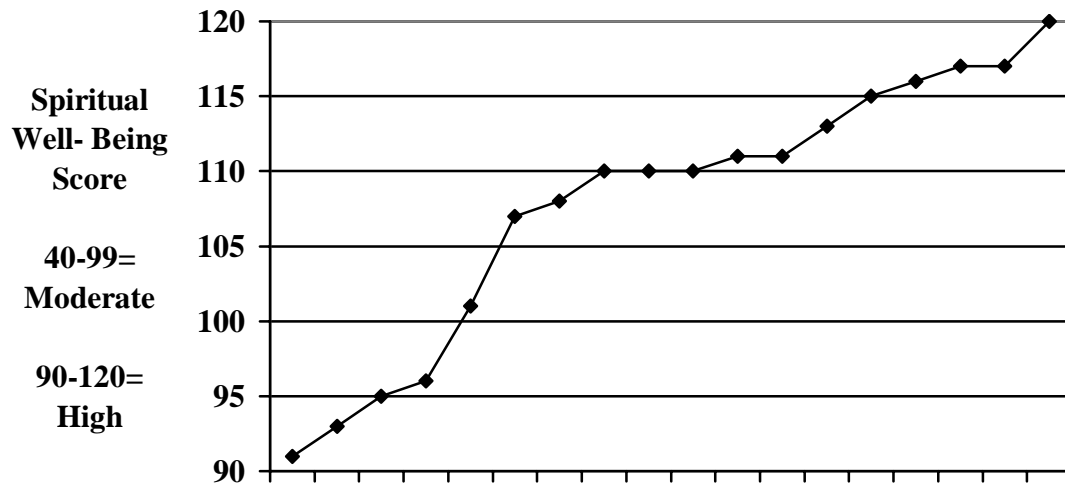
Three pastors gave advice that dealt with the zeal and passion of pastors. One pastor said that “dogged determination is essential” to persevering in ministry. Another pastor talked of the importance of personal resolve. He said, “I may go through hell, but I’m not going anywhere.” The third pastor said that “passionate ministry leads to significant and fruitful ministry.”

### **Pastor Paul and Pastors of Today**

The fourth research question was, “What is the relationship or alignment between the first century pastor Paul and twenty-first century United Methodist pastors who persevere in excellence?” This research question was operationalized by answering the following five questions: (1) What was the spiritual well-being of the pastoral subjects? (2) How did the twenty-two, twenty-first century pastoral subjects sustain their commitment to pastoral excellence? (3) What are the core values of Paul’s persevering excellence? (4) What are the similarities between twenty-first century United Methodist pastors and Paul in the area of persevering excellence? (5) What are the differences between these twenty-first century pastors and Paul in the area of persevering excellence?

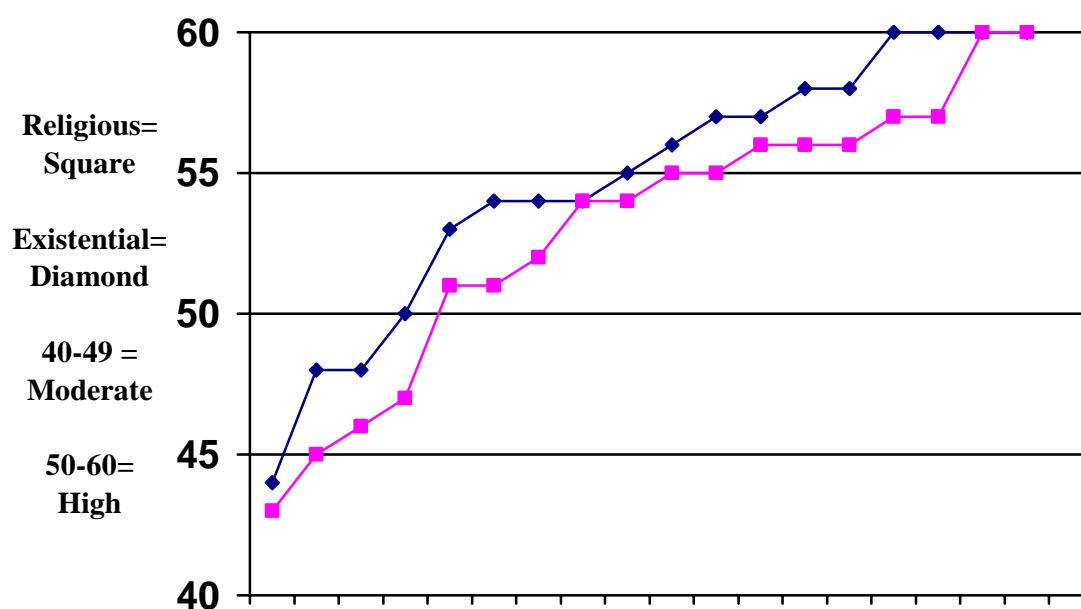
To help ascertain the spiritual well-being of the pastors, the Ellison Spiritual Well-Being scale was given to the twenty-two pastoral subjects. Eighteen pastors completed this self-assessment. The scale provided insight into the religious well-being, the existential well-being, and the spiritual well-being of the pastoral subjects. The Spiritual Well-Being scale is a twenty item self-assessment constructed of two subscales of religious well-being and existential well-being. Religious well-being focuses on the vertical dimension one’s spiritual life while existential well-being focuses on the horizontal dimension of how well a person is adjusted to self, community, and surroundings. These two components when factored together provide one’s overall spiritual well-being score. Fourteen out of these eighteen pastors scored in the high range of spiritual well-being. The four pastors who did not score in the high range were in the very high range of those who have a moderate sense of overall spiritual well-being. All but three pastors had a very positive view of their relationship with God. Pastors tended to see their religious well-being in a more positive light than their existential well-being.

Fourteen of the eighteen pastors scored themselves higher in religious well-being than in existential well-being. Figure 4.7 shows the pastors' sense of spiritual well-being from the Ellison scale.



**Figure 4.7. Spiritual well-being scores.**

Figure 4.8 shows the pastors' scores on the religious and existential dimensions of the assessment.

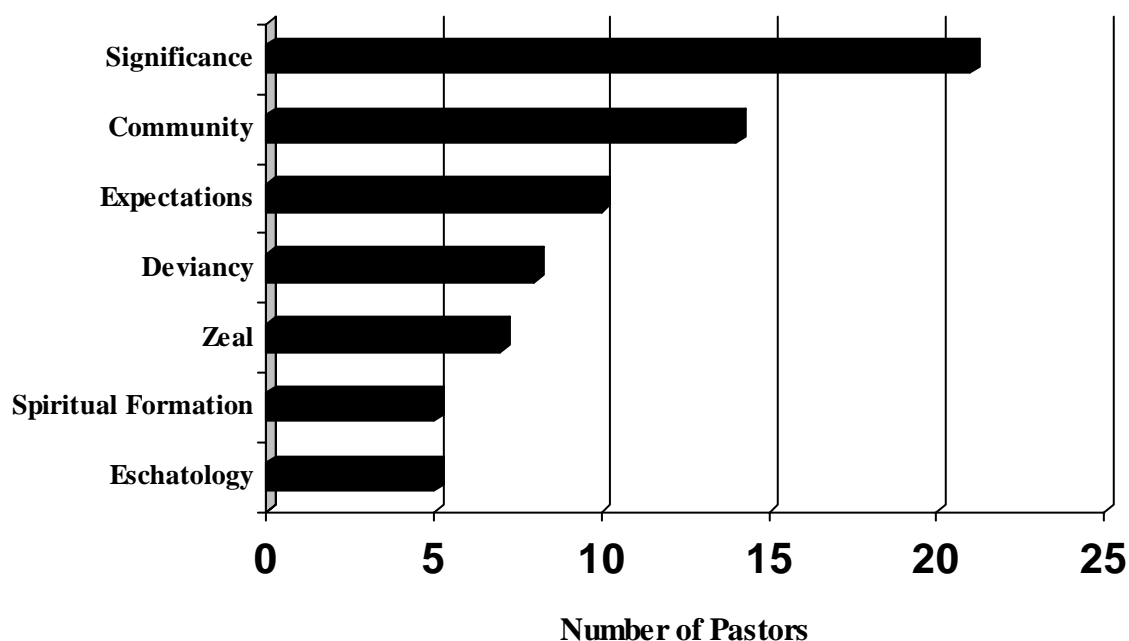


**Figure 4.8. Spiritual well-being scores.**

Overcoming and persevering in ministry allowed pastors to continue their pursuit and experience of ministerial excellence. The twenty-first century pastors talked about the issue of finding and living with a Christ-based significance. All but one pastor talked about the importance of his call to ministry. The concept and importance of God's grace was addressed thirty-one different times in the face-to-face interviews with pastors. The pastoral subjects' reliance upon Christian community was listed by fourteen different pastors. In an age of autonomy and materialism, these pastors survived in ministry because of the support of friends, family, and church and denominational leaders. The expectation that ministry would be filled with struggle and suffering allowed ten pastors to cope with the struggles they were facing. Eight pastors talked and practiced Pauline deviancy where the primacy of the gospel kept them adapting and trying ever new forms and methodologies. Seven pastors had a dogged determination, tenacity, or zeal that characterized their ability to cope and overcome in ministry. Five pastors specifically

noted the importance of certain spiritual disciplines in sustaining their commitment to pastoral excellence. Five pastors also articulated the importance of God breaking through in their church in the present and the future.

Figure 4.9 shows the ranking of how pastors answered the question of how they overcame obstacles in their ministry.



**Figure 4.9. Persevering through obstacles by rank.**

Pastor Paul survived and persevered through and beyond countless obstacles and struggles because of his commitment to the seven core values listed above. The theological and literature review of Chapter 2 made no ranking or delineation of these values in Paul's life. According to the research, these seven were all prevalent to a significant degree in Paul's life.

An obvious disequilibrium was found when addressing the similarities and differences between Paul and the twenty-first century United Methodist pastors. The

pastoral subjects participated in sixty to ninety minute face-to-face interviews and completed spiritual well-being inventories. The Apostle Paul is known through a volume of literature that spans three decades of his life in ministry. The data available on Paul's ministry is thus far greater than that available through this research project on the twenty-two pastors.

Even though the quantity of data available is radically different, the similarities between the pastoral subjects of today and the Apostle Paul are definite. God's call on Paul's life and the work of God's grace in Paul was central to Paul's life and ongoing ministry of excellence. The same was true in a very clear way for the pastoral subjects. All twenty-two of them vividly described the importance of God's call in their lives. Paul was raised in a very collective culture and the community of faith was his family. He counted on his brothers and sisters in Christ for emotional, physical, spiritual, and ministerial support. Fourteen of the twenty-two pastors specifically mentioned the importance of their relational networks in working their way through ministry and personal difficulties. Paul expected ministry to be a place of brokenness, weakness, trial, and suffering. Ten pastoral subjects shared a similar if toned down view of ministry struggles. These pastors expected resistance, limitations, rejection, pressure, personal struggle, and difficult people. Paul's deviancy was seen throughout his ministry as he was committed to the primacy of the gospel. In 1 Corinthians 9:21-23 Paul proclaims the central importance of the gospel to his ministry:

To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law), so as to win those not having the law. To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some. I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings.

Eight pastoral subjects expressed the centrality of God's purpose in their lives. One



pastor talked about holding onto the purpose but not the project. Another pastor described the yearlong process of defining his church's core values and primary mission and how important that process was to his ongoing commitment to ministerial excellence. Before his conversion, Paul had a zeal for the law. After his conversion, Paul had a zeal for the gospel. Seven of the pastoral subjects expressed a similar zeal and passion. Two pastors used the word tenacious to describe their commitment to Christ and to ministry; another pastor used the word bullheaded to describe his uncompromising resolve. Another pastor told of an experience where he was willing to put his whole ministry on the line for racial inclusiveness in his church. Paul's practice of spiritual disciplines was foundational to his identity in Christ and to his enduring excellence in ministry. Five twenty-first century pastors described the essential role that their spiritual disciplines played in helping them overcome in the midst of difficult obstacles. These pastors focused on finding time alone with God, daily devotions, receiving spiritual direction, healthy self-care, and calloused knees in prayer. Paul's eschatological viewpoint shaped his theology and ministry. Paul knew that the coming age of the Spirit had already broken into the present realm. The twenty-first century pastors in this study often expressed a similar conviction about the reality of God's presence in their situations. Five pastors specifically talked about the importance of God giving them the ability to see beyond their current realities to envision and experience his promised future.

The differences between Paul and the pastoral subjects was not so much one of definition as one of intensity. While almost all of the pastors emphasized their call to ministry and talked about the importance of God's grace in their lives and ministry, only a minority of pastors talked about issues of eschatology, spiritual formation, zeal, gospel primacy, and realistic expectations. All seven Pauline values were found cumulatively

present in the twenty-first century United Methodist pastors, but the degree of their importance in the pastors individually was not evident in the research data received from the face-to-face interviews. The Ellison Spiritual Well-Being Scale showed the strong significance and prevalence of prayer and meaningful relationship with God in the pastoral subjects.

### **Conclusion**

The United Methodist pastors in this study were extremely likeable, gifted, articulate, and passionate about ministry. When they defined excellence, they stayed away from one-liners and rehearsed dictionary definitions. Several pastors initially struggled to put their convictions about excellence into words, but the more all twenty-two pastors shared, the more evident their pictures of excellence became. The five categories of excellence (excellence as function, excellence as experience, excellence as character, excellence as spiritual, and excellence as growth) show the breadth of how these pastors understood excellence. The terms “faithful,” “effective,” and “grow” were the most commonly used terms in the pastors’ descriptions of excellence. The context for pastoral excellence was clearly the pastor and the church’s relationship and experience of God. Again and again, the pastors’ view of excellence was tied to their core passions and convictions for ministry.

The pastors in this study had all encountered weighty obstacles and struggles along their journeys. The belief that the obstacles mentioned in Chapters 1 and 2 are vocational constants for twenty-first century pastors was profoundly confirmed through the data collected for this study. The obstacles indeed were many, and they have surely taken their toll on the pastors. Burnout, anger, depression, physical illness, anxiety, and panic attacks were just a few of the effects pastors experienced as they faced obstacles

within their ministries. Conflict of all kinds was the primary cause of struggle for pastors. Interestingly, pastors listed themselves as being the biggest obstacle in their ministry.

Pastors stayed in ministry and kept pursuing ministry because God called them, and that calling was not a personal choice or preference. Pastors stayed because they had the support networks that undergirded them in the midst of crisis. They stayed because they were anchored in key spiritual disciplines and defined by an uncompromising, not-going-anywhere kind of zeal and passion for Christ. They stayed because they believed that God was with them and in them in the present and that he would be with them and in them in the future. They stayed because they were not shocked or surprisingly overwhelmed when the obstacles and challenges came.

Pastors who persevere in excellence today show marked similarities to the Apostle Paul in their strategies of persevering. The core values found in Paul's perseverance were also found throughout the responses of the twenty-first century pastors of this study. The difference is one of volume and intensity. Paul's autobiographical statement from 2 Corinthians 11:21-31 illustrates the deep levels of Paul's sufferings. Paul's single-minded primacy for the gospel seemingly dwarfs most twenty-first century pastors whose pressure to be a "jack of all trades" in a consumer-oriented culture often marginalizes such a central pursuit. Though most pastors articulated that God had broken into and was present in current reality, they stopped short of the full implications of Pauline eschatology. Paul's view that the coming age of the Spirit was readily available in the present age defined and shaped his theology and ministry.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **DISCUSSION**

The origins of this research project can be traced back to my own experience in pastoral ministry just over fifteen years ago. My marriage and my commitment to pastoral ministry were both on the brink of extinction. I can certainly attest to the primacy of God's grace in persevering through and beyond that period of devastating struggle. Since that time, I have known many close pastoral friends who have left the ministry. These pastors knew firsthand the litany of causes for ministry fallout that are listed in Chapters 1 and 4. The data from this project's research shows that those who have stayed and are still pursuing pastoral excellence also experienced the hurts, conflicts, struggles, and challenges of life in the local church. The issue of ministry fallout is not just of personal concern. Pastors leaving the ministry is a problem for the United Methodist Church and every other denomination in American Christendom. The purpose of this project was to understand what is involved in persevering in pastoral excellence. The research from this study provides insight not only into pastoral perseverance but also insight into pastoral excellence. Pastors who persevere through great struggle have to be pursuing something that is worth all the persevering, and that something is pastoral excellence. The first-century pastor Paul was the archetype for persevering in pastoral excellence, and his self-evaluative statement of his life and ministry are a beacon of hope to all who serve Christ as pastors today: "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith" (2 Tim. 4:7).

### **Major Findings**

The face-to-face interviews with the selected pastoral subjects provided important and instructive insight about pastoral excellence, pastoral obstacles, pastoral

perseverance, and contemporary pastoral ministry as compared to the first-century ministry of the Apostle Paul.

### **Pastoral Excellence**

As the pastoral subjects shared about excellence, one major insight was that a healthy understanding and experience of excellence involves both personal character and ministry competence. The pastors' responses often contrasted excellence as something one is versus excellence as something one does. Figure 4.1 (p. 88) shows that more answers dealt with performance and outcome than with issues of character and spiritual identity. More answers focused on excellence being something that occurs outside of oneself as opposed to inside oneself. Three pastors expressed concern about using a contemporary business term such as "excellence" rather than a biblical term such as "faithfulness." These pastors' fears were that when the church uses terms such as excellence, the ministry of the church is reduced to that which can be quantified. Their apprehension was that spiritual concerns and realities would take second place to agendas of the church such as church growth. Such was not the case in the selected pastors of this study. The twenty-two pastors in this study show a very clearly balanced view of excellence. Character and spiritual formation concerns were frequent alongside the concerns in the areas of competence and effectiveness. An insight from all of these conversations about excellence was that those who see excellence only as competence do not last in ministry because somewhere along the way their character becomes a large enough issue to derail both their competence and their ministry. On the other hand, those who want to emphasize identity and spiritual formation exclusively eventually find themselves being led to improve and increase their ministry competence. When ministry is all about competence and performance, a crash is inevitable, and when ministry is all

about character and identity formation, moving towards competence is predictable. One pastor told of how his early years of ministry were characterized by drivenness and extreme effectiveness. As a young pastor, he was rewarded and recognized by his annual conference. His pursuit of competence and his lackadaisical attitude toward issues of character resulted in a devastating ministry and personal crisis. As he received healing and progressed toward restoration, his focus became almost entirely on character development and spiritual formation. Today, this pastor is extremely competent and effective in ministry and talks about church health and not church growth and being lay empowered not pastor centered. The issue of character development for this pastor was the core driving force for the positive outcome of his ministry. Excellence in this pastor began on the side of character development, which then led to competence. This approach to ministry excellence is preferential for those desiring to persevere in pastoral excellence. A healthy view of excellence always involves both excellence in character and excellence in competence.

A second major insight from this study is that pastors who are overwhelmed with responsibility are underwhelmed in their experience of excellence. Fourteen different duties were listed by pastors in the function of excellence category. The demands and expectations that ministers have of themselves and that parishioners have of them are exhaustive, literally. The paradigm of the pastor being all things to all people conceptually and eventually works against, even wars against, excellence in ministry. Pastors are left to be a mile wide and an inch deep. One pastor sent me a follow-up e-mail after our face-to-face interview and described an approach to excellence in ministry that he knew he needed in his own life and ministry. He had recently done an on-site visit to North Point Church in Atlanta and was struck by their key ministry practice of narrowing

the focus. He quoted five snippets from Reggie Joiner, Lane Jones, and Andy Stanley's book Seven Practices of Effective Ministry:

1. Pastors need to do fewer things in order to make a greater impact.
2. Many people weaken their potential by investing too much time in areas of their lives where they have the least potential.
3. If they really want to make a lasting impact, then they need to eliminate what they do well for the sake of what they can potentially do best.
4. Devoting a little of themselves to everything means committing a great deal of themselves to nothing.
5. They have to do less if they want to grow more, and if they do more, chances are they will grow less.

The pastor who shared these insights with me said this kind of thinking runs completely counter to his context of ministry. He and the other two clergy on his staff had recently made up a six-page list of their pastoral duties. During the twenty-two interviews, ten pastors were interrupted with cell phone calls or by staff with important needs. Pastors are under the demand for constant availability and now, with today's technology, instant accessibility. In a day when everyone wants and expects more, those pursuing pastoral excellence will find a way to do less.

The third major insight from the data of this study is that true pastoral excellence is not just a concept; it is a vital experience. The pastoral subjects' emphasis on excellence as an experience shows that pastoral excellence is not just something that happens either inside or outside of the pastor. Excellence is something that connects tangibly to the life of the pastor and the church. Excellence is felt, experienced, and perceived. It is not just accomplished through pastors; it is also a gift to them. The

experiential nature of excellence implies that pastors need to be exposed to excellence-saturated contexts. Pastors need to put themselves in places where they encounter excellence, where they can taste it, touch it, see it, hear it, and even breathe it. The Beeson Institute, Leadership Network, Leadership Summit, and site visits to healthy churches are all examples of ways to experience excellence. True excellence has the potential to be contagious in and through the life and ministry of the pastor.

The fourth major insight is that excellence in ministry requires excellence in self. The importance of excellence in self was noted repeatedly in the face-to-face interviews. Pastors were committed to doing their best but also to being and becoming their best. The pastors' awareness of the need for self-improvement and self-care was rooted in the realization that "self" was the most recurring obstacle to pastoral excellence. The language of "self-care" may be cutting-edge "guruism," but it is also grounded in the Great Commandment given by Jesus: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength. The second is this: Love your neighbor as yourself. There is no commandment greater than these" (Mark 12:30-31). Pastors who desire to heighten both their excellence and perseverance need to implement specific and strategic plans for wholistic self-care: physical, mental, emotional and spiritual. Some annual conferences are making this move by mandate requiring their pastors to develop certain disciplines in the above areas. The counterintuitive nature of self-care is seen every time a flight attendant announces "place an oxygen mask on yourself and then place one on any dependent children who are traveling with you." The primordial instinct of survival would mean taking care of oneself as an end unto itself. The sacrificial instinct that comes in Christ would seemingly mean taking care of others first. Maybe, just maybe, the airlines have the right approach, even if it is



counterintuitive. One cannot adequately care for others if he or she has not first adequately taken care of self. Christ-commanded self-care never has self as the ultimate objective but rather also loving God and loving others.

The fifth major insight about pastoral excellence is that such excellence definitely includes a spiritual component. The spiritual nature of excellence was observable in the pastors' responses both explicitly and implicitly. Authentic excellence cannot be experienced apart from Christ and his character. Christine Pohl's "cruciform excellence" (Carroll 8) is informative and formative for pastors who desire to persevere in excellence. She describes four factors of cruciform excellence central to the gospel of Christ. First, pastors are called to preach and follow a crucified Savior. Pastoral excellence does not begin with church growth or denominational affirmation but with faithfulness to God's call and willingness to follow after Jesus. Second, the kingdom of God privileges the least and the last, not the most or the first. Twenty-first century United Methodist pastors are too easily concerned with career tracts, pension plans, and ideal appointments. Pastors of today are tempted to find their worth from being in places that are just the opposite of "the least and the last." Third, the pursuit of excellence is so much more than self-help or positive thinking. The pursuit of spiritual excellence and holiness must always recognize the reality of human sinfulness and brokenness. Forgiveness, restoration, and healing are essential to personal and pastoral excellence. Pastors who seek authentic excellence must stay rooted and grounded in a lifetime spiritual journey and relationship with Christ and not forfeit their soul to a mere corporate or professional model of ministry. Fourth, pastors' motives and efforts in ministry are a mixture of sin and grace and must always be evaluated in the light of Christ's character. As troublesome and destructive as the obstacles of ministry are, such obstacles can be an essential tool in the hands of God's

Spirit for bringing to light those areas where pastors need the refining and transforming presence of God in their lives.

The sixth insight about pastoral excellence is that it is more than just growth. Most of the pastors' definitions of excellence dealt with issues of growth, yet all but one of the pastors offered additional definitions of excellence that fit into other categories. Excellence as growth in isolation from other characteristics of excellence becomes something other than excellence. Such an understanding of excellence implies that just because something looks like excellence does not mean that it is excellence. The selected pastors believed that excellence was more than mere growth. One pastor said, "I *used to* [emphasis mine] see excellence as effectiveness, the meeting of pre-described goals of membership, attendance, and financial growth." Other pastors talked about quantitative growth in less than positive terms. One of the risks of serving as a pastor in a declining denomination or local church is the development of a defensive coping mechanism against growth itself. While the pastors in this study established that excellence involves more than just growth, a few pastors tended to see numerical growth as a type of non-excellence. United Methodist pastors who are committed to excellence must avoid an attitude that says, "Well, at least we will die with integrity." The data from this study, however, reveals that a more balanced excellence was found in the twenty-two pastoral subjects. These pastors exhibited an excellence that fosters an attitude saying, "We are not committed to not dying but rather we are committed to growing and thriving with integrity."

The seventh insight about pastoral excellence is that it involves effective leadership. All twenty-two pastors described an experience of excellence involving their influencing positive change and transition in their church. United Methodist pastors are

ordained to Word, sacrament, and order, but spoken and unspoken expectations are that these pastors will also be change agents. One pastor who has served as a district superintendent said that “effective pastors are catalysts for change.” If facilitating change and transition is one of the primary tasks for United Methodist pastors in the twenty-first century, then the church must begin to take seriously the issue of how to equip pastors for such leadership. Most of the pastors have relied on their intuitive instincts and skills learned from an assortment of sources.

The eighth insight about pastoral excellence is that setting a positive tone both contributes to and furthers excellence in the lives and ministries of pastors today. The positive attitudes of the pastoral leaders in this study were definite in the face-to-face interviews and in the Spiritual Well-Being Scale. All but four pastors tested high in existential well-being and spiritual well-being, and all but three pastors tested high in religious well-being. The pastors intentionally chose to see their churches and their situations with a positive outlook. One pastor quoted the oft-repeated advice to “bloom where you’re planted” as one of the keys to his ministerial effectiveness. Focusing on the present was more than just trivial advice; it was a crucial strategy to building excellence in ministry. The absence of pessimism in the selected pastors is instructive to the issue of what influences pastoral excellence. The pastoral leaders’ commitment to seeing the best in their churches and situations put them on a different track of effectiveness than other pastors who may have grown cynical and pessimistic through the years.

The ninth insight about pastoral excellence is that the connection of pastoral excellence to individual pastoral passion seems to indicate that excellence and its pursuit is subjective in nature. Excellence appears different when fleshed out in the life and ministry of each pastor. God’s calling, gifting, and the stirring of his Spirit worked

together to create the unique experience of excellence described by each pastor. While pastors need to seek the gifts and skills to meet the needs of their specific churches, their churches will also benefit from their pastors' pursuit of their God-given and God-directed passions. An interesting finding among the twenty-two pastoral subjects was the passion to bring not just systemic change or church change but life change. The pastors' passions and thus their understanding of excellence were immersed in the meeting of real human need and the transformation of life. One of the clear keys to sustaining excellence in ministry is not the removal of obstacles but the rekindling and refueling of passion that can only come as a pastor intentionally and continually brings his or her cup to the very throne of grace.

### **Pastoral Obstacles**

Pastoral ministry is filled with diverse and potentially disastrous obstacles. No pastor can escape the significant impact of the myriad of obstacles that they will face. The face-to-face interviews uncovered ten major categories and eighty-three specific descriptions of obstacles to pastoral ministry. The profusion of obstacles for pastors highlights the need for this study. The cumulative effect of obstacles on pastors often leaves them with depleted energy and diminished passion. The considerable presence of obstacles and struggles in ministry means that pastors need to have both realistic expectations of life spent in ministry and specific coping strategies. Obstacles cannot be taken lightly or assumed to be just something to which a pastor will grow accustomed. Pastors need to develop an awareness and acknowledgement of the seriousness of the struggles twenty-first century pastors must overcome to stay and excel in ministry.

## **Pastoral Perseverance**

The only way to understand pastoral perseverance fully is to understand the profound struggle of pastoral ministry. One persevering pastor said, “You can’t talk about why pastors stay without talking about why they leave.” When pastors were asked to list the major obstacles they had faced, the quantity and types were overwhelming, but even more telling was how they responded when asked to describe an experience of significant struggle. Eighteen out of twenty-two pastors described an experience of conflict in ministry. All obstacles came with both struggle and pain, but the reality of conflict was especially and memorably hurtful to them. Such pain and hurt was particularly intense for all those pastors who “liked to be liked.” Leadership in the face of conflict, conflict management, and conflict styles are skills that are greatly needed by pastors who lead large churches and large staff teams. Pastors can get by on gregariousness and laissez-faire leadership for only so long.

One of the most interesting findings of this study was the willingness of pastors to see themselves as the number one obstacle in their own ministry. The fact that these pastors were recommended by their bishops as effective leaders indicates that one of the keys to effective leading is self-awareness. The willingness to pinpoint weaknesses and struggles in themselves paved the way for new growth both in the pastors and their churches. The pastor who had the tendency to micromanage was learning to delegate and empower others. The pastor who was uncomfortable with the CEO model had gone to leadership training events to strengthen his leadership with his staff. The pastor who saw his INTJ Meyers-Briggs personality profile as not ideal for ministry intentionally and diligently worked to compensate for the weaker preferences of his personality. By far the most significant obstacle pastors found in themselves was the need for affirmation. The

need for approval can work as a driving force in ministry but only for so long. Pastors who pushed themselves and their congregations in order to receive positive strokes from parishioners and the system also experienced the reality that truly satisfying approval and affirmation from such external sources is ever elusive. The demands and expectations of ministry are never fully met. The harder reality for those who lived for affirmation was the ever-increasing experience that “you can’t please everybody.” Eventually, the need for affirmation does not drive; it paralyzes. The pastors who had worked through this obstacle repeatedly referred to the importance of self-differentiation to their persevering in excellence. These pastors had learned this concept through continuing education opportunities and personal counseling. If the church cares about raising up pastors who persevere in pastoral excellence, working through issues of self-differentiation cannot be left to chance or happenstance. Healthy self-differentiation must be a part of the core preparation curriculum either in seminary or in the ordination process itself. One of the insights from the face-to-face interviews was that the classroom for teaching self-differentiation was life crisis. Before pastors could learn the importance of delineating self from their churches and their churches’ success, they had to become receptive. Such receptivity came as they experienced a ministry or personal crisis in which they experienced firsthand their own limitations. The problem with waiting on the classroom of crisis is that many pastors will never survive to or through that classroom. One pastor talked about the profound changes of identity and purpose he had experienced since beginning ministry. He said the issue of self-differentiation and spiritual health *had* to mean more before it did mean more. He wondered aloud, “I don’t know if the Tom Smith<sup>3</sup> then would recognize the Tom Smith of today.”

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<sup>3</sup> Tom Smith is a pseudonym.

The effect of family health and marital health on the pastors and on their churches was significant. Three of the four pastors who went through divorce were moved to another church either during or immediately after the process of their divorce. The pastor who stayed in his church openly confessed his situation, and the congregation rallied around him, grieved with him, and grew with him. Too often, the pastor's marriage is seen as just a personal thing or as something irrelevant to ministry. Marriage, however, is not just what a pastor does on the side. Marriage is a part of the pastor's spiritual formation. When Paul lists the criteria for elders in 1 Timothy and Titus, a healthy marriage and family leads his list. The church has failed to invest fully or even marginally in the well-being of the pastoral couple. Marriage enrichment seminars and retreats should not be options but requirements for pastoral couples. Only two of the twenty-two pastoral subjects mentioned such experiences, and both said they were pivotal to their persevering excellence. Pressure on pastoral families indeed comes in many forms. Pastors' wives and children can feel constricted and critiqued. They often experience crazy expectations and feel singled out for attention. In the midst of such pressures, the tendency is to withdraw and become isolated. Pastoral families need support, love, encouragement, accountability, and healthy relationships just like any family. If those needs cannot be found within a pastor's congregation, then the pastor must find outlets that facilitate the growth and well-being of his or her marriage and children.

From the face-to-face interviews, three foundational needs for ministerial preparation were uncovered. The first need is academic and theological training. Almost all of the pastors felt good about their preparation for ministry in this area. The second need is for equipping for ministry. This area of training is for the building of skills

necessary to do the work of ministry. Pastors thought they had received some effective tools for ministry. The tools they received varied according to the different seminaries they attended: counseling, preaching, and Christian education. The tools they complained about missing were in the areas of leadership, conflict management, church transition, lay empowerment, and vision casting. The gap in theological education may be different for the generation of pastors interviewed for this study than it is for pastors graduating from seminary today. Seminaries today are challenged to discern and address the needed ministry equipment for the future, just as seminaries of yesteryear should have been challenged to meet the demands pastors are facing today. The third needed area of training is in the area of formation. An ideal curriculum for ministry preparation would include the five core values of significance, community, God-given expectations, spiritual formation, and zeal. Pauline eschatology and deviancy should be addressed in theological training. Pastors need to know the importance and establish the practice of ongoing spiritual disciplines. They need to know the centrality of their call to persevering in excellence. They continually need to allow God to solidify and deepen their calls to ministry. They need to put in place plans and strategies for supportive Christian community over the long haul of their ministries. The system could aid this all-important need by adding just one question to the January review of pastors: "With whom are you meeting to sustain and further your growth in Christ and your health in life and ministry?" Pastors in this study were divided on from where that support should and should not come, but the essential thing is that every pastor needs authentic Christ-centered community in place. The pattern for most of the pastors in this study who found community imperative to their survival in ministry was that they were already in some kind of small group when they experienced a ministry-threatening crisis. Their already-



existing small groups became life-saving refuges. These groups were lectionary groups, accountability groups, study groups, continuing education groups, and informal friendship groups. Pastors need to be trained in formation by being exposed to pastors who tell their stories of both great struggle and great overcoming. Several teaching sessions should be offered on the “Top Twenty Obstacles Pastors Face.” A round table discussion with seasoned pastors who still have an uncompromising zeal and passion for ministry would be priceless. These three overall areas of preparation are essential in the wholistic development of persevering pastors.

The prevalence of competing and conflicting visions in the church points to the need for longer tenures for pastors. “The culture of noncommitment” mentioned by one pastor leads to both lay and clergy expecting and even consciously or unconsciously planning for leadership transition. Short-term pastorates do not have the time or influence to develop a unifying vision for the congregation, and so the congregation remains in a long-term state of competing and contrasting visions. Four pastors in this study came into situations of preexisting vision conflict. One of those pastors has been at his current church six years and is just now able to lead his church in a strategic long-range planning and visioning process. Long-term pastorates do not have to be centered in the personality of the pastor. These pastorates can be centered in a common vision shared by both lay and clergy that will far outlive the pastor’s presence in that church. The challenge to the system and to the cabinet is to send the next pastor who understands and supports the vision for ministry the church has established. One of the temptations of pastors in an overactive itinerancy is to settle in and accept the status quo, to be happy with things the way they are. This type of thinking, however, was not found in the pastoral subjects in

this study. All twenty-two pastors had a drive and passion for excellence that involved facilitating transition in their current churches.

Addressing the issue of vision conflict with a systemic approach is important for reducing unnecessary conflict that will help pastors persevere in pastoral excellence. The energy drain that all the different types of conflict cause in the life of the pastor and the church is substantial. The face-to-face interviews discovered that the pain, struggle, and energy investment in interpersonal conflict are just as great as they are for intra-church conflict. The issues a pastor has with one or two people, such as other staff persons, can be just as imposing and just as life and ministry threatening as issues that affect the very future of the church. Personal and relational health must always stay a top priority for pastors. Almost any relational issue has the potential to sidetrack or derail a pastor's ministry agenda. During the interviews, I was initially surprised to hear that one pastor's experience of excellence was basically a really happy, fun, and affirming staff party he had been to the night before. As the pastoral interviews continued, however, the pain of divisive, subversive, and even abusive staff situations became more the norm than the exception. This kind of conflict, where the pastor's own staff team and family turned against him, was especially painful and life debilitating. The pastor's statement, "I got to where I hated coming to church!" was just the top layer of hurt he felt in the middle of his conflicted situation.

The intra-church conflicts in which several pastors found themselves were especially hard to deal with. These conflicts were rooted in former dysfunctional pastors. One pastor in this study came into such wounded churches on more than one occasion. He was intentional to avoid relational triangles, to build rapport and trust, and to be deliberately and strategically inclusive. When asked if he had ever received any training

to lead and transition a church effectively back to health, he said, “No.” While this pastor may have had intuitive and God-given mediation skills, he also had significant ego strength and self-security. When asked how he was able to bring unity to such conflicted churches he said, “I just was myself! What you see is what you get. I’ve been very comfortable in my own skin most of my life.” This pastor was humble and gracious in acknowledging that whatever was accomplished in those churches was because of “God’s working in me.” This pastor’s spiritual well-being score was the second highest of the pastoral subjects. One of the keys for leading a church in and through profound conflict is self-confidence and self-differentiation as found in this pastor.

When the pastors in this study described the interpersonal conflicts they had experienced, they were not just explaining an event that happened in their lives. They were telling about a wounding and a wronging that had occurred in their lives. These wounds, whether great or small, must be addressed in pastors who desire to persevere in excellence. Pastors who desire to persevere must be careful not to let their relational injuries fester, get infected, become poisonous, and then get destructive. Somewhere along the way, the pastors in this study seemingly received the needed healing that has facilitated a lack of bitterness and brokenness about their past conflicts and wounding. Pastors who do not deal with their emotional and spiritual injuries will sooner or later experience consequences such as cynicism, bitterness, isolation, anger, depression, passive aggressiveness, and lackluster ministry.

This study has specifically researched those who have left the ministry during Stage 5 of Call Development (i.e., after they have been affirmed and confirmed by the church). The pastors in this study were proven leaders in their churches and annual conferences. They had persevered for over twenty years and been recommended by their

bishops as effective pastors. They were serving some of the largest churches in all of Methodism, yet even these pastors considered leaving the ministry from time to time. The reasons the pastoral subjects gave for leaving were not that different than the obstacles described in either their list or their description of a particular obstacle. Mostly, they thought about leaving because of the sheer cumulative weight of conflicts, struggles, difficult people, and unrealized expectations. Of course, many pastors do much more than just think about leaving. Untold ministry and impact for the kingdom of God has been lost because pastors are lost by the thousands each year. The reason the twenty-two pastors of this study stayed in ministry was primarily their call to ministry. Throughout the interviews, excellence in ministry was clearly more than a job; it was indeed a call. God's call on an individual's life is a holy and sacred encounter, but it is also an experience that can be either diminished or reinforced over time. The church must commit itself to a threefold strategy of supporting and sustaining God's call in its ministers. Such a strategy involves (1) keeping the call fresh, (2) investing in the calling of others, and (3) providing a fertile environment for further call refinement and development. A multiple mentoring approach of seven pastors from different stages of ministry and different sizes of churches would serve to support and sustain God's calling. Once every other month, a pastor would be asked to meet with one other pastor for a lunch appointment. During the year, the pastor would meet with all six pastors. During the lunch appointment, pastors would be asked to share their call to ministry, their greatest challenge in ministry, and their greatest experience of God's presence in their lives in the present. The pastors would meet as a group one time in the year to renew their calls by using the Wesleyan Covenant Service. These seven hours would give pastors a

chance to mentor those who are coming along behind them and to be inspired by the fresh testimony of God's call in those who are new.

Systems theory gave several pastors tools for understanding themselves and their congregations. Most of the pastors had been exposed to Friedman's ideas through counseling or continuing education opportunities. Those who found systems thinking most helpful used it, on the one hand, to develop an awareness of the dynamics in a dysfunctional church and, on the other hand, to surrender to the inevitable in a church with decades of negativity. The thinking that the "system is what the system is" leads to an almost "hands off" mentality rather than a passion for transformation. According to the twenty-two pastors in this study, pastors who persevere in excellence are more prone to be passionate for healthy change and positive transition.

### **Pastor Paul and Pastors of Today**

The research in Chapter 2 shows Paul as having seven distinctive core values that established and deepened him as a pastor who persevered in pastoral excellence. These seven values offer to twenty-first century pastors the foundational components of what is involved in persevering in excellence today. If the prevalence of these seven factors in Paul's life and ministry were scored on a hundred point scale, he would top the scale on all seven. Pastors today seem to have all seven of these components present in their lives to one degree or another, but the intensity of their presence is far less than that of Paul.

One example of this insight is in the area of community. Paul who is often caricatured as a rugged individualist was deeply grounded in and surrounded by supportive Christian community. United Methodist pastors who are by definition supposed to be a part of a connection often practice ministry and live their lives with a distinctive isolation. United Methodist pastors' hesitancy toward community is based in

their uncertainty about engaging both peers and parishioners in intimate and healthy relationships. Perhaps their tendency toward isolation is also affected by a culture that emphasizes productivity over relationships. Pastors who persevere in excellence must find some way to meet the need of supportive Christian community in their lives.

### **Implications of the Study**

The results of this study have implications to both the excellence and perseverance of pastors today and of those who will serve in the future.

#### **Pastoral Excellence**

Pastoral excellence is not something that one accidentally stumbles onto and not something that is experienced if one just hangs on long enough. Pastoral excellence requires intentional strategies that could and should be taught both in pre-ministerial training and in post-ministerial seminars. Excellence as mere product or competence is not the aim of this study nor should it be the aim of those serving Christ as pastors. The cruciform excellence of Jesus is clearly evident in Paul but obviously clearly absent in most of the examples and models of leadership excellence today. Pastors today must once again “fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith” (Heb. 12:2).

#### **Pastoral Obstacles**

Ministerial candidates need to be exposed to the rigors, demands, and obstacles of ministry through firsthand testimony. Rather than being insulated from the reality of obstacles, twenty-first century pastors need to know exactly what they will face. Such awareness will give them the opportunity to both deepen their commitment and sharpen their skills. The most prevalent obstacle in ministry is conflict. Pastors must do essential internal work and also learn important conflict management techniques. The comprehensive reality of conflict in ministry should not be the proverbial “elephant in the

room” that every one knows is there but is unwilling to talk about. Conflict in ministry has the potential to be not just another obstacle but rather a primary opportunity for helping pastors and their churches to be who God is calling them to be.

### **Pastoral Perseverance**

Persevering in pastoral excellence is first and foremost an issue of self. The “Serenity Prayer” from Alcoholics Anonymous that my mother gave me as a little boy still hangs in my office: “God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference.”

Perseverance involves the courage to take on oneself in order to cope with difficulties and grow on toward excellence. Persevering pastors have self-awareness and a willingness to change. Self-awareness will not be experienced in isolation from supportive community. Only through intimate, safe, and trusting relationships are persons able to become more self-aware. An openness and willingness to change and grow require the experience of positive and healthy mentors who are also staying open and willing to grow themselves. Healthy marriages, healthy families, and a healthy spiritual life are nonnegotiable assets to persevering in pastoral excellence. American culture seemingly allows for the distinction between one’s public life and personal life, but the pastor’s relationship with God and relationship with their family are central to their core identity and character and thus also directly related to what they do and how they function in ministry. Anytime competence and character are separated something less than excellence is experienced.

### **Contemporary Pastors**

Pastors of today who desire to persevere in pastoral excellence need to look beyond today for examples of Christian leadership. While pastors are called to connect to persons of our current cultural milieu, they are also called to conform and be conformed

to the image of Christ. Paul's statement, "I bear on my body the marks of Jesus" (Gal. 6:17), seems an eternity away from corporate America's "what's in it for me" attitude. Pastors need models of excellence that emphasize character and not just competence, wholeness and not just skills.

### **Impact**

The hope and intent of this study was to inform and influence those who have a vested interest in pastoral ministry. For currently serving pastors, the hope is that they will stop and reflect on what direction they are going. Pastors are either moving toward a life of sustained excellence or toward the death of pastoral burnout. Those who are currently serving can make choices today that affect their spiritual formation, experience of Christian community, self-differentiation, expectations, and commitment toward wholistic pastoral excellence. For those who are journeying toward ministry as a ministry candidate or seminary student, the hope is that they will allow God to deepen their calls and define their ministry. This study gives those preparing for ministry a realistic look at what is involved in persevering in pastoral excellence. The struggle, passion, and discipline required for a life of excellence is not for the faint of heart or arrogant of spirit. A growing understanding and experience of God's grace is essential for personal and pastoral well-being. For those, like seminaries and boards of ordained ministries, whose task is shaping and preparing students for pastoral ministry, they must take seriously the formative side of ministry preparation. What a pastor believes about God and does in ministry will make no difference at all if that pastor is not prepared and undergirded formationally for a life of sustained excellence. Pastors need to have spiritual disciplines, Christian community, and an understanding that ministry is filled with difficulty firmly in place as they head into ministry. Such basic life formation will not happen accidentally.



Ministerial candidates are asked to prepare theological papers and to present examples of their skill for ministry, and so also they should be held accountable in the more formative aspects of personal and spiritual well-being. One reason such accountability is not being required is because it is not a mainstream value or practice in the current clerical ranks. Academic and theological preparation needs to ground students historically and personally especially in the areas of grace, Pauline eschatology, and the primacy of the gospel. Preparation in the practical tooling for ministry needs to include courses in leadership development, lay empowerment, transitioning churches, and conflict management. For those who serve as both formal and informal mentors of young ministers and ministerial candidates, the hope is that they will share their call, their passion, their struggles, their hurts, and their excellence with those to whom God has connected them. These mentor pastors will heighten their effectiveness as they let young pastors see where their lives and ministries came apart and also see how God has put them back together. For those laypersons who desire to support their pastors in their quests for persevering excellence, they can pray for them, truly befriend them, and hold them to the fire about keeping their relationship with God primary, their marriage and family primary, and their performance in ministry secondary. Laypersons can lovingly remind their pastors that before God wants their ministry, he just wants them.

### **Weakness of the Study**

This project had six weaknesses. The first weakness of the study was the size of the sample. If more pastors could have been interviewed and tested, more insight into persevering excellence could have been discovered. In particular, a larger study would either confirm or reveal more specific insights about the nature of excellence being pursued and the nature of obstacles being experienced. A second weakness of this study

involved issues with the sample content. The sample was exclusively United Methodist thus excluding insight that could be gained from pastors from other denominations. The sample included only those who are currently in ministry. Much insight could be discovered by interviewing a select group of highly effective and influential United Methodist pastors who are now retired. Their level of experience and persevering excellence would be a rich source of information. Much insight could also be gained from a sample that included those who failed to persevere in ministry in order to ascertain what was lacking in their ministerial and leadership development. The sample was limited to two annual conferences in the South Central Jurisdiction of the United Methodist Church. A third weakness of this study was that the results of this project were specifically applied to pastoral perseverance. The hope is, however, that general applications about perseverance can be made to other life situations and occupations. A fourth weakness was the lack of quantitative and qualitative research on clergy who have left the ministry. This lack of information means that an important and informative voice in this discussion has not been heard as clearly as needed. Denominations have not kept intentional records of pastoral fallout, and seminaries are not in the habit of in-depth tracking of their former students. William Lawrence, Dean of Perkins School of Theology, reports that “[t]here is not much solid information about most of the people who enter, serve, and leave pastoral ministry” (qtd. in Chang 35). Assumptions about the rate at which graduates of certain seminaries leave the ministry can currently only be based on impressions, anecdotes, or bias (35). The Pulpit and Pew project that is being funded by the Lilly Foundation and carried out through Duke Divinity School is conducting studies and surveys in this area. Many of Pulpit and Pew’s results and findings have not yet been released (Pulpit & Pew). A fifth weakness of this project was

that it does not take a detailed look at the vocation of ministry throughout church history. This study specifically investigated ministry in the first, twentieth, and twenty-first centuries. Other pastoral theologies and histories have done an excellent job of addressing this subject. The sixth weakness was that the gathering of data had limiting factors. The time allowed for the interviews was just sixty to ninety minutes. Self-assessment was used throughout this study both in the quantitative and qualitative measures, and interviewer bias affected the design of the interview questions.

### **Contributions to Research**

The greatest contribution this study makes to research methodology is the categorizing of pastoral excellence. Future studies can further delineate and refine these categories. A quantitative tool can now easily be designed for use with a large research sample. A growing understanding of pastoral excellence will allow researchers to understand more readily what is also involved in overall pastoral well-being. This study also offers a broad collection of research data about the crisis of pastoral fallout in American Christendom.

### **Further Studies**

The United Methodist Church along with other denominations is becoming more attuned to the importance of ministerial self-care to ministerial longevity and effectiveness. Several conferences and judicatories have begun to mandate certain self-care and spiritual care initiatives. A longitudinal study of pastors serving in those contexts would be very beneficial to help ascertain what is involved in developing excellent pastors. Another important study would be a qualitative evaluative study similar to this study that involves doing face-to-face interviews with pastors who have left the ministry. These interviews with former pastors would seek to discover in a more in-depth

way their causes and rationales for leaving. A third study project of interest would be a follow-up study in five years with the very same pastors from this study in order to compare and contrast their views and experience of pastoral excellence. A fourth study of interest is a much larger but similar research design of this current study. Such a study would confirm or reveal specific insights that are definitely implied in the current study. The new study would answer the following three questions. First, do pastors who are excelling in ministry in the twenty-first century see excellence with balance or with a bias toward competence and performance? Second, do pastors who persevere in excellence see themselves as their number one obstacle? Third, is spiritual well-being a prerequisite for persevering excellence?

### **Conclusion**

My hope is that this study will be used by anyone who is called to strengthen the pastoral profession. Seminaries, judicatories, pastoral mentors, local church personnel committees, laity, pastoral families, and pastors themselves have much to gain from this research that has been aimed at helping pastors persevere in pastoral excellence. This study has had a tremendous impact on me as I have had the opportunity to get face-to-face with twenty-three pastors who are persevering in pastoral excellence. Twenty-two of these pastors are my peers and now my mentors in the United Methodist Church, and the twenty-third is the Apostle Paul who has provided me an enduring and ultimate example of how to persevere in pastoral excellence.

Any meaningful discussion of why pastors stay in ministry involves an understanding and awareness of why pastors are leaving the ministry. In the research of literature and in the face-to-face interviews, the overwhelming challenges of ministry were clear. As I sat and visited with my colleagues in ministry, their pain and struggle

were obvious. All twenty-two pastors had been through these profound crucible experiences. Everyone had encountered experiences of intense crisis. Through these experiences, these pastors were formed and transformed, shaped and molded into deeper and more authentic servant-leaders. The secret to pastoral excellence is not the absence or avoidance of obstacles and conflict but rather the continual renewal of one's call and dependency on Christ.

The tacit acceptance and nonchalant ignoring of the huge numbers of pastors who are lost to ministry must no longer be tolerated within the United Methodist Church or Christendom as a whole. The church and those responsible for the affirming, equipping, and sustaining of ministers must do things differently. Persevering in pastoral excellence should not just be for the fortunate or for those who have great survival instincts but for all pastors who have willingly accepted God's call on their lives. While an exact formula for persevering in excellence may not be found, the ingredients and components for persevering are found in this project. Whether one chooses to call these ingredients core values or key factors is irrelevant. The important commitment in becoming a built-to-last pastor is to take and use the following seven tools to repair, restore, recreate, fix, and further one's pursuit of pastoral excellence. First, built-to-last pastors do not find their worth and significance in the circumstances of their lives or ministries; their value is in God's grace and work in their lives. Second, built-to-last pastors do not have the luxury of autonomy and isolation; instead, they are called to a life and ministry in the context of authentic, Christ-centered community. Third, built-to-last pastors do not allow the present to define reality but instead view the present from the perspective of the future. These pastors know that reality is more than the here and now and that the reality of God's Spirit is available to all who desire him. Fourth, built-to-last pastors will not conform to

the ecclesiastical world or to the world around them but will be transformed by the primacy of God's purpose in their lives. Fifth, built-to-last pastors realize that ministry involves suffering, and they are committed to lives of self-sacrifice and endurance fully knowing that God's strength is made known in their weakness. Sixth, built-to-last pastors will never take for granted the necessity of a deep and growing relationship with God. Seventh, built-to-last pastors have a zeal and passion for God that leads to an absolute commitment to Christ.

## **APPENDIX A**

### **E-Mail to the Bishops**

Dear Bishop \_\_\_\_\_,

Thanks for your servant leadership in these recent and crucial days. Your leadership and example have been pivotal for helping us both survive and move ahead as God's people in Louisiana.

I am sending this note to you because I am working on my dissertation, "Built to Last Pastors: Identifying the Foundational Characteristics of Persevering in Pastoral Excellence." As a part of this study, I need to identify and interview United Methodist pastors who meet the following criteria:

1. They have served at least 20 years in ministry.
2. They are serving as senior pastors of churches who average at least 500 in worship.
3. They are pastors who are seen as effective leaders by their congregations.

I am asking that you recommend pastors from the Louisiana Annual Conference who meet these criteria. I will send the pastors that you recommend an invitation to participate in this study. They will be asked to complete a brief questionnaire, a wellness survey, and a face to face interview.

While much has been written on why pastors are leaving the ministry, this study seeks to identify the core characteristics of pastors who endure in excellence. I hope to learn much from these persevering pastors about how they have overcome the vocational constants of pastoral ministry and how they have sustained a ministry of excellence over the long haul of their ministries.

My hope is that this study will help those preparing for pastoral ministry, those in pastoral ministry, and those who mentor, supervise and train pastors. I also hope that this study would be of benefit to concerned lay persons who are committed to working in a more effective partnership with their pastors.

Thanks for your time in recommending these pastors. I look forward to hearing from you or someone in your office. I will follow up this email with a phone call by November 7th. If you have any questions about this project or these criteria, please give me a call at (318)251-0750 or (318)243-0922.

Your fellow servant in Christ,

Andy Hurst

## APPENDIX B

### Invitation Letter for Pastors

November 21, 2005

«AddressBlock»

Dear Revered «Last\_Name»,

I am working on my dissertation at Asbury Theological Seminary. The title of the dissertation is *Built to Last Pastors: Characteristics of Persevering in Pastoral Excellence*. While much has been written about why pastors are leaving the ministry, the purpose of this research is to identify the foundational characteristics of persevering in pastoral excellence. The pastoral perseverance this study is looking for is not just about surviving until retirement. It is about dynamic and growing leadership in the church.

As a part of this study I am interviewing select United Methodist pastors from across the United States. Pastors selected for this project have been recommended by their Bishops and meet the following criteria:

1. Pastors who have at least 20 years of ministry experience.
2. Pastors who are senior pastors of churches who average at least 500 in worship.
3. Pastors who are seen as effective leaders by their congregations.

You have been recommended by Bishop Hutchinson as someone who is persevering with excellence in your annual conference. I am asking you to do two things as a part of this study:

First, meet with me for an informal and confidential ninety minute interview. This interview will be conducted at your office or a place of your convenience.

Second, complete the Ellison Spiritual Well Being Scale. This is a self-administered, 20 item questionnaire that can be completed in 10-15 minutes.

As you know, pastoral fallout is a huge issue within United Methodism. It is my hope that this project will both help us to understand and remedy this trend within our church.

I will give you a call by December 5, 2005 to talk to you more about this project and your availability and willingness to take part in it. If you have any questions, concerns, or insights, please don't hesitate to give me a call (318)251-0750 ext. 203 or drop me an email at [andyh@trinityruston.org](mailto:andyh@trinityruston.org).

Your fellow servant in Christ,

Reverend Andy Hurst



## APPENDIX C

### Follow-Up E-Mail to Pastors

Dear *Name*,

Thanks so much for your willingness to be a part of this research project. I look forward to our visit on *Date* at *Time*. If you need to get in touch with me for any reason, my contact numbers are as follows:

Cell 318-243-0922

Church 318-251-0750

Home 318-251-8205

If you have time prior to our interview, I would like you to give a very brief response to the two questions below:

1. What have been some of the major obstacles that you have faced in your ministry?
2. In a sentence or two, what does excellence in ministry mean to you?

Thanks again! I will see you in a few days.

Your fellow servant in Christ,

Andy

## **APPENDIX D**

### **Interview Questions**

1. What have been some of the major obstacles that you have faced in your ministry?
2. In a sentence or two, what does excellence in ministry mean to you?
3. What is the story of your call to ministry?
4. Think back to a time when you faced a significant obstacle in ministry. Describe it.
5. How did you deal with that obstacle? How did you overcome? How did you work through it?<sup>4</sup>
6. Think back to a time when you felt like something had gone really well, when you were really pleased with the outcome of what was happening in your ministry. Describe what made this experience of excellence a reality.
7. Think back to a time when you felt like leaving the ministry. Describe what happened.
8. Why did you stay in ministry?<sup>5</sup>
9. If you think back to the beginning of your ministry and someone gave you advice or if you wish someone would have given you advice about how to make it or persevere in ministry, what might that advice have been?

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<sup>4</sup> Questions number four and five were asked as one question.

<sup>5</sup> Questions number seven and eight were asked as one question.

## **APPENDIX E**

### **Thank You Letter to Pastors**

January 31, 2006

Name  
Address  
City State Zip

Dear First,

Thanks so much for your willingness to participate in my study on pastors who persevere in pastoral excellence. It was great to visit with you. I truly appreciated your openness and insight into both persevering and excellence in ministry. I am currently re-listening to all the interviews, and trying to bring together all the data.

Enclosed in this letter is Ellison's Spiritual Well-Being Scale. It is a twenty question test that is fairly self explanatory. Please take a few minutes and complete this inventory and then send it back to me in the enclosed envelope. If you can return this to me by February 15, it would be appreciated.

I wanted to also just say thanks for your love and service of Christ and your leadership in our church.

Your fellow persevering servant,

Andy Hurst

## **APPENDIX F**

### **Ellison Spiritual Well-Being Scale**

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