

Liberty University School of Divinity

Pastoral Pitfalls: Solutions to Navigating the Stresses of Twenty-First Century Ministry

**A Thesis Project Submitted to
The Faculty of Liberty University School of Divinity
in Candidacy for the Degree of Doctor of Ministry**

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Thesis Project Approval Sheet

Dr. Al Sarno Faculty Mentor

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THE DOCTOR OF MINISTRY THESIS PROJECT ABSTRACT

Pastoral Pitfalls: Solutions to Navigating the Stresses of Twenty-First Century Ministry

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American church clergy and their families are suffering from the effects of Twenty-First Century ministry and the stresses of the local church, according to research from the Fuller Institute, Barna Group, and Pastoral Care Inc. Much of the research in this area and its effects on the clergy and churches occurred more than a decade ago. Through updated research and surveys of current Southern Baptist ministers in the Baptist General Convention of Texas, this thesis will offer solutions to how these dangers can be lessened or alleviated. Through the presentation of updated statistics, the seriousness of this problem for the modern church will be made apparent for an examination of the attitudes toward the pastor in the local church. Solutions will be offered that will result in training opportunities for seminary students and current ministers on how to navigate these treacherous waters of ministry and emerge on the other side with stronger ministries, families, and churches ready to face the new normal of doing ministry in the Twenty-First Century.

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Chapter One

Introduction to the Stresses of Navigating Twenty-first Century Ministry

American pastors are leaving the ministry at alarming rates and those who choose to persevere and continue in ministry often struggle with burnout, depression, health issues, marital issues, and family issues. The state of the American pastors today is at best a struggle, and at its worst an alarming sign that something is terribly wrong with clergy ministry in American churches and within American culture.

American pastors and their families are suffering from the effects of modern day ministry and the stresses of the local church. Much of the research in this area and the effects on pastors and churches occurred more than a decade ago. Through updated research and surveys of current Southern Baptist ministers in the Baptist General Convention of Texas, this thesis will offer solutions on how to lessen or alleviate these dangers. Through the presentation of updated statistics, the seriousness of this problem within the modern church will be made apparent for an examination of the attitudes toward the pastor in the local church. Solutions will be offered that will result in training opportunities for seminary students and current ministers to help them navigate the treacherous waters of today's ministry and emerge on the other side with stronger ministries, families, and churches better equipped to face the new normal of doing ministry in the Twenty-First Century.

This research and the proposed solutions are critical for ministers and churches today because a pastor must have his life in order so that he may lead the church effectively. This is clearly spelled out in 1 Timothy 3:4-5 where Paul writes that the pastor must be "one who manages his own household competently, having his children under control with all dignity. (If

anyone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he take care of God's church?).” Many will see this as simply an admonition to make sure pastors are good fathers and husbands, but in context, it suggests that a pastor must be able to handle himself and family in order to lead the church.

Statement of Limitations

With the overview now set for what this thesis will strive to accomplish through the thorough consideration of the problem, there are some limitations to the data and information that will be presented. Most importantly, the reader must note that this is a small sampling of clergy from throughout the United States. Specifically, this study will focus only on Southern Baptist ministers who are part of the Baptist General Convention of Texas. The ministers will be used as a case study representing ministers from throughout the United States, but the focus will be on the state of Texas. This is also only taking into consideration an individual Protestant denomination, Southern Baptists, and does not speak to other ministers in other denominations.

In addition to these limitations, there will be limitations on the amount of application of the solution that may be established as part of this work. One of the proposed solutions to the pastoral stresses encountered today is training opportunities for seminary students. Presently the author of this study does not have the resources to apply this research in a seminary teaching setting and all solutions directed toward seminary education will be on a theoretical basis for future study to be carried out by professors and this author in future seminary settings.

It must also be noted that the author of this work is a member of the statistics presented in this thesis and ceased pastoral ministry in the local church in January of 2015 in order to better care for his wife and family and seek solutions for his own depression and anxiety that resulted as part of doing the work of the ministry, first in youth ministry for nine years followed by

pastoral ministry for ten years. The author will include personal experiences as part of this study, but will set limits on sharing personal experiences as part of this study in order to achieve the greater goal of understanding the scope of this issue among current pastors. Application of findings through this study will not be achieved through the first hand application of the author in pastoral ministry setting, but will instead be applied through personal counseling of local ministers that the author continues to participate in through the length of the thesis project.

It should also be noted that this project was started prior to the COVID-19 pandemic that began in March 2020 and will be concluded in 2022 following the largest impacts of the pandemic. Some results may be found to be statistically different in future studies as this was a unique period in history. However, there is a significant chance that the pandemic will not alter the underlying causes or issues but will simply amplify and clarify them more as in this time of greater stress, the causes become more apparent.

Theoretical Basis

Due to the lack of current statistics and broad application of solutions to the problems of pastoral burnout, depression, and ministry stresses, best practices in this field are more difficult to ascertain. As a result, much of the benefit of this thesis will be to establish the scope of the problems in modern ministry and establish a tangible plan for a solution to the problem that empowers and strengthens local pastors and their ministries.

Coming out of seminary, few clergy realize the potential hazards of the journey they are about to endure. Secular and religious studies are just now beginning to quantify the reality of the stress ministry often puts upon a pastor. Some of the causes of the stress include being on call seven days a week in ways that predecessors never experienced with the invention of the cell phone, church members who expect more than a pastor could possibly give, an inability to find

or open up to others who might understand their situation, lack of opportunities to put down roots, having to perform duties they are unqualified or unprepared for, feeling of failure, and coping with the struggles of dealing with other's pain.¹ Because of the increased viewing of pastors as counselors, they are the number one point of help for 42% of individuals with problems.² Clergy strive to meet unrealistic expectations through excessive work, failing to seek help, and always allowing themselves to be on call.³ The common result is pastors having to work harder and longer to uphold an image, or meet unrealistic expectations, and this will lead ultimately to burnout and health altering stress for many.

There are other stressors on the pastor that must also be considered, two of the most pressing being the decline in church attendance (and most likely giving) and congregational conflict.⁴ Many young and inexperienced pastors experience idealism concerning the ministry and few seminary courses directly address the lack of reality many students without in-church experience of ministry exhibit. In this author's personal experience and his relationships with other pastors, including counseling situations with other pastors, this would be the wisest investment of time. Solutions suggested in the past beyond seminary include that church leadership at local and regional levels should provide guidance and oversight for ministers in their infancy years, yet this is rarely seen even today.⁵

There is an unfortunate truth that churches often treat their pastors as if they should not struggle with stress, depression, and anxiety; however, this is an unrealistic expectation and just

¹ Jill Anne Hendron, Pauline Irving, and Brian Taylor. *The Unseen Cost: A Discussion of the Secondary Traumatization Experience of the Clergy*. *Pastoral Psychology* 61, no. 2 (2011), 222.

² Hendron, Irving, and Taylor, 224.

³ Ibid, 227.

⁴ G. L. Harbaugh and E. Rogers. *Pastoral Burnout: A View from the Seminary*. *Journal of Pastoral Care & Counseling: Advancing Theory and Professional Practice through Scholarly and Reflective Publications* 38, no. 2 (1984): 99.

⁵ Harbaugh and Rogers, 105.

exacerbates the problem. Stress can take over the pastor's life and affect him in every aspect of his being. A 1984 study of 144 seminary students showed that there were "238 incidents of 'immobilizing' depression and 268 incidents of 'acute' anxiety...a third of the students had been prescribed medication one or more times."⁶ Even of greater concern is the fact that this study only looked at a period of six months for the 144 seminary students. In the 32 years since the completion of this study, it is apparent that the pace of life has increased these numbers, but pastors do not openly talk about their issues for fear of their congregations' judgment or an unrealistic assumption they must be "perfect."

In addition, many pastors are slipping into a silent depression and fear visiting with medical professionals or another individual as a result of the fear that a member may find out. The experience of this author was that many church members view depression in a pastor as a failure to depend on God and a sign of weakness in the pastor's leadership, ultimately believing that the pastor was not truly called to lead; however, according to the author's personal physician, he sees thirteen pastors on a regular basis and seven of those pastors are on some medication for depression. It took almost 18 months after leaving the pastoral ministry for the author of this thesis to finally be able to gain a true handle on his own depression. The struggle of the modern church ministry is obviously beginning to strike at the mental and physical health of pastors today. This is clearly a reflection that there are issues growing within the church at the same time issues exist in the ministers themselves.

The ministry is a career known to create stress and pressure. It also makes strong demands upon the minister's time, often on weekends, evenings, and holidays which encroach

⁶ Ibid, 102.

upon the pastor's family time.⁷ Sometimes the easiest way to address a problem is just to throw a great truth out and then just deal with it much the way a man with hairy arms would deal with a Band-Aid. Cameron Lee does this by pointing out that personal criticism is very harmful to the pastor and this hurt spills over onto his family and spouse. Unrealistic expectations are thrown at his children and spouse.⁸ This author has seen this in each of the three churches he has pastored and the stress and expectations often seemed most burdensome upon his child and wife, even when his child was only six months old. In author Cameron Lee's study of pastoral ministry, he has come to apply the concept of Boundary Ambiguity to the pastor and his family's struggle. When applied to clergy families, this often occurs when a pastor is defeated from the personal criticism of his congregation and he becomes a prisoner to the church and unable to exist in the role he should as husband and father.⁹ Lee cites a study of 131 United Church of Christ clergy who left the pastorate and more than one-third cited "wife or family unhappy" as being important in the reason they left the ministry.¹⁰ As mentioned previously, this study is confirmed by the author's own personal experience and that of his child and wife.

In addition to the mental aspect of a pastor's health, there is also evidence that the stresses of the pastorate are affecting pastors' physical health. Clergy are at a greater risk of obesity than the general public and "the emotional exhaustion of clergy is, at least in the United States, resulting in poor self-care, including unhealthy eating and sedentary lifestyles."¹¹ From a personal perspective, this author, and his other Southern Baptist pastoral friends, would not turn to drugs or alcohol as a way to relieve stress, but food and overeating has become the vice of

⁷ Cameron Lee. *Patterns of Stress and Support Among Adventist Clergy: Do Pastors and Their Spouses Differ?* Pastoral Psychology 55, no. 6 (2007): 761.

⁸ Lee, 762.

⁹ Ibid, 762.

¹⁰ Ibid, 762.

¹¹ Carrie Doehring. *New Directions for Clergy Experiencing Stress: Connecting Spirit and Body.* Pastoral Psychology 62, no. 5 (2013): 624.

choice that is becoming a hindrance to the work of the ministry. Some of this is an answer to the undiagnosed or untreated depression and some is just simply an emotional response to the effects of ministry on the individual.

There are some, especially within church membership, that would claim that the struggles with burnout and depression among pastors show that many of today's pastors are not truly called to the ministry. Almost every minister the author knows, including himself, has been accused of this by a member under their care during one personal crisis or another; however, a study by Carrie Doehring points out that pastors are strange in that they experience great satisfaction even in the midst of difficult and emotional situations and attributes, at least in part, this fact to the clergy's more likely use of spiritual resources like prayer than the average believer.¹² This would seem to indicate that pastors are not failing in their connection with God but that there is a deeper, more pressing reason for their struggles within today's ministry.

Statement of Methodology

This thesis will be based upon new research that is conducted through the course of this study on the range of depression and burnout among Southern Baptist ministers and surveys conducted that identify personal causes of the burnout and depression.

The study of this struggle and its solutions will be presented in an orderly fashion throughout this project. This Introduction (Chapter One), has presented the case for the importance of studying and understanding this issue of stress, burnout, and depression among pastors today. It also has explained why this is an issue that is important to the local church.

In Chapter Two, the theories and suggestions of Chapter One will be expanded upon using the best of current and past research. In addition to the applied research this project will

¹² Doehring, 624.

undertake, further research will be done on other current studies in pastoral health, stress, burnout, and depression and the findings of those studies will be clearly laid out and discussed within Chapter Two.

Chapter Three is where the process of the research and interventions will be presented and the processes clearly explained and defined. In this chapter the author will explore in greater depth why Southern Baptist pastors in the Baptist General Convention of Texas were chosen as the study group and the reasons this research is so personally important to the author.

Chapter Four will share the results of the research of this project and attempt to clearly explain them. It will also look to clearly define the applications of the results. Through the project's research, Chapter Four will clearly define what the leading stressors are for pastors doing ministry in the Twenty-First Century. Furthermore, the statistics and research will be given graphic representations for the readers to more clearly understand their application and suggestions will be made for the readers, and current pastors, on how they can more successfully navigate through the stresses of modern ministry. The goal is not to just give numbers to the problem but to take those statistics and give them a context and story that applies to ministers today. One goal of this research is to help the average church member to realize the difficulties their pastors go through. In addition, it is hoped that Chapter Four and the applied research will be able to find a root cause within the modern local church that is consistent across a broad spectrum of churches as to what has changed in the church over the last few decades and what internal struggles are contributing most to the decline of the emotional and physical health of the pastor and indirectly the church.

Another goal of Chapter Four is to make it clear to ministers that they are not alone in their struggles and that they are not failures as ministers because of the stress, depression, and

burnout they often feel. Ultimately, the hope is that this project, its research, and its application will help lead to effective resources that pastors who are struggling can plug into to help them return to health or successfully transition away from the ministry if this is the desire of the Spirit of God for their life and that of their family. If this study arrives at a flawed system within the American Church that is resistant to change, then the goal may be to create “tentmakers” out of ministers much like the Apostle Paul who are willing to take on other jobs in order to go out into the world and make disciples more effectively.

The final chapter of this project (Chapter Five) will present the research and applications combined into a conclusion and proposed solution to the issues of stress, depression, and burnout within the clergy today. Obviously, a study this far reaching and lacking much in the way of modern research will have questions arise that cannot be clearly answered through the process of this project. Those opportunities will be presented in the concluding chapter so that the author or others in this field will have opportunity to pursue the necessary answers more thoroughly to helping pastors best navigate the waters of ministry.

Following the body of work, full statistics, surveys, and research will be presented in the appendices and all resources and research used throughout the project will be presented in the bibliography for further study by the reader.

Chapter 2

Conceptual Framework for Study of Pastoral Ministry and Health

One of the greatest challenges in a project such as this is obtaining applicable scholarly research. Due to the stigma of admitting struggles with stress, depression, and burnout within the ministry, few authors have approached this subject and even fewer ministers have directly addressed personal struggles with these issues. Usually the first indication that a pastor has struggled in one of these areas is a public failing through a traumatic event in the minister's life. The goal of this research and the study of available literature is to attempt to bridge this gap before the failings occur and help pastors attain health again, whether it be through dealing with their own struggles and remaining in the ministry or finding new paths in which to continue their ministries.

Much of the literature that can be accessed in this field is of the more applicable type and not so much theoretical. As a result, some of the research pushes the definition of scholarly works to the edge of its boundaries. The resources in this project should be appealing to not just the scholar, but also to the average minister to keep on their shelf as a resource for their own personal well-being.

Review of Literature

What's A Pastor to Do?: The Good and Difficult Work of Ministry by Jeren Rowell

Reverend Jeren Rowell is a current pastor who has realized the void in describing the joys and difficulties of modern ministry. He has completed this work as an encouragement for pastors who find themselves in situations where they are unsure what to do. This book gives a realistic view of ministry and is a great resource for pastors to use in their own personal studies

as well as in the moments they struggle to find the hope and joy of the ministry they love so much.

Living in a Glass House: Surviving the Scrutiny of Ministry and Marriage by Donald Harvey and Gene Williams.

As mentioned earlier in Chapter One, one of the greatest reasons for pastors to leave the ministry is the impact it has on their wives and children. Few books have been written specifically on what it means to be a ministry couple or family. Harvey and Williams have put together a great resource for ministry couples to utilize in the difficulties of ministry. The bad news that the authors present is that there is nothing that can be done about living in the glass house of ministry, but the book has become a resource for how to turn this perceived struggle into a blessing for ministry couples and families. Throughout this project, pastors will be surveyed as to the effect ministry has had on their marriages and families. Most likely, the results will show a significant impact and this will be a resource that pastors can turn to in times when ministry strains their family and marriage.

Pastor on Track: Reclaiming Our True Role by Emanuel Cleaver III

Pastor Emanuel Cleaver III has written a great work based upon his own experiences in ministry. He has returned his readers back to the scriptural basis of pastoral ministry and what the true definitions of that ministry are to be. One of the greatest challenges to modern ministry is the misunderstanding of a pastor as a professional Christian paid by the congregation to do the work of the ministry. Pastor Cleaver takes Scripture and helps to return ministers and their congregations to their God-given roles, thus helping to alleviate the stress and strain on the pastor.

One of the most impactful statements Pastor Cleaver makes is:

Soon after finishing their seminary training, most pastors discover that they did not learn how to manage a congregation. Seminaries teach biblical interpretation, homiletics, and theological discourse but do not teach about budgets, facility management, or organizational supervision. The pastor must learn these skills on the job. It is easy to see how this can be damaging to the growth of the congregation, as the pastor spends time and energy on learning by trial and error how to be the administrative officer of an organization, rather than on all those other valuable endeavors we learned about in seminary.¹³

He goes on to discuss why he believes that pastors should not be considered the administrators of the church, but that work should belong to others and the pastor should be focused on prayer, study, and preparation for the actual work of the ministry. It is Pastor Cleaver's opinion that the administrative role of the pastor is not Biblical and should not exist. He also writes, "Congregations can rely on the pastor so much that they can't eat a church meal until the pastor comes and blesses the food."¹⁴ Based upon his recommendations, the primary job of the pastor should be to look forward and plan where the church is going, not simply answering what is going on at the church today.

While Cleaver's thoughts are understandable, the reality of modern ministry is that churches do require their pastor to be the main administrator of staff and the day to day operations of the church. This is not an idea and process that is likely to change in the near future. The purpose of this project is to understand where pastors are and help them to find solutions to doing ministry in the modern context. For this reason, administration duties of a pastor cannot be ignored simply because an author does not feel they are appropriate. Reality trumps ideology in this case and pastors must be equipped for the work of the ministry in all aspects, including the administration of the local church. Being ill equipped for administration of the church causes unnecessary stress upon the pastor and detracts from his abilities to do the

¹³ Emanuel Cleaver. *Pastor on Track: Reclaiming Our True Role*. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2014), 34.

¹⁴ Cleaver, 37.

other work of the ministry. As a result, the solution to administration is not ignoring it, because it is not going away, but rather to train up pastors who are well-equipped to do the administration work of the church to the point that they do not struggle with these areas but thrive in them and spend less time on them.

Healing Your Church Hurt: What to Do When You Still Love God but Have Been Wounded by His People by Stephen Mansfield

There is no greater threat to the modern church than the number of people who have been hurt by some episode within the church and have completely ceased any connection with the modern church. Furthermore, this is complicated as these people have children and their children carry on the hurt of their parents, but what happens when the person who is hurt by the church is the pastor? Stephen Mansfield was just that person. As a pastor, he was personally hurt and left the ministry and in this book writes about how to go about healing past hurts from the church so one can continue to serve Christ. Not every pastor will return to ministry after their hurt, but every believer should be about the Father's work of ministry. Mansfield does a great job of helping bridge this gap from his perspective as a former pastor.

Mansfield shares stories of many who overcame their church hurt, but most powerful for pastors may be his retelling of the story of Jonathan Edwards. Edwards is known as one of the most important and influential ministers in American history and was key to America's Great Awakening. But even Edwards faced conflict and attacks from his congregations, even after all the things that God had so visibly accomplished through him. Mansfield writes, "opposition from Christian friends is often the price of the calling of God."¹⁵ Edwards eventually was fired as pastor of his Northampton Church, where the Great Awakening was so powerful, because the

¹⁵ Stephen Mansfield and George Barna. *Healing Your Church Hurt: What to Do When You Still Love God but Have Been Wounded by His People*. (Carol Stream, IL: Barna, 2012), 47.

congregation was stirred up by those that did not appreciate his requirement that Communion was reserved solely for those who were saved. He eventually moved on to another church where he faced opposition again. It is unclear if pastors should be encouraged or discouraged about the fact that a pastor as powerful and godly as Jonathan Edwards should face conflict and opposition to the point of being fired by his church. On one hand, if it happens to someone like this, then a pastor's opposition should be seen as nothing but routine, but on the other hand, if it happened to Jonathan Edwards, it is to be expected for every pastor.

Switch Off: The Clergy Guide to Preserving Energy and Passion for Ministry by Heather Bradley and Miriam Grogan.

“Expectations” is the dirty word of ministry. Every member has one for their pastor, whether spoken or not, and the pastor even has them for himself. As a result, the pressures of ministry are unlike almost any other vocation and the expectations are inescapable. Bradley and Grogan do a good job of understanding a pastor's mindset that most of the time they think everything is going okay within their church, only to be blindsided by a reality from a member that they are failing to meet expectations. This is another killer of clergy as they constantly live in fear of perceived expectations or in wonder of what the next church member's call or conversation is going to reveal about the hidden side of ministry. The authors do a good job of helping to provide appropriate tools for dealing with this stress and the development of effectual habits to survive in ministry. The authors make it clear that many of the areas that lead to burnout and stress come from pastors not spending their time on actions that lend toward their strategic vision or fundamental purpose in ministry.¹⁶ In other words, pastors are burning out because they are getting caught up in the monotony of everyday work that is neither furthering

¹⁶ Heather L. Bradley. *Switch off: The Clergy Guide to Preserving Energy and Passion for Ministry*. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2016), 39.

their ministry purpose or adding to long-term growth aimed at a vision they have for their church and ministry.

Like Cleaver's work earlier, it seems that Bradley and Grogan suggest that the actual ministry work is what matters most and that areas like administration are given less importance. Again, this seems to be too simplistic of a suggestion and does not take into consideration the reality ministers face based on the requirements the local church places on their roles when they arrive. Yes, it is important to have vision and focus on the fundamentals of ministry, but to ignore what is going on in the churches today and ignoring real world requirements of pastors' job descriptions seems to be an idea that will not help pastors or the local church.

Spiritual Wholeness for Clergy: A New Psychology of Intimacy with God, Self and Others by Donald R. Hands and Wayne L. Fehr.

Hands and Fehr are both clinical psychologists who have spent many hours counseling with over 400 clergy members and they have written this work based upon their experiences. In this book, they deal with the struggles of ministry in a real way based upon their counseling and have devised ways for pastors to have a more psychologically healthy ministry and relationship with others. The authors, after working with clergy in crisis, realized that it should be the ministry of the church to care for pastors. As they so clearly articulate that the health of a pastor will lead to a positive influence on the churches that they serve.¹⁷

This begs the question of how churches can best minister to their pastors. Yes, they should be allowing pastors to have time off for vacation and for weekly rest and Sabbath. But churches need to consider being more intentional with their care for their local pastor and have

¹⁷ Donald R. Hands and Wayne L. Fehr. *Spiritual Wholeness for Clergy: A New Psychology of Intimacy with God, Self, and Others*. (Bethesda, MD: Alban Institute, 1994), xix.

safeguards to help support them in times of struggle or to preemptively meet emotional, spiritual, and physical needs. Too often, churches are primarily concerned with what the pastor can bring to their congregation, but there needs to be an emphasis on new dynamics to care for pastors to not only improve their health, but also the health of the local church.

Rest in the Storm: Self-Care Strategies for Clergy and Other Caregivers by Kirk Byron Jones.

Pastors are so focused on caring for others that they often forget or intentionally overlook caring for themselves. When it becomes necessary for care for the pastor, many pastors do not know where to turn for help. Jones personally understands this and has written this book to help pastors discover healthy ways to care for themselves and to overcome the tendency in ministry to overcommit oneself to the ministry and congregation.

Clergy Self-Care by Roy M. Oswald.

Oswald has written a work that helps the pastor to honestly assess their health from multiple angles through self-care tools that the author has developed. Through qualified research and real-life examples, he has provided many self-assessment tools in this volume for pastors to examine more clearly where they are at in their own self-care. Oswald sends a clear warning to pastors and churches when he writes, “With no encouragement or support in self-care, clergy are left to twist in the wind. It is only after they are burned out that some clergy scramble out of the boiling cauldron and find saner professions. Those who remain pastors often plug along in cynical exhaustion.”¹⁸

5 Ministry Killers & How to Defeat Them by Charles Stone

¹⁸ Roy M. Oswald. *Clergy Self-Care: Finding a Balance for Effective Ministry*. (Washington, D.C.: Alban Institute, 1993), ix.

The source of many pastoral burnouts begins with a simple disappointment or hardship. Over time, this begins to eat away at the pastor and his contentment in the ministry until he finally reaches the point that there is no other viable solution but to leave the ministry. Stone, based upon Barna Research, attacks this issue head on in his text with the goal of assisting the pastor in finding their joy again so that they may continue in the ministry God has given them. He also presents techniques for the pastor to restore community with his congregation when frustration has settled in.

Interestingly, Stone notes that two prominent surveys from Lifeway and The Barna Group showed that the most prominent issues that pastors mentioned as frustrations were related to issues that hinder the organization of the church and hinder growth and the administrative jobs of the pastor. Spiritual and relational issues were rated much lower in the surveys. He posits that this could be a cause for concern as ministers seem to be focusing more on their administrative duties and things that hinder those and less on helping grow their congregations spiritually and in relationship with one another.¹⁹

What Pastors Wish Church Members Knew: Helping People Understand and Appreciate Their Leaders by Denise George.

Denise George has provided a great volume for the research of the issues of this project. As mentioned, it is often difficult to get ministers to honestly discuss their struggles and their honest thoughts on a wide range of subjects for fear of retaliation in some form from the congregation they serve. Through anonymous research and surveys, George has allowed pastors to openly share the thoughts they normally would only keep to themselves. As a result, she is

¹⁹ Charles Stone. *5 Ministry Killers and How to Defeat Them: Help for Frustrated Pastors - Including New Research from the Barna Group.* (Bloomington, MN: Bethany House Pub, 2011), 79.

able to share the true hurts and struggles that pastors and their families experience. Having this awareness alone is enough to help a congregation member reassess just how they are contributing to the health of their pastor and his family. George's approach to compiling her research is commendable as well. Instead of just sharing facts and figures, she shares directly what some pastors responded in their own words. This is more revealing than any statistic could be and makes this book a must read for all church members. It should give pause when a believer thinks they understand their pastor.

One pastor responded, "I wish my people understood my limitations. I need to be forgiven as I forgive. I need time to be me."²⁰ This seems to be a common expression from her research when pastors wish their members would realize they are not superhuman and are just like the members they serve. Another pastor wrote, "Please don't try to force me into roles and into doing things I'm not gifted or called to do. I can't be everything to everyone. Preachers can't live up to everyone's expectations. They aren't perfect and never will be."²¹ Her study also captured the depth of pastoral loneliness, with one pastor admitting, "I wish my members knew how friendless I am. (Actually, I don't want the church members to know this, so I never let on — they don't know.) I don't have a single person in the city of my pastorate who I can expose my heart to or have an in-depth conversation with."²²

One suggestion given through her work that demands further consideration (even though in reality it may have been shared in jest) is when a pastor responded, "Any chance that a pastoral 'personal care' subcommittee of the board could be put in place to oversee the personal

²⁰ Denise George. *What Pastors Wish Church Members Knew: Understanding the Needs, Fears, and Challenges of Church Leaders Today*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009), 30.

²¹ George, 31.

²² *Ibid*, 33.

needs of the pastor and his spouse?”²³ This begs for more consideration. Honestly, why are churches not concerned with and overseeing the care of their pastors? If churches take the time to have committees that plan out meals and fellowships, why would something as important as their pastor’s health not be of even greater importance?

Another response that will lend to this study is a pastor who wrote a response that said, “I have a big problem with time restraints — mainly trying to balance study, pastoral care, administration, and all the other ministries in which a pastor is involved. Too often what is sacrificed is personal spiritual growth and devotion.”²⁴ Pastors are trying to be all things and do much of the work of the church themselves and in doing so, they are losing focus on their own spiritual lives and seeing little growth in their relationship with Christ.

Clergy Burnout: Recovering from the 70-Hour Work Week... and Other Self-Defeating Practices
by Fred Lehr.

Fred Lehr is a rare individual in that he specializes in counseling clergy. Through this experience, he has become painfully aware of the codependent tendencies of pastors in the modern ministry. As a result, he has suggested ways that pastors can restore healthy boundaries and discover new ways to deal with the stresses of ministry without returning to codependent behaviors.

Of particular interest for the purpose of this study is Lehr’s sharing of a Fuller Theological Seminary study from the late 1980s that showed:

- 90 percent of pastors work more than 46 hours per week.
- 80 percent believe that pastoral ministry is affecting their families negatively.
- 33 percent say that “Being in ministry is clearly a hazard to my family.”
- 75 percent have reported a significant crisis due to stress at least once in their ministry.
- 50 percent felt unable to meet the needs of the ministry.

²³ Ibid, 41.

²⁴ Ibid, 59.

90 percent felt they were not adequately trained to cope with the ministry demands placed upon them.

40 percent reported at least one serious conflict with at least one parishioner at least once a month.

70 percent of pastors do not have someone they would consider a close friend.

37 percent admitted having been involved in inappropriate sexual behavior with someone in their congregation.

70 percent have a lower self-image after they have been in pastoral ministry than when they started.²⁵

A more recent survey from the Duke Divinity School in 2001 showed:

10 percent of those surveyed reported being depressed—about the same as the general population—while 40 percent said they were depressed at times or worn out ‘some or most of the time.’ This study also discovered other serious health problems among these leaders, including the astounding statistic that 76 percent of clergy were either overweight or obese compared to 61 percent of the general population.²⁶

What this seems to suggest is that the stresses of ministry have been occurring for much longer than many perceive. It will be curious to see how these statistics hold up when compared to the survey results that will be shared later in this study.

The Joy of Ministry by Thomas W. Currie III

Currie has written this volume as a way for ministers to reconnect with the joys of ministry that other classical ministers discovered generations ago. He also helps to rediscover the joy intended for the minister in serving Jesus Christ and does this by using a firm foundation of Scripture as the basis for the practices that he suggests.

How the Other Half Lives: The Challenges Facing Clergy, Spouses, and Partners by Johnna Fredrickson and William A. Smith.

Lost in the limelight of the pastor’s role is often a spouse who is struggling just as much, if not more, with the difficulties of ministry. As a result, many ministries end as the pressure and

²⁵ J. Fred Lehr. *Clergy Burnout: Recovering from the 70-Hour Work Week-- and Other Self-Defeating Practices*. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006), 23.

²⁶ Lehr, 23.

strain on pastor's marriage and family becomes too much. Many spouses struggle to find ways to communicate their struggle to their spouse for fear of adding to the stress they see in him every day. Fredrickson and Smith have written this book as a way of assisting spouses in communicating with their minister husband about the struggles they live with daily. They have also completed a thorough study of the struggles the ministry spouses go through, and this research will be critical to this work.

15 Characteristics of Effective Pastors: How to Strengthen Your Inner Core and Ministry Impact by Kevin W. Mannoia and Larry Walkemeyer.

Mannoia and Walkemeyer have worked with effective pastors to develop this volume as a resource to help define what a truly healthy pastor and ministry is in the Twenty-First Century. They have also helped to define for the average church member how a healthy pastor contributes to having a healthy church. This is an important read for connecting the pastor's health with the health of the church.

Autopsy of a Deceased Church: 12 Ways to Keep Yours Alive by Thom S. Rainer.

Author Thom Rainer is one of the leading experts on the church today and has done extensive research into the health of today's church. This book continues that research and shows, based on his study of churches that have died, 12 ways that churches can help avoid making the same mistakes that those churches made. While this is not a volume directly about pastoral health, it is a book that will help to define the problems within the Twenty-First Century church. One area that clearly contributed to many of the churches' declines that also affects pastors is the desire of congregations to continue to live and dwell on past successes and compare the current pastor and success against an aged lens.²⁷ The burden of an ominous

²⁷ Thom S. Rainer *Autopsy of A Deceased Church*. (Nashville, TN: Lifeway Christian Resources, 2017), 18.

shadow from a former pastor or successful period from the church's past prevents much light from shining on many ministers' work today and vision for the future.

Pastors at Greater Risk by H.B. London, Jr. and Neil B. Wiseman.

The authors have collaborated with other ministry experts to compile a volume that deals with numerous pitfalls for ministry. In each chapter, a specific topic is discussed by one of the experts with tips on how a pastor can most safely navigate through that issue. This is an updated version, so it deals with more modern day issues than the previous edition.

One underlying idea that the authors note early on is that:

Pastors' concepts of ministry are in flux. Now, clergy expect personal fulfillment and meaning where former generations seemed satisfied with sacrifice and even expected suffering. Clearly, this new breed of pastors views their world, their work and themselves differently than their preaching parents and grandparents did. Not better or worse – just different.²⁸

Perhaps their perception is correct and pastors are different today and that is the source of exponential stress and unhappiness. Maybe previous generations of pastors had something that the current generation is missing. This seems to be London and Wiseman's assessment.

However, much evidence seems to suggest that, while the pastor persona is changing, they are having to adapt even quicker to the changing dynamics of their congregants and their churches. Expectations are broader than ever for who a pastor should be and what they should be doing.

Under the Unpredictable Plant by Eugene H. Peterson.

There are many authors who are in the discussion as this generation's pastor to pastors. Eugene Peterson is certainly in this discussion. He personally realizes the struggles that pastors go through and has written this book based mostly on the life of Jonah to help pastors rediscover

²⁸ H.B. London, Jr. and Neil B. Wiseman, *Pastors at Greater Risk: Real Help for Pastors from Pastors Who've Been There* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 2003), 35.

the joy of the ministry. While Peterson strives to make his work approachable, it is scathing in its assessment of pastors. Yes, he writes, “My impression is that the majority of pastors are truly good, well intentioned, even godly.” Yet in his very next statement, he throws the curveball and states, “But their goodness does not inevitably penetrate their vocations.”²⁹ (page 5) It would seem that Peterson’s assessment becomes that pastors, like London and Wiseman’s assessment, have lost something of what they should be. He says that being a pastor can become like an idol, “a call from God exchanged for an offer by the devil for work that can be measured and manipulated at the convenience of the worker.”³⁰ His damning words suggest pastors are more concerned about careers than actual holiness. He would suggest that pastors are more concerned with how they appear than the condition of their walk with Christ. Could this be the root of pastoral stress and dissatisfaction?

Five Smooth Stones for Pastoral Work by Eugene H. Peterson.

In this volume, Peterson returns the pastor to the root of the calling by taking them back to the Old Testament foundations of the pastoral ministry. This is important because to understand a truly healthy ministry one must also understand where the ministry originated. He speaks of the dangers that come when society, especially the church, believe that ideas of the past are antiquated and useless because new ways of thinking are more accepted today. In doing this, he would posit that respect for God and His story, and particularly the call of the pastor, is no longer respected or sought.³¹

With another scathing rebuke of modern pastoral ministry, Peterson writes:

²⁹ Eugene H. Peterson. *Under the Unpredictable Plant*. (Grand Rapids, MI: WB Eerdmans, 1992), 5.

³⁰ Peterson, 5.

³¹ Eugene H. Peterson. *Five Smooth Stones for Pastoral Work*. (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 1996), 2.

If in the past fifty years a solid biblical foundation has been rebuilt under pulpit and lectern, it has been consistently eroded in other areas where pastors regularly do their work. If there were once biblical foundations under the pastoral work that is normative between Sundays – work of counsel, guidance, comfort, prayer, administration, community-building – they are not there anymore, or at least they are not there conspicuously.³²

Peterson would tell his readers that pastors need to return to the great teachings and examples of earlier pastors and examples in scripture while relying less, or not at all, on modern works of psychology and secular sources for knowledge on how to do the work of the ministry.

Mad Church Disease: Overcoming the Burnout Epidemic by Anne Jackson.

Anne Jackson's father was a pastor and she has devoted her life to ministry as well. As a result, she knows firsthand the difficulties and stresses of pastoring. After reaching out online to those struggling with burnout, she discovered an overwhelming response from the ministry community. In the end, this volume was the result of those online conversations and stories and her desire to write a book that would offer tips and tools to help pastors more safely navigate the ministry.

In 2007, the author took it upon herself to survey thousands of pastors concerning burnout. Jackson wrote:

Almost every person who completed the questionnaire said the stress from ministry had affected them either emotionally (most common were feelings of worthlessness, depression, anxiety, anger, or loneliness) or physically (most common problems were insomnia, headaches, stomach problems, heart issues, weight gain, or inflammation).³³

³² Peterson, 3.

³³ Anne Jackson. *Mad Church Disease: Overcoming the Burnout Epidemic*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009), 49.

She also found that only 25% of those surveyed participated in personal Bible study time that was not connected to their work of the ministry.³⁴ Another telling statistic was that 21% of pastors pray less than 15 minutes per day.³⁵

Instead of just talking about the problem, Jackson's work is directly applicable to pastor's lives by giving not just advice, but practical guides based upon scripture for ministers to work through the different areas of burnout and find restoration for their soul. She does a great job of identifying the scary realities of stress and burnout for the modern-day minister, but she also helps guide and direct them toward healing and the Savior.

Simple Life: Time, Relationships, Money, God by Thom S. Rainer and Art Rainer.

One of the challenges of ministry is that life simply becomes too complicated and stressful. Several years ago, Rainer wrote *Simple Church* which was groundbreaking in the modern-day church's way of overcomplicating the ministry. Now joined by his son, Art, he has returned to the idea of simplicity, but this volume deals with the simple life for the individual. Again, this book does not deal directly with the minister, but for a minister to be truly healthy, they must have the simplicities of life under control and have a way of successfully dealing with the complexities of ministry life. This volume provides them that opportunity.

Review of Scripture

The Scriptures below all deal directly with pastoral ministry or some aspect of the life of the minister.

1 Kings 19:4-8

But he went on a day's journey into the wilderness. He sat down under a broom tree and prayed that he might die. He said, "I have had enough! Lord, take my life, for I'm no

³⁴ Jackson, 50.

³⁵ Ibid, 55.

better than my fathers.” Then he lay down and slept under the broom tree. Suddenly, an angel touched him. The angel told him, “Get up and eat.” Then he looked, and there at his head was a loaf of bread baked over hot stones, and a jug of water. So he ate and drank and lay down again. Then the angel of the Lord returned for a second time and touched him. He said, “Get up and eat, or the journey will be too much for you.” So he got up, ate, and drank. Then on the strength from that food, he walked 40 days and 40 nights to Horeb, the mountain of God.

Few passages of Scripture show the depth of depression that a minister undergoes better than Elijah’s call to die. However, notice the importance in God’s reply. His answer was to allow Elijah to rest under the broom tree and to eat. God knew the strains of the ministry that Elijah had been through and that he would go through, so for the moment, he gave Elijah a time of rest and a time to care for his physical needs. This is important for today’s pastor to remember in his own ministry.

Isaiah 40:27-31

Jacob, why do you say, and Israel, why do you assert: “My way is hidden from the Lord, and my claim is ignored by my God”? Do you not know? Have you not heard? Yahweh is the everlasting God, the Creator of the whole earth. He never grows faint or weary; there is no limit to His understanding. He gives strength to the weary and strengthens the powerless. Youths may faint and grow weary, and young men stumble and fall, but those who trust in the Lord will renew their strength; they will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary; they will walk and not faint.

Like Israel, it is easy for a pastor bordering on burnout or depression to cry out to God and feel like He is ignoring them. However, God encouraged Israel and does the same for the pastor through this passage.

1 Corinthians 15:58

Therefore, my dear brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always excelling in the Lord's work, knowing that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.

One of the challenges pastors face with discouragement is never seeing the results of their work. Pastors must be ready for "dry" seasons and realize that it is God who sees the fruit of their work and He promises that it is not in vain.

Galatians 6:9

So we must not get tired of doing good, for we will reap at the proper time if we don't give up.

Much like the previous passage, discouraged pastors feel like giving up because they do not see the harvest yet. God's encouragement through Paul is to continue doing the work God has called them to do for he will bring the harvest in His time.

Philippians 4:15-20

And you Philippians know that in the early days of the gospel, when I left Macedonia, no church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving except you alone. For even in Thessalonica you sent gifts for my need several times. Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the profit that is increasing to your account. But I have received everything in full, and I have an abundance. I am fully supplied, having received from Epaphroditus what you provided—a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God. And my God

will supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus. Now to our God and Father be glory forever and ever. Amen.

This passage contains a double blessing for the minister. It shows how, despite not having enough people contributing to Paul's needs, God used what was given and he had an abundance. Furthermore, Paul returns the encouragement by reminding them that God will supply their needs according to His riches. Pastors will never be paid enough, but they can trust that God will take care of them.

1 Timothy 5:17-18

The elders who are good leaders should be considered worthy of an ample honorarium, especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching. For the Scripture says:

Do not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain, and, the worker is worthy of his wages.

While it is clear in the previous verse that it is God who provides for the pastor, churches should be open to God's leading in providing for their pastors' wages as he faithfully serves God. When a pastor must worry about his finances, his time and focus are taken away from the work of God.

Hebrews 13:17

Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account, so that they can do this with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you.

Few churches today are willing to follow their pastors' leadership and focus on their own power and desires. Paul points out that the pastors will have to give account for the souls of their members and the members should be willing to submit to their leadership because of this. He

also shows them that it would be better for the church if the pastor could do this with joy and not with grief.

1 Peter 5:1-4

Therefore, as a fellow elder and witness to the sufferings of the Messiah and also a participant in the glory about to be revealed, I exhort the elders among you: Shepherd God's flock among you, not overseeing out of compulsion but freely, according to God's will; not for the money but eagerly; not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock. And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.

Peter reminds the pastor that they should serve with zeal and do the ministry for God and not for the monetary gain. This passage is also a great reminder to those who would complain about the fish bowl effect of ministry because he makes it clear that pastors and their families are to be examples for the congregation. A pastor should be slow to exert his power, but quick to show his example.

Proverbs 27:23-24

Know well the condition of your flock, and pay attention to your herds, for wealth is not forever;

While it appears that the author was directly addressing real flocks, this is a passage that has a dual meaning for pastors. A pastor should always know his congregation and individual members well. Quite literally, if he does not, then what little wealth he has from his position will be gone quickly as the church moves past him.

James 3:1

Not many should become teachers, my brothers, knowing that we will receive a stricter judgment.

The purpose of this study is not to release pastors from their God-given responsibilities. Instead, it is to help them understand their role in a healthy way. Pastors will be held to a higher judgment because God has entrusted them with His people. Ministers must never lose sight of this truth.

Matthew 6:1-4

“Be careful not to practice your righteousness in front of people, to be seen by them.

Otherwise, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven. So whenever you give to the poor, don’t sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be applauded by people. I assure you: They’ve got their reward! But when you give to the poor, don’t let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

When depression and burnout start to settle in within the pastor, he begins to go on the defensive with his congregation. This happens in times of criticism as well. One of the temptations is to begin making sure that every good work a pastor does is put on display for the critics to see. However, the pastor must resist these temptations for he answers to God and not to man.

Matthew 23:12

Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted.

A great tool in the pastor’s arsenal is humility. Burnout can find its way into any cracks in the rock of a pastor’s life, including ones that occurred through success. When a pastor loses

sight of the fact that the good things achieved through his ministry were done through the Spirit, it is easy to lose humility. When humility is lost, the foundation for one's ministry may crumble.

Psalm 19:7

The instruction of the Lord is perfect, renewing one's life; the testimony of the Lord is trustworthy, making the inexperienced wise.

So many pastors find themselves in burnout simply because they ceased to rely on God for direction and wisdom and started relying on their own understanding. The Psalmist is correct in reminding all believers, including pastors, that the key to renewing life is relying on the instruction of God. Wisdom comes from Him alone.

Matthew 25:40

'I assure you: Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of Mine, you did for Me.'

There will be a temptation in ministry to angle one's attention toward those with who most influence and power. This is a way to increase peace among a congregation by keeping people happy. But God has not called the pastor to be a happiness maker but rather a God doer.

Acts 20:28

Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock that the Holy Spirit has appointed you to as overseers, to shepherd the church of God, which He purchased with His own blood. One of the greatest sources for perseverance in ministry is remembering that the congregation and the pastor will never be perfect, but they both stand on equal ground thanks to the purchasing blood of Christ. The pastor must always strive to see the congregation through the view of Christ's blood and salvation.

Chapter Three

Methodology of the Pastoral Survey

To arrive at the truth concerning the emotional, spiritual, and physical health of pastors is a challenge. Of utmost importance is the requirement that anonymity must be preserved at all times so that ministers will be free to share the reality of their situations. In beginning to determine how to receive accurate information, this was the first consideration. For the purposes of this thesis, the information necessary was determined to be received most accurately via online surveys that did not require the author to know the identity of those participating in the questions on the survey. To do this, Survey Monkey was used as the sole source of information for this project.

As a lifelong member of Southern Baptist Churches and a pastor of Southern Baptist Churches for ten years, the author has chosen to focus the research on Southern Baptist Pastors serving churches that are part of the Baptist General Convention of Texas. These are churches that the author has a more thorough understanding of and relationships exist that make responses more readily available for this project. Since the focus of this work is on pastors in Southern Baptist Churches that are part of the Baptist General Convention of Texas, the next challenge was to determine how to get participation from this specific group of ministers. Utilizing personal contacts with leaders of the Baptist General Convention of Texas along with other pastors that met the criteria, the author was able to get most of the responses from those connected to leaders that had a relationship with him. However, more responses were needed to reach the goal of having a minimum of 20 responses to the online survey. To receive a few more responses, Facebook was utilized to pursue responses from pastors that met the criteria. To do

this, ads had to be purchased that focused specifically on pastors that met the criteria and the necessary responses were ultimately received.

Intervention Design

Prior to beginning to receive responses, the most important part of the actual project was the determination of the questions that were appropriate and necessary to be a part of the survey. What follows is a breakdown of all 34 questions that were determined to be important to this project.

In order to quantify the information received through the survey, the survey began with several general information questions, including, “How long have you been a pastor?”, “How long have you been at your current pastorate?”, “What is your age?”, “What is your gender?”, “What is your ethnicity?”, and “What is your highest level of education?”. By asking these questions, the research may reveal specific stresses of a pastor that are more predominant in one of the general factors asked in questions one through six.

In question seven, the respondents were asked, “What do you consider to be your greatest source of stress as a pastor?”. Instead of offering multiple choices for the respondents to check off from a list, it was decided that there would be more to gain from the data if the question was left open for the pastors to enter what their greatest stress was. This allows the survey to clearly state what the predominate stresses are based upon the responses of the pastors themselves without leading them to select a predetermined answer from a list the author created. The ultimate hope of this question is that the project can determine the most dominant stressors on pastors which can be used to create an education and counseling plan for pastors that helps them cope with the struggles they are facing in their churches.

Next, participants were asked, “How often do you pray (not including church activities)?”. This question helps to qualify the health of a pastor’s spiritual life and helps to test whether some of the stressors and struggles they are facing may be less a result of outward forces and more a result of personal spiritual struggles and battles the pastor may be facing. Similarly, question nine continued this process by asking “How often do you spend time in personal devotion and Bible study unconnected to the requirements of ministry?”.

Question 10 asked participants “Do you consider your church to be healthy?”. Since this survey was anonymous, pastors were more likely to be able to share an honest assessment of their church’s health and clarify the responses to the other questions included in the survey.

Following question 10, questions 11, 12, and 13 asked the pastors to assess their own health physically, emotionally, and mentally. Again, having the freedom to respond without connection to their identity allowed pastors to respond honestly and accurately to these questions to help give the author a better understanding of where pastors are at in these different areas.

This project is also concerned with the effect that being a pastor has on other relationships in a pastor’s life, so question 14 asked respondents to accurately assess what effect the pastorate has on their family. Participants were simply asked to rate the effect as positive, negative, or neutral.

Question 15 is perhaps one of the most telling questions in the survey and the answers were intended to reveal quite a bit about the current state of pastors in local churches. Participants were asked, “If you could transition to a non-ministry job that pays the exact same as your current salary, would you do it?”. Responses were limited to simply “yes” or “no” so that a choice would need to be made without a neutral or other option.

As with the author's personal experience, the reality of the pastorate is that it has a huge impact on marriages for ministers, so question 16 asked respondents about how the ministry has impacted their marriages and included three choices to select from on the impact the pastorate has made on their marriage either more healthy, less healthy, or has had no effect. Respondents were also given a fourth option to select that they were not married.

Another important consideration for pastoral health is their relationship with their children. For too long, church members have joked about the behavior of "preacher's kids" and the hope of question 17 is that it will help address the impact the pastorate has had on the pastor's children, whether making their relationships more healthy, less healthy, or having no effect. Like question 16, respondents were also offered an option to state that they did not have children.

Of all the key relationships in a pastor's life, the most critical is his walk with Christ. To quantify the pastor's relationship with God, respondents were asked in question 18 if the pastorate has made their relationship with God more healthy, less healthy, or it has had no impact.

Once participants reached question 19 they were asked to select all of the struggles with which they have personally struggled with during their time as a pastor. The options they were given to choose from included:

- (1) Overeating
- (2) Obesity
- (3) Depression
- (4) Anxiety
- (5) Self-Esteem

- (6) Stress
- (7) Hopelessness
- (8) Pornography
- (9) Drugs
- (10) Alcohol
- (11) Infidelity
- (12) Divorce
- (13) Burnout
- (14) Thoughts of Suicide
- (15) None of these

Many of these were chosen because of their connection to stress, such as overeating, obesity, depression, anxiety, self-esteem, hopelessness, drugs, alcohol, burnout, and thoughts of suicide. Others were chosen because of relational issues that were assumed to occur because of the ministry, such as pornography, infidelity and divorce. The goal of this question is to arrive at what ministers are struggling with the most personally.

Question 20 was a follow up question and asked, “Do you believe that the struggles you mentioned above were a result of working in the ministry? Please explain why or why not.” The review of the answers to this question showed how many of the stressors were a result of ministry versus a result of typical day-to-day living in the Twenty-First Century.

A very important question is asked in question 21 as the focus began to shift to the minister’s relationship with their church. It asked, “How often do you or your family feel under attack from members or groups in your church?” and the choices given were:

- (1) Daily

- (2) Weekly
- (3) Monthly
- (4) Occasionally
- (5) Rarely
- (6) Never

It will be interesting to share the correlation between the results of this question and the amount of stressors a pastor acknowledges in the previous questions.

The next five questions seek to further examine the pastor's relationship and health with their congregation. The questions were as follows:

- 22. Does your church have realistic expectations of you as their pastor? Please explain.
- 23. Does your church have realistic expectations of your spouse? Please explain.
- 24. Does your church have realistic expectations of your children? Please explain.
- 25. Do you feel free to share your true self with your church? Please explain.
- 26. Have you ever refused to preach or teach something you felt led to discuss because you feared disagreement or conflict?

Through the experience of the author and conversations with other ministers, often the church's members expect more of their pastor than they can realistically complete in a 24-hour day. This is why question 22 was so important to the understanding of this project. Likewise, there are unwritten expectations of the minister's family, if they are married, and their children. It has been the experience of the author that the greatest stress of the ministry often comes from how the minister's family is treated. Questions 25 and 26 deal directly with the pastor's ability to be who God created them to be and freely share God's direction for the church. Many pastors have to swallow their own opinions and passions to prevent causing a conflict with members,

especially in the modern day with so much division along political lines. This often seeps into the message a pastor delivers through sermons and Bible studies as they may be led to speak on a controversial topic but refuse to do so to avoid stirring up more dissension and conflict within the congregation, or because they are afraid that members may disagree with their own opinions.

Beyond the stressors of doing ministry, sometimes ministers do not take care of themselves, which may contribute to burnout and stress. So, question 27 asked, “How often do you take time off from ministry work to have personal time for yourself or your family?” To further clarify, question 28 asked, “Does your church support you taking time for yourself or your family?” Even if a pastor takes time off to refresh from ministry work, if the church does not support his need for refreshment, then it most likely will not occur as they will be concerned of what their congregation is thinking even while they are away.

In question 29 the survey seeks to pursue possible solutions to other issues that may appear through the results by asking, “Did your education adequately prepare you for ministry work and life? If no, please explain why.” Through experience and conversations with other pastors since leaving the ministry, the author has found that the education required for the ministry often provides a lot of head knowledge, but it does not provide experience and education for many of the skills required for the actual daily work of the ministry. Therefore, question 29 was critical to helping determine solutions for any issues that are clarified by the results of this survey.

The following two questions help determine the strength of a minister’s support system. Often ministers feel isolated and alone because the demands of the ministry do not allow time for deep friendships outside of their congregation and it is often difficult to make friends within a congregation. So, by asking, “Do you have someone in your life you consider to be a close

friend other than your spouse?” it was possible to further add to solutions on how to support a minister if the survey shows a trend for unhealthy ministers. Furthermore, a minister needs someone who has walked in their shoes before to be available to give advice. It is difficult for someone to understand the work and unique stresses of the ministry if they have not been a pastor themselves. So, by asking in question 31 if the pastor has a mentor to discuss ministry work with and seek advice, the survey helped determine if a lack of a mentor contributed to the added stress of the ministry. Just like Timothy needed Paul, today’s minister needs a mentor to help carry them along.

Finally, the last question sought to find out “what one thing could your church members change today that would encourage you and give you the freedom to serve Christ unhindered?”. This question contributed to the final recommendations of this project by sharing with churches what pastors need to serve effectively and to allow members to meet the needs of their local minister.

Many of the questions discussed above were arrived at for the goal of action research. By asking a broad spectrum of questions across many emotional, physical, spiritual, and experiential topics, there will be a better opportunity for trends in response data to be clear in the research. This, in turn, will lead to the opportunity for better application of data that is analyzed for a comprehensive plan of action to be implemented following this project. The process should be repeatable in the future and may provide clarification of the initial results over time and be able to act as a measuring tool for the success of steps implemented as a result of the data received in this first collection from ministers.

Implementation of the Intervention Design

Since much of the information and data on pastoral health is dated or non-existent, the intervention in this project will be based solely around the survey and its results. As discussed prior in this chapter, there is a broad variety of questions asked in the survey. This is intentional as the desire of the project is to determine commonalities across different areas from respondents. It is presently unclear what the greatest reasons are for the number of pastors leaving churches or why many are suffering burnout at an alarming rate. The depth and breadth of the survey questions will result in a smaller response rate, but the responses that are received will be significant. Instead of asking leading questions or offering presupposed answers, many of the most critical questions to understanding the state of pastors in modern churches will be left open ended for the pastor to fill in their own responses without prejudice in the answer choices. In doing this, perhaps this project will be a great resource for the purposes of determining pastoral health, but also for future researches to take the results and do more in-depth studies on the results that are received.

Statistics will be critical for this project. The hope is that it will be a source document for further research in the selected areas of pastoral health. Even with a smaller quantity of participants than other surveys, the quality of data received should be significant. Once the survey is completed, then the results will need to be compiled into formats that can be easily presented and processed by this project. For the survey questions that have a limited number of pre-selected responses, the project will depend primarily on the compilation tools of Survey Monkey and statistically significant questions will utilize these tools to include charts in Chapter 4 of this study. Since many of the questions are complex and depend upon data entered uniquely by each respondent, then the author of this project will need to compile data by studying the

responses and collecting them into common categories to find true percentages of each data point. To compile this data, Microsoft Excel will be utilized to organize the data and then this data will be utilized to make additional charts which will be presented in Chapter 4. As a result of this work, the hope is that there will be statistically significant results across multiple questions and the discussion and focus of the remainder of this project following the sharing of the data will be connecting the data points across the questions to arrive at key similarities that point to the issues most affecting pastoral health across physical, emotional, and spiritual areas. With this information, data will be critically reviewed and the result will be recommendations that can be utilized in ministry education and modern church work. The end result will be to enable pastors to maintain or rediscover health, teach local churches what is most necessary to support their pastors, and to allow for denominations to find ways to stem the tide of pastors leaving the ministry.

Chapter 4

Results and Recommendations Based Upon the Pastor Survey

Utilizing the procedures outlined in Chapter Three, the survey received responses from 22 Southern Baptist pastors working at churches that were members of the Baptist General Convention of Texas. As will be demonstrated throughout this chapter, many of the results were as expected and support the theories that pastors are suffering considerably due to the stress of modern ministry. Below is a clearer picture of where pastors are struggling most and will lend opportunity for plans on how to assist pastors in achieving greater health in their spiritual, emotional, physical, and relational lives.

The first question asked respondents to share how long they have served as a pastor. Many of the respondents have served for several decades and the combined number of years served for all 22 respondents was 450 years. The shortest time served as a pastor was 2 months with the longest time served being 41 years. The average number of years served per pastor was 20.45 years. For the purposes of this study, this is a significant data set as it shows that those who chose to respond represent a great number of years experiencing the day-to-day work of pastoring local churches. This means that responses to the additional questions can be considered significant and reflective of the true experiences of an average pastor in a Southern Baptist Church in Texas at the time of this study.

In question two, respondents were asked to share the number of years that they have served at their current church. Combined, they have served 180 years at their current pastorates with the shortest time served being 1 month and the longest time served being 31 years. This breaks down to an average time served at their current pastorate of 8.18 years. Again, this would

be a significant amount of time at their current churches for the purposes of this project and should reflect a good sample of the experience a Southern Baptist pastor in Texas would have in churches at this given moment in time.

Question three clarifies the ages of the respondents and results in an average age of 53.18 years old across the 22 responses. The youngest respondent was 27 and the oldest was 72. This sampling is a good reflection of the pastorate conditions in Texas today showing responses from those who are just beginning their ministry work through those who are nearing the end of their ministry service. According to a Lifeway study in 2017 the average pastor in the Southern Baptist convention was 54 years old³⁶, so this survey's result of 53.18 years old is close to the average pastor in Southern Baptist churches and again lends credence to the results of this project.

Not surprising, the responses to question four concerning gender were almost all male with 21 of the 22 respondents being male pastors. Only two Southern Baptist Churches in Texas currently have female pastors and this survey was fortunate enough to have one of the two respond to the questions.³⁷ The results of this question confirm the statewide lack of female ministers.

When asked about ethnicity in the survey, all 22 respondents shared that they were "White or Caucasian." This is not a complete reflection of the Southern Baptist churches in Texas, but the vast majority of Texas Baptist churches are led by white pastors, so this does not deter from the results of this survey.

³⁶ Lifeway Research. "How Old Are America's Pastors?" Last modified March 17, 2021. Accessed May 6, 2022. <https://research.lifeway.com/2017/03/09/how-old-are-americas-pastors/>.

³⁷ Anne Stych. "Despite SBC Dissent on Women Pastors, Texas Baptists Celebrate Them." The Roys Report. Last modified December 1, 2021. Accessed May 6, 2022. <https://julieroys.com/women-pastors-sbc-texas-baptist-celebrate/>.

In question six, respondents were asked to share their highest level of education completed. The largest response was a Master's Degree with 13 of the 22 respondents holding a Master's as their highest level of completed education. Next highest was a Doctorate with seven respondents holding this degree as their highest level of education. One pastor held a Bachelor's Degree and one had a Certificate of Ministry. For the purposes of this study, the results to this question show that 91% of all respondents have a seminary degree and will lend to the considerations of this study on how our seminaries can better prepare pastors for their time in the ministry.

Next, the survey begins to seek answers as to the condition of the pastor and what the difficulties of their pastorate are. Question seven asks the respondents to share what their greatest source of stress is in their ministry work. The survey did not provide a list of stressors for the subjects to choose from, but rather allowed them to enter their own responses. In doing this, the responses discussed here are directly from the pastors themselves and were not prompted in any way by the survey. 35% of responses shared that conflict within their church was the greatest source of stress in their current pastorate. Another 13% of respondents said that current politics have become an issue in their churches along with 13% who also said that trying to meet church member expectations in their congregation was their major stress. Nine percent of pastors said that the pressure to grow their church was their greatest stressor. Other stressors that were mentioned by respondents included the stress of caring for their family while serving the church, time management struggles, church administration tasks, lack of leadership, apathy of church members, sermon preparation, and being compared to past periods or pastors of the church. This shows that there is a great variety of stressors on today's pastors, but overwhelmingly conflict within the church accounts for a larger percentage of the primary

stressor than any other area that was mentioned at a rate greater than double the next highest area.

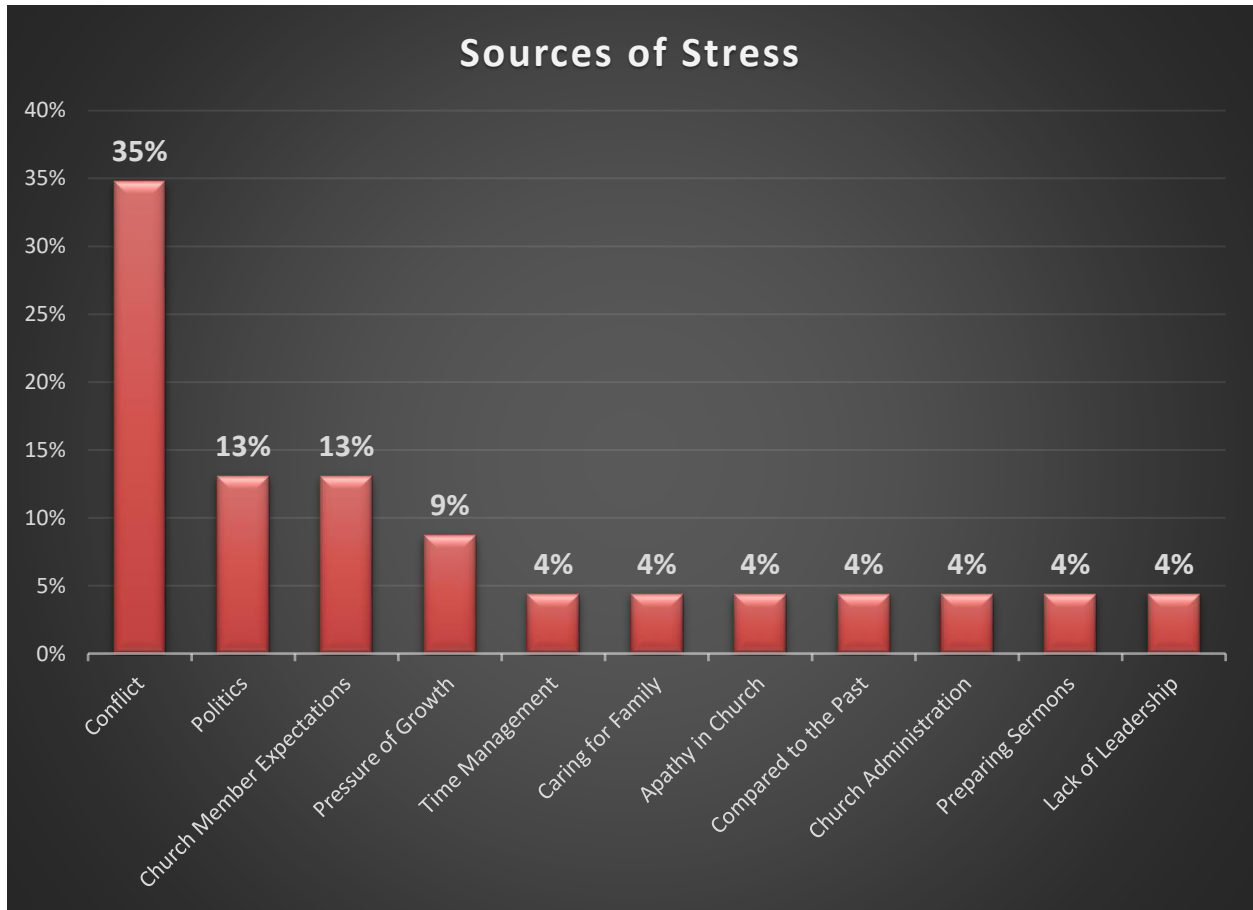


Figure 1: Primary Sources of Stress for Surveyed Pastors

Question eight is intended as a test of the spiritual health of the respondents by asking how often they pray. Ten of the respondents said that they pray multiple times each day, nine said that they pray once per day, and three responded that they pray less than once per day. This shows that the majority of the respondents have what would be considered a very healthy prayer life and all respondents make prayer a priority for their personal walk with Christ.

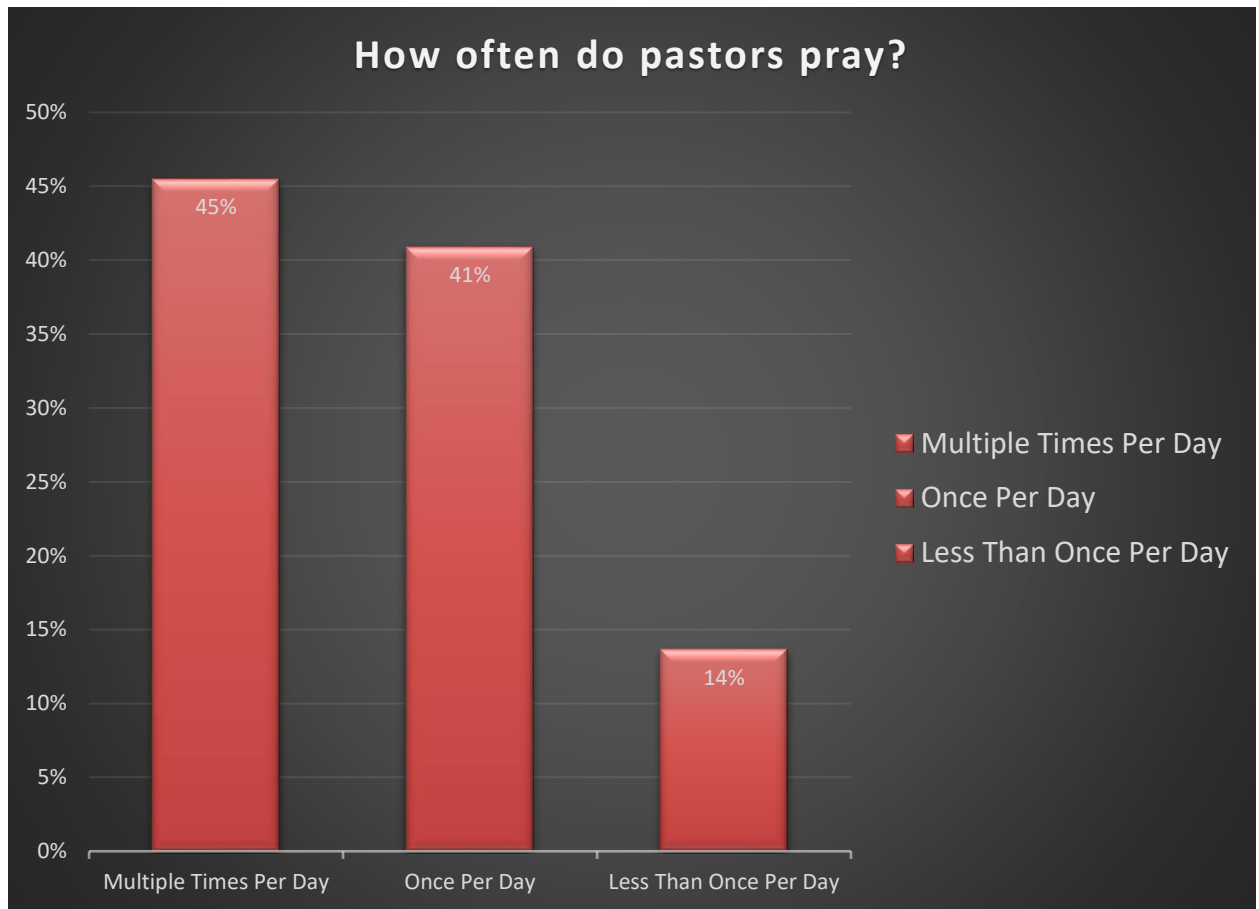


Figure 2: Prayer Frequency for Surveyed Pastors

Continuing to seek out the health of the respondents’ spiritual lives, question nine asked how often they spent in personal devotion and Bible study apart from the time required for ministry work. 55% of respondents said that they have personal devotion and Bible study time every day with 45% saying that they spent time in personal devotion and study less than once a day. Several respondents acknowledged that this is a particular weakness of theirs and that they struggle to find a time to focus on personal time with God that is not connected with their ministry work.

The first surprising result from the survey was found in question 10 when respondents were asked if they considered their church to be healthy. Of the 22 responses, 73% considered their church to be healthy with only 27% saying that their church was not healthy. While 27% is

a significant number of churches that are not considered to be healthy by their pastor, this number was slightly lower than the author expected based upon the other challenges mentioned throughout the survey.

Much has been written in the past decade about overweight and unhealthy ministers in Southern Baptist churches, but 77% of respondents consider themselves to be healthy physically with only 23% saying that they are not healthy physically. 73% of the pastors who responded said that they considered themselves to be healthy emotionally with 27% saying they were not healthy emotionally. Highest marks for health went to spiritual health in question 13 with 91% of those that responded, or 20 of the 22 pastors, saying that they considered themselves to be healthy spiritually. Only two respondents, or 9%, said that they did not consider themselves to be healthy spiritually.

Question 14 asked respondents if the pastorate had affected their family positively, negatively, or had been neutral. 59% of pastors responded that the ministry had had a positive effect on their family while 14% said that the ministry had a negative effect on their family. 27% said that their work in the ministry had not affected their family in a positive or negative way. Of great concern in the results of this question is why 14% of pastors say the ministry has played a negative role in the life of their family. It sounds like a small percentage until it is broken out among the approximate 5,000 Southern Baptist churches in Texas. If that percentage held up, then 700 pastors in the Texas Baptist churches have families that have been negatively affected by the church. This number would be significant and is another response that deserves further clarification and attention.

Possibly the most important question of the entire survey is question 15 which asked respondents, "If you could transition to a non-ministry job that pays the exact same as your

current salary, would you do it?”. 27% of pastors, or six out of the twenty-two who participated in the survey, said that they would transition to a non-ministry job that paid the exact same as their current pastorate if the opportunity presented itself. This means that there are approximately 1,350 pastors in Southern Baptist churches in Texas that would take a non-ministry job today if it was feasible. There could be numerous reasons for this response, but it is almost double the amount of pastors who say that the church has had a negative impact on their families. There appears to be other causes of unrest and unhappiness for pastors in their ministry and the hope of this project is to further clarify this response and determine the reasons this response rate is so significant.

Q15 If you could transition to a non-ministry job that pays the exact same as your current salary, would you do it?

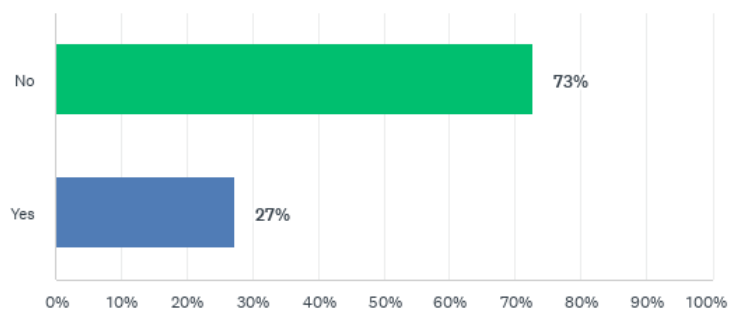


Figure 3: Desire to Transition to a Non-Ministry Job

Earlier pastors were asked what type of impact the ministry had on their families, but question 16 seeks to determine specifically what effect it has had on their marriages. One respondent said that they were not married, so only 21 respondents will be considered for this answer. Similar to the family question above, 14% of respondents said that the pastorate had a negative effect on their marriage. However, unlike with families, only 43% said that the ministry

had a positive effect on their marriage while 43% said that it had no effect on their marriage. The difference in positive effect between families and spouses is an interesting statistical difference and worth further consideration.

Question 17 dives further into the family question asked earlier by seeking whether the pastorate has had a positive or negative effect on the pastor's relationship with their children. Two respondents said that they did not have children, so only 20 responses will be considered for this question. Interestingly only 1 of the 20 responses said that the ministry had played a negative role in their relationship with their children. This reflects only 5% of responses to this question. As an aside, many churches have joked for years about the behavior of preachers' kids, but this seems to suggest that this is just an unfounded stereotype. 50% of responses say that the ministry has had no effect on their relationship with their children, while 45% say that there has been a positive effect on their relationship due to the ministry.

Perhaps a more telling measurement of the impact of ministry can be found in question 18 which asks ministers what impact the ministry has had on their relationship with God. While 82% said the impact has been positive, 18% of respondents say that the ministry has played a negative role in their relationship with God. Using the 5,000 approximate number of Texas Baptist churches again, this would mean that there are 900 pastors across the state of Texas who have a more negative relationship with God today than when they started their work in the ministry. While the number does not seem significant, it is still concerning that there are 18% of pastors who should be growing in their faith by working for Christ each day but are instead experiencing a decline in their relationship with Him. This is a significant number to be concerned about and worthy of further study to determine how to better assist pastors with their relationship with Christ.

Q18 Has the pastorate made your relationship with God:

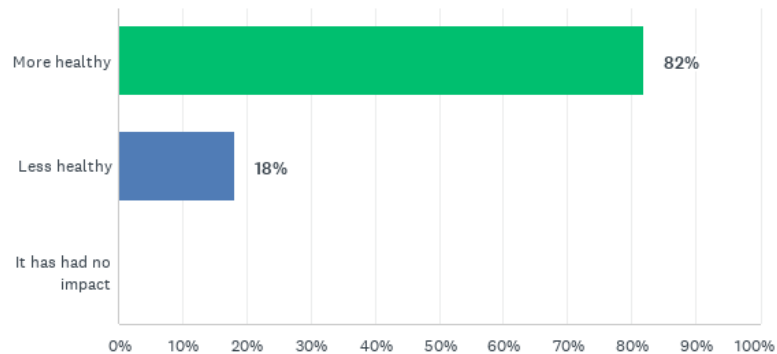


Figure 4: Pastorate Effect on Relationship with God

One of the most detailed questions of the survey is question 19 which asked respondents to select from a list the issues they have personally dealt with while serving as a pastor. The highest, as expected, was stress with 73% of pastors saying it is something they have struggled with. Next highest were three issues tied at 64% which were anxiety, self-esteem, and burnout. 59% of the pastors surveyed said that they had struggled with depression. 45% admitted to struggling with overeating, while 36% said they had obesity. 7 out of 22 respondents admitted to struggling with pornography while serving as a pastor. This represents 32% of those that responded. 23% of pastors mentioned hopelessness as an issue they have struggled with as well. Rounding out the list at were several that received one vote out of 22 respondents, including alcohol, infidelity, divorce, thoughts of suicide, and someone who said they had not struggled with any of the issues on the list. There is much to dissect from this list and it will be revisited in greater length later in this chapter.

Q19 Which of the following have you personally struggled with during your time as a pastor?
Check all that apply

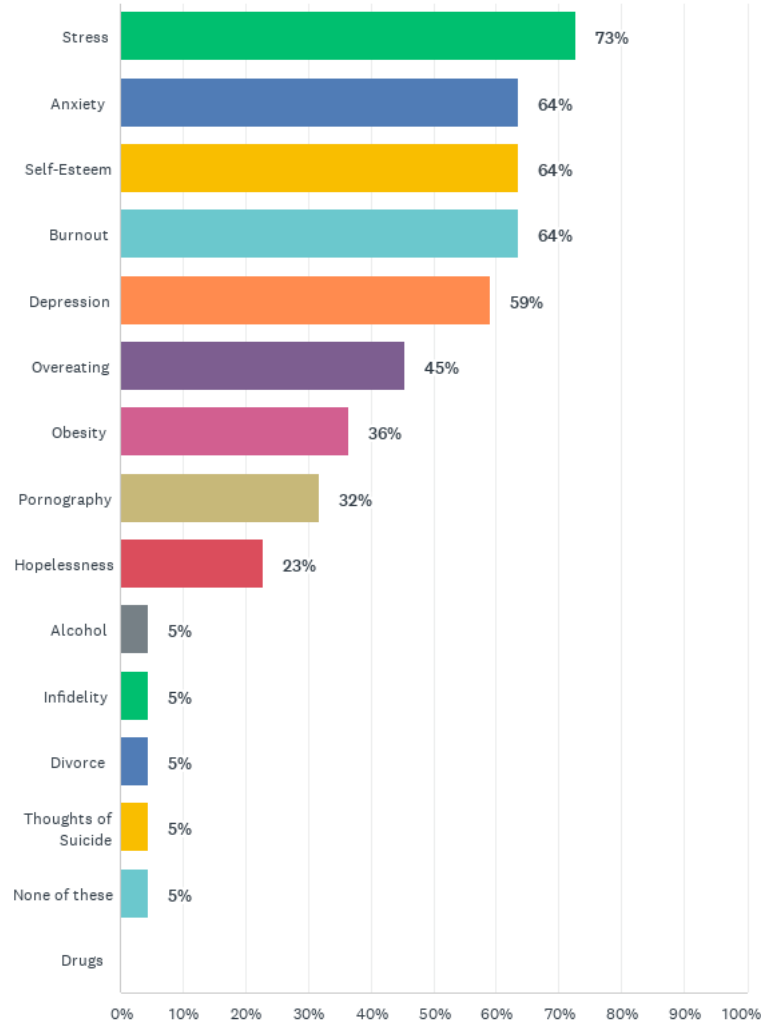


Figure 5: Areas of Struggle for Pastors

Question 20 asked the ministers if their struggles listed in question 19 were a direct result of working in the ministry. 68% of those surveyed responded “yes,” that their struggles had been a result of the ministry. Only 32% said that their struggles were not a result of their work in the ministry. The pastors were asked to explain their answer in question 20. Several responded that the struggles and stresses of ministry work were not unlike those they experienced in other

professions prior to entering the ministry. However, many responded that the fear of constant criticism from their church members added much to their issues. One response was especially telling by stating that, “I believe ministry and being the target of constant and unrelenting criticisms has deeply affected my self-esteem. I believe not feeling like you are free to express your opinions for fear of creating issues in the church has led to depression. For me, the costs of ministry far outweigh the rewards of ministry.” Some admitted to struggles with their own sinfulness and poor lifestyle choices, while others expressed that their issues were a result of feelings of ineffectiveness in their ministry work. One pastor noted that there never really is a break in ministry, and this led to the issues they struggled with.

Since pastors often struggle as a result of feeling under attack from their church, question 21 asked respondents how often they or their family feel under attack from members of their church. 45% said that they rarely felt under attack which is encouraging that it received the largest response. The next highest response was “occasionally” which received 27% of the vote. This would mean those that feel attacked less than monthly. Unfortunately, 14% of pastors that responded to the question felt that they or their family were attacked on a weekly basis while 9% felt attacked on a monthly basis. Only one out of the 22 responders said that they never felt under attack. While the numbers do not sound as alarming as feared, there are still 23% of pastors that feel they or their families are under attack at least on a monthly or more frequent basis. This is another data point that needs further processing.

Q21 How often do you or your family feel under attack from members or groups in your church?

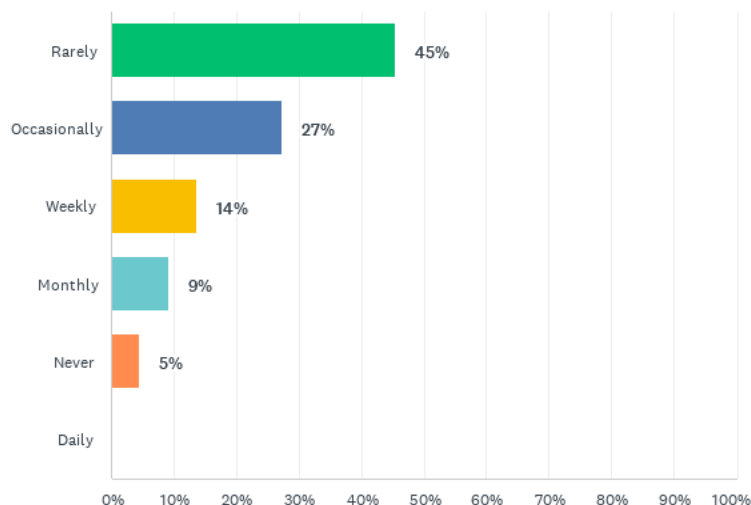


Figure 6: Frequency of Feeling Under Attack from Church Members

Next, pastors were asked if their churches had realistic expectations of them as pastor. Seven out of the 22 responded that their churches did not have realistic expectations. This represents 32% of respondents. This means that of the approximate 5,000 Southern Baptist churches in Texas, 1,600 of them do not have realistic expectations of their pastor as determined by this survey. Respondents were asked to elaborate more on their answers and some gave some very interesting answers. For example, a pastor that said his church did have realistic expectations qualified his answer by saying, “They consistently support me, tell me to go home, quit working so hard, but would be disappointed if I cut back any more than I have. I used to work 70+ hours a week. I am consistently 45-50 now.” Another who said his church did not have realistic expectations wrote, “A small but vocal minority either want the church to become what it was in its glory days or they want immediate answers to long term problems, problems to which they contributed.” Similarly, another pastor wrote, “Most do not understand the role of

the pastor or the demands which come from ministry.” Several pastors mentioned being compared to predecessors that were remembered fondly and the reality that they could never live up to those memories. Others mentioned the unrealistic expectations on their ability to grow their church and bring in more money with one writing, “a constant expectation to bring in more money and have constant growth is unrealistic in some ways.” All these responses were interesting and add a wealth of information to responses in other questions in this survey.

The following question continued with the theme and asked pastors if their church had realistic expectations of their spouse. Only four of the 21 respondents who are married said that their church had unrealistic expectations for their spouse, or 19%. Most of the comments were positive about churches allowing for the spouse to support their ministry spouse or having no real expectations of them. However, one pastor wrote, “They couldn't accept her need to have friends and employment outside the church.” Another said, “I think some of the ladies expect her to be superwoman and run a thriving women's ministry without much help.” Those with spouses who worked full-time outside of the church seemed to have more to say than others with one pointing out how frequently members would go to their spouse’s place of employment to talk with her about church matters or to ask her to pass a message on to her pastor husband. One respondent wrote, “Despite the fact that she works a stressful full-time job herself, some believe she should participate in every women's activity regardless of when it is scheduled or whether she is even interested.”

When asked the same question about the expectations of their children, only one responded that the church did not have realistic expectations of their children. However, several did mention that their children often struggled with the “preacher’s kid” stereotype with some in their church and community.

Following questions of expectations, pastors were asked if they felt free to share their true self with their congregation. Seven of the 22 responses said no, or 32%, while even those that said yes felt the need to clarify what they felt comfortable sharing and what they did not. Several expressed the need to keep their guard up about personal opinions and one wrote, “I believe if I was totally honest about my struggles, my opinions, or even my preferences there would be calls for me to be dismissed by someone within the church.” Politics was mentioned by several as something they could not share openly with one writing, “I have difficulty sharing many of my own beliefs on current events (politics, Christian nationalism) because of the strong opinions within our congregation.” Several who responded that they felt comfortable sharing their true self pointed out that they were only comfortable doing so with their inner circle of friends or leaders in the church and not with the extended members of the congregation. Other thoughts that were shared in the comments pointed out that they only felt comfortable after serving in the church for many years while another pointed out that they felt mostly comfortable, but there were certain members that it would be dangerous to share their true self with.

As a follow up to the previous questions, pastors were asked if they had ever refused to preach something they felt led to teach because of fear that it would cause disagreement or conflict. 23% of respondents said that they had chosen not to preach on certain topics because of this fear. This is concerning because there are 23% of pastors who felt that God wanted them to preach or teach on a topic for the good of their church, but they chose not to because they feared what the backlash would be from their membership. As a result of this response, this definitely demands further consideration in the plan to help pastors navigate leading their churches in the Twenty-First Century.

The next question was concerning time off from the work of the ministry. Most pastors responded that they take one or two days off per week from ministry work, but most added the caveat that this did not always happen as church needs or requests would impede upon their time off. Those who did always take their weekly time off admitted to having to guard this time purposefully to make sure that it happened. Most said that their churches allowed for vacation time, ranging from two weeks to five weeks per year. However, they also mentioned that they had to cut trips short due to demands of the church or that they would plan shorter trips throughout the year because they felt like they could not take off full weeks at a time away from the church. When asked if their churches supported them taking time away for themselves and their family, all 22 respondents said that their church did support this time off.

Question 29 is a very important question for the planned response to the data received. It asks the question if the pastor felt their education adequately prepared them for pastor work and life. Of the 22 surveyed, 50% said that their education did not adequately prepare them for the work of the ministry. There were several comments as to why the pastors felt that they were not prepared by their education. There was a clear opinion that their education was lacking in preparedness for the personal side of ministry. Some felt like there was not enough preparation for dealing with church members, like the respondent who wrote, "There isn't enough training to actually prepare you for in-the-moment conflict or grief." Many of the responses stressed the lack of interpersonal training to help pastors work with their membership, like the pastor who wrote, "I absolutely believe seminary is very important but also believe too many seminaries have removed the practical aspects of ministry for the more 'academic' pursuit of knowledge. At the hospital or graveside, people care that you are there not that you know Greek, Hebrew, Aquinas, Calvin, and Grenz." That same respondent also shared how they felt that their eight

years of lay leadership in churches prepared them more for the work of the pastorate than their seminary education. Some felt that the lack of practical preparation was a hindrance and one said, “It was all theological with no practical ministry training or realistic preparation.” Others felt like there are aspects of pastoral work that are not taught to seminary students, like the respondent that wrote, “there were few if any classes that dealt with the daily grind, business side of church work. No one prepared me for dealing with church staff.” A very in-depth response was, “I feel like most of seminary was review of what I learned growing up in church and did not focus on my personal relationship with God. I took one class on church administration and while intentions were good, there was no teaching on running meetings, strategic planning, or vision.” Repeatedly, ministers expressed the desire to see more leadership and practical aspects of ministry work focused on at the seminary level. These will all be topics that will be returned to as this project considers recommendations for improving the health of the Twenty-First Century pastor.

Q29 Did your education adequately prepare you for ministry work and life? If no, please explain why.

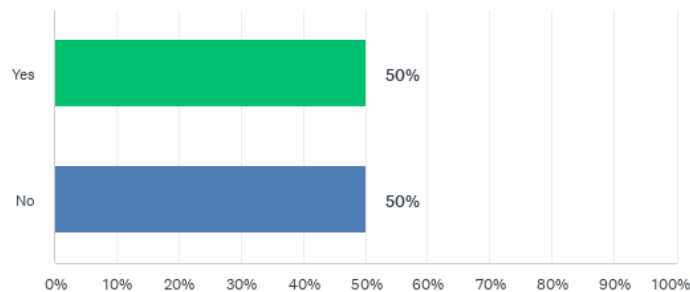


Figure 7: Adequacy of Education for Ministry Work

Another important aspect for the minister’s success and health is having positive people in their circle of influence. Often it seems that pastors have a hard time making friends due to

the demands on their time. However, based upon the survey, 21 of the 22 respondents said that they had a close friend other than their spouse. This is encouraging as it seems that pastors are not as isolated in their positions as once feared.

An important part of bridging the gap between education and practical ministry work is having mentors who have served as ministers before that can help guide young ministers. 23% of the pastors involved in the survey said that they did not have a mentor they could turn to for help and advice. This means that almost a quarter of pastors in Texas Baptist churches are depending solely on their education and personal ideas to do the work of their ministry. This is a topic deserving of more study and needs more understanding as to why older pastors are not connecting with younger pastors to help guide and assist them. The author's experience suggests that pastors can sometimes be territorial concerning the area around their churches and view other area pastors more as competitors than part of the same team reaching the community for Christ. This will be an area that needs more work and emphasis to help younger ministers succeed in the Twenty-First Century.

Q31 Do you have a mentor to discuss ministry work with or to seek advice from?

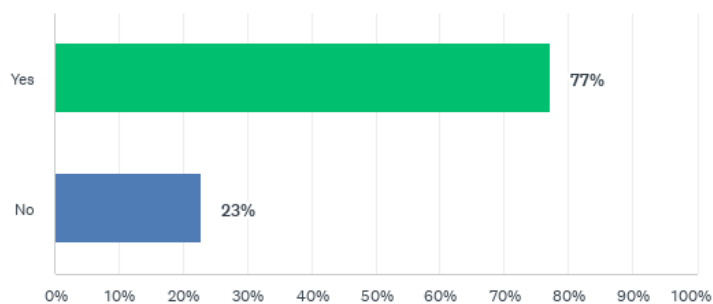


Figure 8: Percentage of Pastors with Mentors

When asked what one thing their church could do to encourage the pastors that responded and allow them to serve Christ unhindered, there was a variety of answers with a few specific topics that showed up often. Most prominent was a need for church members to take upon themselves leadership roles in the church and the ministries of the church. Similarly, members could help by actively serving in the ministries of the church, particularly areas of evangelism and reaching out to the community. Some pastors felt like their church members did not recognize their call from God to lead their church and felt that if members would acknowledge that to be true, it would help them to lead the church and do the things they felt God was calling their church to do. A few responses were very practical, such as the pastor that wished his church would pay for health insurance for him and his family or that the church would contribute to his retirement. Another topic that came up often was pastors hoping their church would allow them more time off, specifically for sabbaticals to find refreshment in their own spiritual life and to help give fresh desire for the work of the ministry.

Question 33 gave pastors a set of statements and they were asked to select all of the statements they agreed with. 82% of those surveyed agreed with the statements that “I am respected by my church” and “I was called to be a pastor.” 77% agreed that “I receive support of people outside of my congregation” and “my church supports me.” Pastors agreed 73% of the time that “I am adequately paid to support my family,” “I feel close to God,” and “I am excited to serve Christ.” 64% of the ministers felt like they had a positive relationship with their church staff. Only 59% of respondents felt like they were fulfilling the Great Commission. Similarly, only 55% felt like their church was fulfilling the Great Commission. Another concerning statistic was that only 55% of the pastors felt like their church listened to them. When asked if they would still attend their church if they were not the pastor, only half of those surveyed said

they would. 41% said they regularly share Christ outside of regular church activities and the same percentage said they considered themselves to be a success. It is not a surprise based on this information that only 36% said that their church was reaching the community immediately surrounding it. Only 23% of the pastors said that they regularly spend time with people that do not have a relationship with Christ yet and the same percentage said that they feel isolated. Most concerning is that 18% of the respondents said that they are currently considering leaving the pastorate permanently and 14% agreed that the pastorate is not what they thought it would be but felt like they could not get out of it now. This means that almost 900 pastors in Texas Baptist churches are currently considering leaving the pastorate permanently if these statistics hold up across the denomination. This represents almost one in every five pastors that are ready to leave the ministry today. Another 14% said the ministry is just a job that provides for their family. This question more than any other shows that there are some serious health issues in a number of areas among Texas Baptist pastors and the churches they lead.

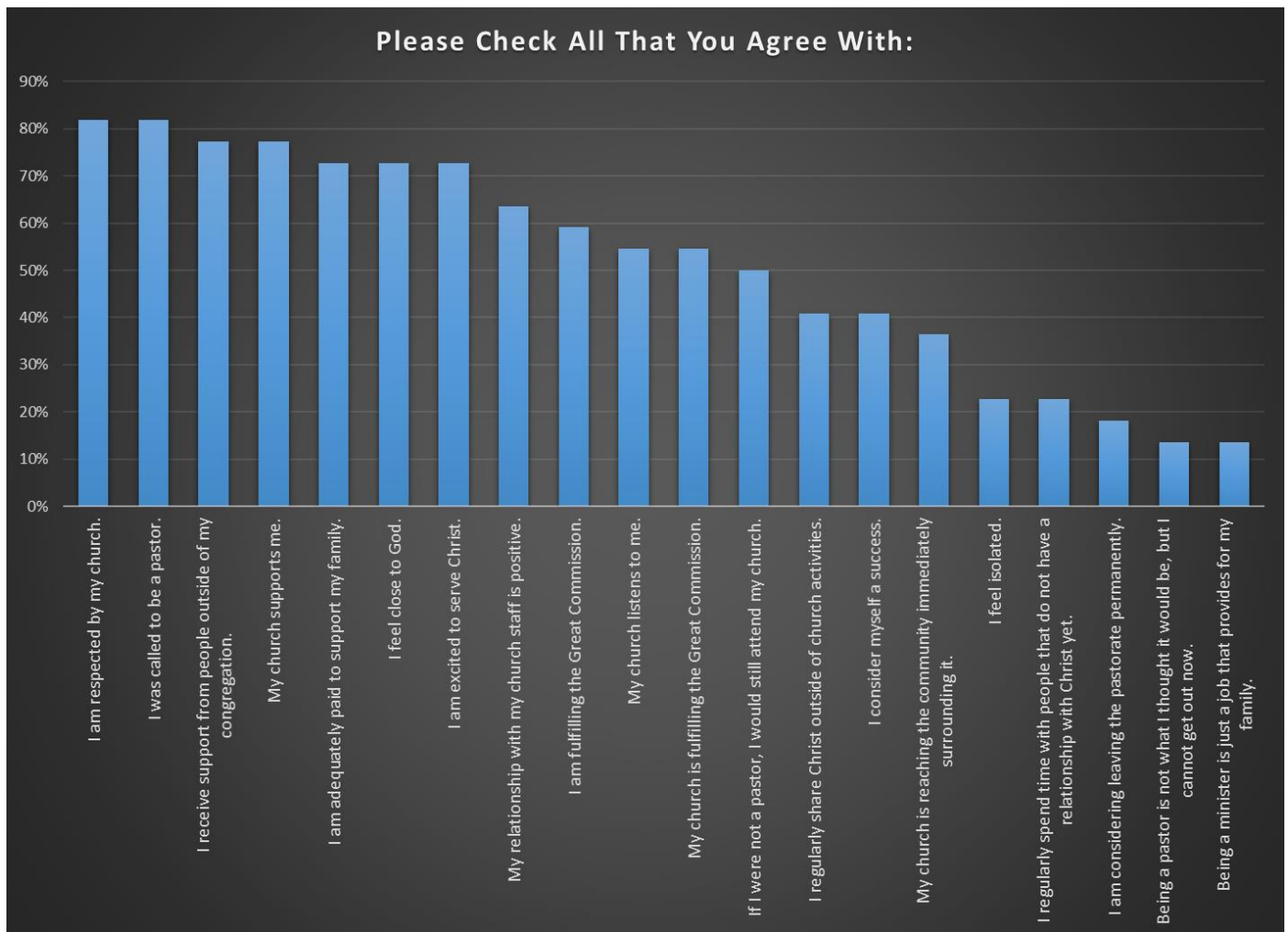


Figure 9: General Summary of Pastors’ Feelings

The final question of the survey asked pastors what was one thing about being a pastor that the survey did not ask that they would like to share. Most were very positive answers that basically said that there were always struggles with doing the work of the ministry, but that it was always a great honor and blessing to be a pastor. One pastor wrote, “Being a pastor is a high calling. The first priority is our relationship to God through Christ. If that suffers, everyone and everything suffers, because it is His church.” Another wrote, “Make sure you are called by God. If you can do anything else and be fulfilled, do it. Being a pastor is not easy--it takes hard work; but for me, it is my joy and heart's desire. I am having the greatest time of my life!”

Based on the results of this survey shared above, there are several key points to discuss. The first of these points is that 35% of pastors said that conflict in their church was the greatest stressor they faced as a pastor. This stat alone is not surprising, but juxtaposed with the other responses, this rate of response was almost three times the rate of the next closest stressor which only saw a 13% response rate. So, the greatest stressor by far for pastors appears to be conflict in the church based on these results. Keep in mind that this result was not from a question that asked pastors to select from a list of options but was one in which the participants entered their own responses to the survey. Interestingly, 23% of responses also said they or their family felt under attack from church members at least monthly or more frequently. Continuing this trend, 23% also said that they had refused to preach or teach something they felt called by God to speak to in their church because they feared the conflict and opposition they would face. This is clearly showing a pattern that the stress point for pastors revolves around church conflict and it appears that instead of dealing with the conflict, the same percentage choose not to touch on points that may be necessary for their congregation in order to avoid new or continued conflict. It also appears that this conflict is not just interpersonal between church members but is often directed as attacks at the pastor or their family.

So why is conflict such a stress point for pastors? When asked if they felt their education adequately prepared them for seminary, half of all respondents said that it did not. The primary reason for this response was because they felt their education did not prepare them for interpersonal confrontations and dealing with members on a personal relationship level. This can play out in several ways that lead to the stress of conflict. First, the pastor may be presented with a conflict between members in the church and is unsure how to bring resolution between the members. Because the pastor stresses over the conflict, the human tendency for flight will often

take over and the pastor either ignores the conflict, which rarely causes it to go away or improve, or they do not have the tools to deal with the conflict, so attempts to bring a resolution often exacerbate the issue or, even worse, cause the conflict to spread to the pastor himself or herself. The other scenario is that the conflict is directly aimed at the pastor or their family. In this case, it is easy for the pastor to feel like their congregation is out to get them or they become anxious over what is being said behind their backs among their congregation. When the conflict is directed at the pastors themselves, often the tools for resolution are difficult to find because there has been little to no practical training in the pastor's education for how to deal with this conflict and personal criticism. Like in the first scenario, the most likely result is that the pastor eventually shuts down and refuses to deal with the conflict, which makes the conflict worse and possibly spread further in the congregation, thus fulfilling the pastor's fear of what is being said behind closed doors. This problem with conflict has the potential to completely stall a pastor's ministry in a local church based on the interaction with just a few church members. 27% of pastors said that their church was not healthy, so there are other issues going on in local churches that are causing pastors to question their health, but conflict and knowing how to deal with it appears to be the greatest issue affecting pastors and ultimately harming local churches. Clearly this is why 32% of pastors do not feel comfortable sharing their true self with their congregations, which is not healthy for the pastor's relationship with their church. As mentioned above, this lack of sharing one's true self is most frequently attributed to the pastor wanting to avoid conflict. This issue keeps rising to the surface in the issues that seem most pressing for the health of the pastor and the local church.

So, what are solutions that could help alleviate this strain on the pastor and congregation. The first solution is a clear one, though the application may not be immediately easy to do.

Since pastors do not feel their education adequately prepared them for interpersonal relationships and conflict, seminaries, universities, and any higher education establishment that teaches ministers should add courses on dealing with conflict and interpersonal relationships immediately. This is what pastors seem to be asking for and, based on the results of this survey, has the greatest opportunity to improve the pitfalls pastors are clearly experiencing to help pastors navigate not just the stresses of Twenty-First Century ministry, but also to learn how to lead their churches from out front without the burden of conflict, or the avoidance of conflict, weighing them down. Seminaries should be teaching conflict resolution, not as a passing section of another course, but as a full semester course. The course should not just educate the pastor on tools to use in conflict resolution, but the pastor should be given opportunities to role play in the course in order to be prepared how to respond. Likewise, there should be a practical ministry course created for seminary students. Obviously with conflict being considered, this course should focus on training pastors in how to improve their relationship with the members of their church, neighbors in the community, and leaders in their community. In a time of virtual meetings and non-verbal communications, it is not practical to assume that new ministers will have the tools necessary to relate to members, have serious conversations, and resolve problems. As a result, this practical ministry course should focus a significant amount of time on interpersonal relationships in the church, but this should not be the only focus. According to the responses in the survey concerning education, pastors do not always feel adequate in dealing with budgets and the day-to-day workings of office tasks. They also do not always feel they have the skills to oversee other staff. A practical ministry course could have units that focus on these areas as well to give the pastor a well-rounded education, not just for ministry work, but for the day-to-day functions of their position as well.

The second solution to the problem of dealing with conflict and interpersonal relations would be intentional efforts by Baptist Associations and state conventions to establish mentorship programs between experienced pastors and new or younger pastors. The recommendation would be for a program established through the state conventions where a new pastor would register with the director of the state mentorship program upon being hired. The director would then assign a mentor within a two-hour drive of the new pastor's church, and they would commit to meeting on a regular basis so the new pastor could learn from their relationship with their mentor. The goal would be for the new pastor to learn from the experience of the longer-serving pastor, so even if the new pastor should move from the area, the hope would be they would continue contact with their mentor pastor. Hopefully the relationship would continue throughout the pastor's career, even when they have the experience to begin mentoring another pastor. By establishing this through the state convention and allowing the mentor to be within a two-hour drive of the new pastor, this should eliminate any of the attitudes of competition that may exist between pastors in the same community. This would be a program that could fill the void for pastors who may not attend a seminary offering conflict resolution and interpersonal relations courses and even help pastors who may already be established by opening the mentorship program up to all pastors when it is initially launched.

Pastors need to be supported more, not just by their congregations, but also from local associations and state conventions. Another program that should be offered to pastors is to have a literal pastoral counselor whose job is to be a counselor for pastors. This position could be established at the state convention level and expanded into local associations as necessary. This would need to be someone educated in counseling with the experience of pastoral ministry so that they could speak to the day to day stresses a pastor faces and have a true empathy for what a

pastor is going through. With 73% of pastors saying they struggle with stress, hopefully that will be improved by the education and mentorship efforts, but there are deeper issues that a statewide counselor for pastors could help with. 64% of pastors admit to dealing with anxiety, self-esteem, and burnout issues. Through personal experience, the author understands that these are often difficult issues to talk about with anyone in the church you serve and even more difficult to confide in pastors locally. While most of the pastors involved in this survey admit to having close friends, the truth is that if those friends are not pastors as well, they have a hard time understanding the unique stressors a pastor faces. So, a dedicated counselor for pastors would give all local pastors someone they could contact for emotional and spiritual support. The mental health of pastors in the Twenty-First Century is not an issue that can continue to be ignored, especially with 59% struggling with depression and 23% having feelings of hopelessness. Some of the other issues mentioned are ways that pastors choose to self-medicate because they cannot cope with these foundational mental health struggles. Often the media and other believers mention how frequently pastors deal with issues such as overeating, obesity, pornography, infidelity, divorce, suicide, and alcohol, all of which were reflected in this survey, but these are just outward expressions to deal with inward hurts. Pastors may struggle with these areas, but if there was a counselor available to guide them through anxiety, low self-esteem, burnout, depression, and hopelessness, perhaps the church would see fewer pastors making headlines for struggles with infidelity, pornography, and activities that put a black eye on the church and the ministry.

By establishing better practical education at the seminary level, mentorship at the local level, and counseling at the state level, this would create a network of support and knowledge for new and established pastors to draw from when their own well is empty. The ramifications for

other data points in this survey would be tremendous. For instance, with a more practical education that includes the knowledge of how to manage a local church staff, perhaps the 36% of pastors surveyed who said they do not have a positive relationship with their staff would improve significantly. Without the time spent trying to make up for inadequacies, maybe the 41% of pastors who said they were not fulfilling the Great Commission and the 59% who said that they do not regularly share Christ outside of the regular activities of their church would find the time and energy to renew their passion for those areas. Through the mentorship program, perhaps the 23% of pastors who said that they feel isolated would no longer feel this way, especially considering that this took into account the 95% who said they had close friends besides their spouse. Obviously, the feelings of isolation are not a result of a lack of a support system, but rather the lack of a support system of those that understand the realities of being a pastor. Most importantly for the future of the local church and its ministry to the communities where God has placed them is that a true, multi-level support system as the one recommended here for pastors would alleviate the 27% of pastors who currently say they would transition to another non-ministry job today if they would make the exact same salary as they do at their current ministry. This number will never go away completely as some pastors are not truly intended for the positions they serve, but there is no reason that this percentage should be so high today.

What about the local congregations? What can the average member do today to help support their pastor and, in turn, increase the ministry of their church? First, they should be an encouragement to their pastors. Pastors are amazing people, as evidenced by the number who still spoke highly of their congregations, the ministry, and of Christ even at the same time they were admitting and sharing their struggles, some directly caused by their work, in this survey. Many members clearly are supporting their pastors and encouraging them as evidenced by many

of the responses received, but as a church member now and former pastor himself, the author of this project knows that the average church member rarely shares words of encouragement with their pastor but will quickly let them know when something is going wrong or even if a personal preference is not being met. And maybe that is the most important thing a church member can do. Set aside personal preferences and remember, as one pastor reminded in the survey, that it is Christ who is the head of the church. Any attempt by the members of a local church to seize control or the direction of the congregation aside from being led by the Holy Spirit is outside of the will of God. A pastor is the steward of the local church and held accountable daily by God and by themselves for the work they are doing. Members should be encouraging them first, then checking on them on a regular basis to make sure they are feeling healthy physically, emotionally, and spiritually. And if a pastor has struggles, there should not be a fear of losing their job for being honest about their struggles for even the apostles themselves were honest about their struggles and failures and are held in the highest of esteem. Next, members should be quick to be leaders and servants in their church in support of the ministries God has chosen to direct through the pastor.

Members should always keep Ephesians 4:11-13 at the forefront which reminds of the pastor's job in Christ. It says that Christ, "gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, for the training of the saints in the work of ministry, to build up the body of Christ, until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of God's Son, growing into a mature man with a stature measured by Christ's fullness." The pastor's job is not to do all the work of the church as the "paid professional Christian" as some pastors in the survey felt they were perceived, but rather to train church members (the saints) to do the work of the ministry. This does not mean the pastor does not participate in the work of the ministry

because they are also part of the saints as well, but it does not mean they do more than their fair share of the ministry work of the local church. Their job is also to build up the local congregation in unity. And while the training mentioned above will help them learn how to better unify local congregations, it is still the job of church members to look for unity and work at establishing it, even through the differences found when so many conflicting personalities co-exist in a local church. According to this passage, the call on the local church member is not to be most regarded by their pastor or thought of in higher esteem than their fellow church member, but to be a member that is growing in maturity as measured against the fullness of Christ. The local church member is not using the people around them in the congregation as their measuring stick, but rather the person of Christ Himself.

Finally, local church members should practically support their pastor. Be sure they and their family are adequately cared for financially with salaries and benefits that make it possible for them to do the ministry Christ has called them to do unencumbered by the stress and anxiety of providing for their next meal or what to do when a car breaks down or child gets sick. Recognize that the pastorate is a high stress job and do not just give them time off as part of their salary package, but insist they take it on a regular basis and help them guard their one or two days off each week for personal refreshment and recreation. This survey makes it clear that they need and deserve this, but many will never ask their congregation for what they need. And when a pastor has been with a congregation for a long time, then that congregation should offer them sabbaticals to go find refreshment and a new passion to continue the ministry of the church. As mentioned in the survey, do not call these times vacation as they are set aside as time for the pastor to grow in their own ministry work and are a benefit to the congregation and community when they return.

While the state of the pastorate is still more concerning than ever, this project's data has confirmed that there is still hope and the root of the struggles many pastors face is not something that is beyond the local church's, association's, and state convention's control. Very practical and small steps taken today can turn around the exodus of pastors leaving the ministry and bring about a healthier local pastor and local church.

Chapter Five

Conclusion, Summary, and Remaining Questions Regarding Pastoral Ministry in the Twenty-First Century

As stated in the beginning of this project, American pastors are leaving the ministry at alarming rates and those that choose to stay and press on in ministry are often struggling with burnout, depression, health issues, marital issues, and family issues. The results of the survey supported most of the issues proposed for this project. Some of the issues were not as serious as originally thought such as the ministry causing marital issues with 41% saying that the ministry has made their marriage healthier. Only 14% said that the ministry has made their marriage less healthy. Likewise, 41% said the ministry has made their relationship with their children healthier while less than 5% said it had made their relationship with their children less healthy. This proposal of a problem was less significant than theorized. As far as the other issues mentioned are concerned, the project confirmed that these were issues pastors are dealing with. 64% of pastors that responded said that they had suffered with burnout during their ministry. 59% of those who responded said they had struggled with depression. In addition, 23% of respondents shared that they did not view themselves as healthy physically, 27% said they were not healthy emotionally, but only 9% said they were unhealthy spiritually. Of all the issues that the pastors surveyed shared, 68% said that the issues mentioned were a result of their work in the ministry. As evidenced by these results, most of the theorized issues pastors are facing are true for the majority of pastors. Even the issues that were less predominant, such as the effect of the ministry on the pastor's marriage and children showed a percentage that, while not as high as others, are concerning enough to demand further study.

In chapter 4, there was much discussion about the results and several options to help alleviate the struggles pastors are facing in Twenty-First Century ministry, such as more practical education for the day to day functions of ministry and interpersonal relations, including conflict and the creation of a mentoring program for younger pastors with more experienced pastors. The author stands by these suggestions, but there is much more information that needs to be collected. This project focused on just a small sampling of pastors from Southern Baptist churches in Texas. To get a full understanding of the depth of the issues studied for this project, research should be done throughout the United States and across multiple denominations. When this survey found that 27% of pastors would take a secular job today if it paid exactly what their church paid them along with 18% that said they are considering leaving the ministry and 14% said being a pastor is not what they thought it would be but they feel like they cannot get out now it made clear the reality that pastors are not happy in their ministry and need more support than they are receiving today.

This was a very basic survey of pastors and their emotional, physical, and spiritual health. As such, it is meant only to be a foundation for further study, not just in a broader study, but more specifics on some of the findings of this project. For instance, 14% of pastors responded that the ministry has had a negative effect on their family. This needs to have further information gathered to determine what negative effects the ministry has had on their families and what the cause of the negative effects were. If related to conflict or interpersonal relationships, then the solutions proposed in this project would be appropriate and help alleviate some of the struggles pastors are finding with their families as a result of their work in the ministry. However, if the causes are from other reasons, then further solutions will need to be discovered.

Likewise, the data that showed 27% of pastors who would take a non-ministry job that paid the same if they could deserves a significant follow up. This percentage is much higher than the number of pastors who felt under attack on a regular basis, so there appears to be more going on with this struggle. Yes, conflict is running some pastors out of the ministry, but there is much more going on and a further study should be done to determine why pastors would be so interested in taking non-ministry jobs and exiting the pastorate. Of all the areas that need further study, this may be most critical to the life of the church. As this survey received a response from a good number of younger and more experienced pastors, this does not appear to be isolated to just pastors who are struggling at the beginning of their ministry. What is going on in churches today that would cause more than one in four pastors to say they are ready to exit for secular jobs that pay the same? This study did not fully answer that question and further studies should examine why pastors are leaving the ministry or so willing to leave the ministry.

Another concerning data point is that 18% of pastors said that the ministry had a negative effect on their relationship with God. This is significant for two reasons. First, and most obvious, is that pastors are working for Christ daily and focused more than the average believer on the things of God, yet something in the ministry is causing almost one in five pastors to see a decline in their relationship with God. The second significance is that only 9% of pastors responded that they did not consider themselves to be healthy spiritually. So, a deeper question needs to be asked to determine why 9% more of respondents said they had a healthy spiritual life but still felt the ministry had negatively affected their relationship with God. Perhaps interviews with future respondents in similar studies would be appropriate to ask exactly how the ministry had a negative impact on their relationship with God. Maybe some respondents felt that it had

caused a struggle in the relationship, but that they had overcome it and were still healthy spiritually.

Question 19 is another data point that merits further study. This question sought to find out what struggles the pastors had experienced but it did not go into greater depth about the severity of the struggles or how often the struggles had arisen. For instance, 64% had struggled with anxiety, self-esteem, and burnout, but this number alone does not tell the whole story. What has caused the anxiety the pastors struggled with? This information would be necessary to make further progress with offering education and mentorship programs that would be transformational for the pastors and their ministries. Also, it would be necessary to know what had caused struggles with self-esteem. Were they a result of their own feelings of failure in the ministry or was it an outside influence, such as church member criticism, that caused them to feel they were failing? Was it momentary or long lasting? All of this could be discerned with further study and broader responses. Even more, what is causing the burnout pastors are facing? Are they being required to work too many hours to keep up with the demands of modern ministry? Does the reality of always being on call in this hyper-connected culture cause them to feel they cannot get away from their jobs and have a personal life? This seems to come through in the study as one pastor mentioned that there is never really a break from the ministry. Perhaps a study of a pastor's availability to their members is worth undertaking. Do pastors set boundaries and do members respect them? Do members abuse the pastor's time by calling about trivial matters at times the pastor should be enjoying downtime with their family? These would be interesting data points to receive and could easily have trainings incorporated into ministry education.

Another concern is that 59% of pastors said they struggled with depression. This number should be examined more closely to see if the depression was self-diagnosed or was the result of a consultation with a medical doctor. In this day of deeper struggles with mental health issues, this significant number of pastors who say they have struggled or are struggling with depression cannot be overlooked. Comments from the study also made it clear that pastors did not feel comfortable sharing their depression struggles with their congregation for fear of how they would be treated or looked upon. A deeper study should strive to find suggestions for local congregations on how they could make it safe for the pastor to share their struggles as all members should feel free to seek comfort and support from their church family, even the pastor. And even though less than five percent of responses said they had thoughts of suicide, this does not make the struggle with depression any less severe or concerning for modern day pastors.

Often overlooked, physical health for a pastor is of concern as well. 45% said they had struggled with overeating and 36% struggled with obesity. Through the follow up question concerning whether or not this struggle was in response to the stress of the ministry, the vast majority agreed that it was. An appropriate study that was not conducted as part of this project would be to ask pastors how they cope with the stressors of the ministry. It appears that many turn to food for stress relief, but the good news is that less than 5% turned to alcohol and none turned to drugs. However, 32% were coping by turning to pornography. Through a deeper study of pastors' coping mechanisms, perhaps suggestions could be made through mentoring and counseling programs for pastors of healthier ways to cope and assistance could be given to lower pastors' reliance upon unhealthy coping mechanisms.

As mentioned often in this project, conflict is by far the most concerning stressor for pastors. 23% of pastors and their families feel under attack on a monthly or more frequent basis.

This study only focused on the health of pastors, but a study of church members would be most appropriate in this case. Why do members feel the need to confront their pastors or oppose them? Do church members even realize when a pastor perceives their words or actions as an attack? If conflict is the largest stressor and impacting pastors in such a negative way, then to understand the reasons for it, one should go to the source directly, which would be church members, to arrive at the reasons. A study such as this could provide data to develop education for church members on how to handle conflict in the church in healthy ways along with how to interact in healthier ways with their pastors. This type of education could easily be woven into the Sunday School and Bible study materials churches are already using. Another option would be to take advantage of the recommended mentorship program and have other pastors come speak to congregations to teach them about conflict resolution and allow them an opportunity to have greater empathy for their pastors. The author was fortunate enough to have a retired pastor in one of his congregations who played this role during times of difficulty. While it did not alleviate all conflict and attacks, it was a place of respite during times of difficulty to have a fellow pastor's active support. The Church needs to be more proactive in this area, especially local associations and state conventions. The current process seems to be to wait until there is an active problem before outside assistance is offered. Perhaps, for the health of pastors and churches, it would be more appropriate to provide education and training before conflict escalates to a level that draws outside attention.

There was much learned through this project, but one truth that cannot be denied is that even mostly healthy pastors still have struggles that sometimes prevent or hinder them from doing the work of the ministry. Pastors are under stress and while some are more adept at coping in healthy ways with that stress, the local church stands to gain much from supporting their

pastor's health and lightening the burden on pastors could make for a much more effective ministry in the Twenty-First Century. Studies should be completed on church structure and many churches have antiquated job descriptions and requirements of their pastor positions. Another study that would further amplify this work would be to research the demands on pastors' time in the modern church and what the exact expectations are for a pastor to be available to their congregation. It seems obvious that due to email, cellular phones, and texting, modern pastors are more readily available to their congregation than ever before. Does this bear out when looking at demands on pastors' time over the course of the past several decades? What negative effects is this having on modern pastors? Is it true, as one responder mentioned in the survey, that there never truly is a break from ministry any longer? In studying these questions and learning more about the expectations of the local church, then recommendations could be made to congregations on realistic expectations for their pastor's job description and requirements. Churches should be more open and clarify how available the pastor should be after regular hours. Systems should be put into place to protect the pastor's downtime, such as designating deacons, elders, and other church leaders as the first points of contact for members and then they would be the ones that contact the pastor when something after hours cannot be handled by others in leadership.

Another study that should be completed as a follow up to this project is a thorough survey of pastors' time. The goal should be to arrive at how much time each part of ministry takes from their schedule each week and should give a picture of the number of hours pastors are actually working in a given week. A study of this nature may reveal that some of the stressors a pastor feels are more a result of time management issues than the nature of ministry. This would allow further information for the practical ministry education recommended by this project and help

those that will teach pastors know where most pastors are spending their time in the work of the ministry. Corrections could be made to this issue if it appears that pastors are spending more time in certain areas and would be better served utilizing more time in other areas.

Interestingly, since this project began, the Baptist General Convention of Texas' Church Health Initiative began a study of pastoral health through Grey Matter Research and Consulting³⁸. Their results were released in February 2020 and had a broader scope of questioning for pastors. Some of their information confirmed the results of this project's study, while others arrived at different statistics. With the full backing of the state convention, their study was able to receive 560 responses from Southern Baptist pastors³⁹ in Texas compared to the 22 that were received for this project. In the Texas Baptists survey, only 12% of pastors were diagnosed with depression, but of particular concern was that 24% of pastors younger than 45 had been diagnosed with depression.⁴⁰ They also examined deeper into specific mental challenges and found that 39% of pastors had a reduced sense of accomplishment, 38% suffered from physical exhaustion, 37% suffered from emotional exhaustion, 26% had self-doubts, 23% were pessimistic about their future, and 7% had suffered from panic attacks.⁴¹ In each of these areas, pastors under 45 had much more significant rates of occurrence within the last six months when taking the survey.⁴² The Church Health Initiative also found that 63% of pastors experienced personal stress due to challenges with their church or congregation at least on a monthly basis with another 35% saying it was at least once a week.⁴³ Yet another concerning

³⁸ Texas Baptist Press. "Pastor Health Survey." Accessed May 6, 2022. <https://cdn.txb.press/txbpress/files/2020-CHI-Pastor-Health-Survey-Full-Report.pdf>.

³⁹ Texas Baptist Press, 10.

⁴⁰ Ibid, 20.

⁴¹ Ibid, 22.

⁴² Ibid, 22.

⁴³ Ibid, 24.

statistic was that 47% of pastors under 45 said that they experienced this personal stress at least once a week.⁴⁴ Another concerning statistic was that 89% of pastors in their survey reported having at least one critical physical or mental health issue and there were no significant differences based on age.⁴⁵ 64% of respondents in the Church Health Initiative study agreed strongly that their relationships with church members were “generally loving, trusting, and honest.” But the response to the question for pastors younger than 45 was only 51%, significantly lower than the average.⁴⁶ Their survey also had 32% agree strongly with the statement, “When I get hurt in a relationship, I am good at resolving that pain through conversations of reconciliation and forgiveness.” However, only 23% of pastors under 45 agreed with this statement.⁴⁷

The Texas Baptists’ broader survey asked pastors more specifically than this project how many hours they spent in prayer each week. According to their findings, the average pastor spent 4.1 hours in personal prayer per week, or about 35 minutes per day. 6% of those that responded to their survey said they spent less than an hour in prayer each week.⁴⁸ Pastors aged 45 and under were yet again a statistical anomaly and said they only spent 3.1 hours in prayer per week on average, which was significantly lower than that of other aged pastors.⁴⁹ Their study also found that the average pastor spends 4.4 hours per week on average in personal Bible study. Pastors under 45 were not as significantly different in this area with the results showing they spent 3.8 hours per week in personal Bible study.⁵⁰ According to their results, about half of all

⁴⁴ Ibid, 24.

⁴⁵ Ibid, 25.

⁴⁶ Ibid, 27.

⁴⁷ Ibid, 29.

⁴⁸ Ibid, 32.

⁴⁹ Ibid, 32.

⁵⁰ Ibid, 33.

pastors admitted to experiencing concerning spiritual issues with 64% of those under 45 responding that they suffered from some type of spiritual issue.⁵¹

A very telling statistic in their results was that 23% admitted to having seriously considered leaving the ministry for a non-ministry job.⁵² This is very similar to the 27% of respondents in this project's study that admitted the same. Their study also found that 65% of pastors who experienced stress due to their church or congregation multiple times per week were considering leaving their church ministry.⁵³ Interestingly, only 18% of the pastors they surveyed said they were moving churches or changing careers because they felt like God was leading them to do so.⁵⁴ As they point out in their results, this means that most ministers are viewing the pastorate more as a job and less as a direct call from God to a specific place. Another significant statistic for the purpose of this project is that 27% said they were leaving for another church or another type of job because there was too much stress in their current church.⁵⁵

As far as education is concerned, only 22% of pastors under 45 felt fully equipped for the work of the ministry as a result of their education.⁵⁶ 57% of their respondents felt that additional education was necessary in administrative tasks and 61% said that they needed additional education in relationships and conflict management.⁵⁷ This would seem to support the recommendations and findings of this study that more practical education at the seminary level is necessary for modern ministry.

Many of the findings of this Church Health Initiative study were similar statistically to the findings of this survey. Due to the questions they asked of pastors and the greater range of

⁵¹ Ibid, 36.

⁵² Ibid, 8.

⁵³ Ibid, 46.

⁵⁴ Ibid, 8.

⁵⁵ Ibid, 47.

⁵⁶ Ibid, 49.

⁵⁷ Ibid, 50.

information, there are some alarming findings that cannot be overlooked. This study has made it clear that pastors are struggling and there are many unique stressors to being a pastor in the Twenty-First Century church. However, when pressed against the findings of the Church Health Initiative study, the more concerning facts are that the stresses of ministry work seem to be effecting younger pastors at a significantly higher rate than the average pastor. This would seem to call for a thorough study of current seminary requirements and where the majority of time is being focused in classroom settings. The statistics also lend support to the suggested mentorship programs and also make it clear that pastors under 45, more than other age groups, would benefit from counseling specifically tailored for pastors and their unique stressors.

All pastors need additional education, preparation, and support to promote spiritual, emotional, and relational health, but the younger generation of pastors seems to need this at a much higher rate than others. This is significant as more pastors are leaving the church ministry because if the younger pastors are leaving at a higher rate, it will be increasingly difficult to find pastors for local churches as older pastors begin to retire. The goal of this project was to find ways to help pastors navigate the stresses of Twenty-First Century ministry and the statistics and findings of this project seem true and accurate. The recommendations for practical education, mentorship, and counseling are appropriate and seem to be the best solution to assist pastors, especially those newest to the ministry, in not just doing the ministry, but thriving in it. May this information and the recommendations be found useful to local congregations, associations, and state conventions. The moment to act for the betterment of pastors is now while there is still time to stem the tide of stresses upon the local pastor.

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Appendix A

Survey Questions: Pastoral Health Questionnaire

Part 1: General Instructions

Introduction of researcher. My name is Chris Moore and I am completing a research study from Liberty University as part of the Doctor of Ministry program.

Purpose of the questionnaire. The purpose of this research is to identify the physical, emotional, spiritual, and familial health of pastors.

Confidentiality Statement. Your responses to this survey will be confidential and all responses will be shredded after use and analysis. Please do not write your name on this in order to remain anonymous. Only the researcher involved in this study, Chris Moore, will see your responses.

Voluntary participation. While participation in this research study is appreciated, you are under no obligation to complete this questionnaire and those that do choose to participate are under no obligation to answer any question(s) they feel uncomfortable completing for any reason.

How to submit the questionnaire. The questionnaire may be filled out online at <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/9DHW3RW> or you may request a physical copy of the questionnaire by emailing Chris Moore at [REDACTED]. Please include your mailing address and the researcher will mail a copy of the questionnaire to you along with a self-addressed stamped envelope to return with your responses. If you wish to remain anonymous, please do not include a return address on the envelope when returning the survey.

1. How long have you been a pastor?
 - a. _____
2. How long have you been at your current pastorate?
3. What is your age?
4. What is your gender?
5. What is your ethnicity?
 - a. White
 - b. Black or African-American
 - c. American Indian or Alaskan Native
 - d. Asian

- e. Native Hawaiian or other Pacific islander
 - f. From multiple races
 - g. Some other race (please specify)
6. What is your highest level of education?
7. What do you consider to be your greatest source of stress as a pastor?
- a. _____
8. How often do you pray (not including church activities)?
- a. _____
9. How often do you spend time in personal devotion and Bible study unconnected to the requirements of ministry?
- a. _____
10. Do you consider your church to be healthy?
- a. Yes
 - b. No
11. Do you consider yourself to be healthy physically?
- a. Yes
 - b. No
12. Do you consider yourself to be healthy emotionally?
- a. Yes
 - b. No
13. Do you consider yourself to be healthy spiritually?
- a. Yes
 - b. No

14. What effect has the pastorate had on your family?
- a. Positive
 - b. Negative
 - c. Neutral
15. If you could transition to a non-ministry job that pays the exact same as your current salary, would you do it?
- a. Yes
 - b. No
16. Has the pastorate made your marriage:
- a. More healthy
 - b. Less healthy
 - c. No effect
 - d. I am not married
17. Has the pastorate made your relationship with your children:
- a. More healthy
 - b. Less healthy
 - c. No effect
 - d. I don't have children
18. Has the pastorate made your relationship with God:
- a. More healthy
 - b. Less healthy
 - c. It has had no impact
19. Which of the following have you struggled with during your time as a pastor?

- a. Overeating
- b. Obesity
- c. Depression
- d. Anxiety
- e. Self-Esteem
- f. Stress
- g. Hopelessness
- h. Pornography
- i. Drugs
- j. Alcohol
- k. Infidelity
- l. Divorce
- m. Burnout
- n. Thoughts of Suicide
- o. None of these

20. Do you believe that the struggles you mentioned above were a result of working in the ministry? Please explain why or why not.

- a. Yes
- b. No
 - i. Please explain your response:

21. How often do you or your family feel under attack from members or groups in your church?
- a. Daily
 - b. Weekly
 - c. Monthly
 - d. Occasionally
 - e. Rarely
 - f. Never
22. Does your church have realistic expectations of you as their pastor? Please explain.
23. Does your church have realistic expectations of your spouse? Please explain.
24. Does your church have realistic expectations of your children? Please explain.
25. Do you feel free to share your true self with your church? Please explain.
26. Have you ever refused to preach or teach something you felt led to discuss because you feared disagreement or conflict?
27. How often do you take time off from ministry work to have personal time for yourself or your family?
28. Does your church support you taking time for yourself or your family?
29. Did your education adequately prepare you for ministry work and life? If no, please explain why.
30. Do you have someone in your life you consider to be a close friend other than your spouse?
31. Do you have a mentor to discuss ministry work with or to seek advice from?

32. What one thing could your church members change today that would encourage you and give you the freedom to serve Christ unhindered?

33. Please choose whether you agree or disagree with the following statements:

- a. I am considering leaving the pastorate permanently.
- b. I am adequately paid to support my family.
- c. I am respected by my church.
- d. I feel isolated.
- e. I receive support from people outside of my congregation.
- f. I regularly spend time with people that do not have a relationship with Christ yet.
- g. I feel close to God.
- h. My church supports me.
- i. My church listens to me.
- j. My church is reaching the community immediately surrounding it.
- k. I regularly share Christ outside of church activities.
- l. I consider myself a success.
- m. I am fulfilling the Great Commission.
- n. My church is fulfilling the Great Commission.
- o. My relationship with my church staff is positive.
- p. Being a pastor is not what I thought it would be, but I cannot get out now.
- q. If I were not a pastor, I would still attend my church.
- r. I am excited to serve Christ.
- s. I was called to be a pastor.
- t. Being a minister is just a job that provides for my family.

34. What is one thing about being a pastor that we have not asked that you would like to share?

Appendix B

Survey Permission Letter

[Insert Date]

[Recipient]

[Title]

[Company]

[Address 1]

[Address 2]

[Address 3]

Dear [Recipient]:

As a graduate student in the Pastoral Counseling department/School of Divinity at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a Doctor of Ministry degree. The title of my research project is Pastoral Pitfalls: Solutions to Navigating the Stresses of Twenty-First Century Ministry and the purpose of my research is to identify the physical, emotional, spiritual, and familial health of pastors.

I am writing to request your permission to contact members of your staff/church/organization to invite them to participate in my research study.

Participants will be asked to go to <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/9DHW3RW> and click on the link provided to complete the attached survey. Participants will be presented with informed consent information prior to participating. Taking part in this study is completely voluntary, and participants are welcome to discontinue participation at any time.

Thank you for considering my request. If you choose to grant permission, please respond by email to [REDACTED].

Sincerely,

Chris Moore
Doctoral Student
Liberty University

Appendix C

Consent

Title of the Project: Pastoral Pitfalls: Solutions to Navigating the Stresses of Twenty-First Century Ministry

Principal Investigator: Chris Moore, Doctoral Student, Liberty University, School of Divinity

Invitation to be Part of a Research Study

You are invited to participate in a research study. In order to participate, you must be 18 years of age or older and current or former Southern Baptist Pastors in Texas. Taking part in this research project is voluntary.

Please take time to read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to take part in this research project.

What is the study about and why is it being done?

The purpose of the study is to identify the physical, emotional, spiritual, and familial health of pastors.

What will happen if you take part in this study?

If you agree to be in this study, I would ask you to do the following things:

1. to complete a questionnaire online at <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/9DHW3RW> or you may request a physical copy of the questionnaire by emailing Chris Moore at [REDACTED]. Please include your mailing address and the researcher will mail a copy of the questionnaire to you along with a self-addressed stamped envelope to return with your responses. If you wish to remain anonymous, please do not include a return address on the envelope when returning the survey.
2. The survey should take approximately 17 minutes to complete the procedure listed.
3. Participation will be completely anonymous, and no personal, identifying information will be collected.

How could you or others benefit from this study?

Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from taking part in this study.

Benefits to society include a better understanding of the total health and wellness of Southern Baptist Pastors in Texas leading to useful information for churches to study in order to better support their pastors.

What risks might you experience from being in this study?

The risks involved in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life.

How will personal information be protected?

The records of this study will be kept private and all participants will be anonymous. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records

- Participant responses will be anonymous.
- Data will be stored on a password-locked computer and may be used in future presentations. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted

How will you be compensated for being part of the study?

Participants will not be compensated for participating in this study

Is study participation voluntary?

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time prior to submitting the survey.

What should you do if you decide to withdraw from the study?

If you choose to withdraw from the study, please exit the survey and close your internet browser. Your responses will not be recorded or included in the study.

Whom do you contact if you have questions or concerns about the study?

The researcher conducting this study is Chris Moore. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact him at [REDACTED]. You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor, Dr. Al Sarno, at [REDACTED].

Whom do you contact if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at irb@liberty.edu

Your Consent

Before agreeing to be part of the research, please be sure that you understand what the study is about. You can print a copy of the document for your records. If you have any questions about the study later, you can contact the researcher/study team using the information provided above.

Appendix D

Recruitment Template: Social Media

ATTENTION SOUTHERN BAPTIST PASTORS IN TEXAS: As a graduate student in the Pastoral Counseling department/School of Divinity at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a Doctor of Ministry degree, and I am writing to invite eligible participants to join my study. The purpose of this research is to identify the physical, emotional, spiritual, and familial health of pastors.

Participants must be 18 years of age or older and current or former Southern Baptist Pastors in Texas. Participants, if willing, will be asked to complete a questionnaire online at <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/9DHW3RW> or you may request a physical copy of the questionnaire by emailing Chris Moore at [REDACTED]. Please include your mailing address and the researcher will mail a copy of the questionnaire to you along with a self-addressed stamped envelope to return with your responses. If you wish to remain anonymous, please do not include a return address on the envelope when returning the survey. It should take approximately 17 minutes to complete the procedure listed. Participation will be completely anonymous, and no personal, identifying information will be collected.

A consent document is provided as the first page of the survey. The consent document contains additional information about my research. After you have read the consent form, please click the link to proceed to the survey. Doing so will indicate that you have read the consent information and would like to take part in the survey.

Recruitment Template: E-Mail

Dear [Recipient]:

As a graduate student in the Pastoral Counseling department/School of Divinity at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a Doctor of Ministry degree, and I am writing to invite eligible participants to join my study. The purpose of this research is to identify the physical, emotional, spiritual, and familial health of pastors.

Participants must be 18 years of age or older and current or former Southern Baptist Pastors in Texas. Participants, if willing, will be asked to complete a questionnaire online at <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/9DHW3RW> or you may request a physical copy of the questionnaire by emailing Chris Moore at [REDACTED]. Please include your mailing address and the researcher will mail a copy of the questionnaire to you along with a self-addressed stamped envelope to return with your responses. If you wish to remain anonymous, please do not include a return address on the envelope when returning the survey. It should take approximately 17 minutes to complete the procedure listed. Participation will be completely anonymous, and no personal, identifying information will be collected.

A consent document is provided as the first page of the survey. The consent document contains additional information about my research. After you have read the consent form, please click the link to proceed to the survey. Doing so will indicate that you have read the consent information and would like to take part in the survey.

Sincerely,

Chris Moore
Doctoral Student
[REDACTED]

Appendix E

IRB Approval

Date: 5-8-2022

IRB #: IRB-FY20-21-707
Title: Pastoral Pitfalls: Solutions to Navigating the Stresses of Twenty-First Century Ministry
Creation Date: 3-8-2021
End Date:
Status: Approved
Principal Investigator: Chris Moore
Review Board: Research Ethics Office
Sponsor:

Study History

Submission Type	Initial	Review Type	Exempt	Decision	Exempt
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Key Study Contacts

Member	Albert Sarno	Role	Co-Principal Investigator	Contact	[REDACTED]
Member	Chris Moore	Role	Principal Investigator	Contact	[REDACTED]
Member	Chris Moore	Role	Primary Contact	Contact	[REDACTED]

From: do-not-reply@cayuse.com
Sent: Wednesday, May 12, 2021 10:55 AM
To: [REDACTED]
Subject: IRB-FY20-21-707 - Initial: Initial - Exempt



May 12, 2021

Chris Moore

Albert Sarno

Re: IRB Exemption - IRB-FY20-21-707 Pastoral Pitfalls: Solutions to Navigating the Stresses of Twenty-First

Century Ministry

Dear Chris Moore, Albert Sarno:

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB) has reviewed your application in accordance with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP) and Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulations and finds your study to be exempt from further IRB review. This means you may begin your research with the data safeguarding methods mentioned in your approved application, and no further IRB oversight is required.

Your study falls under the following exemption category, which identifies specific situations in which human participants research is exempt from the policy set forth in 45 CFR 46:101(b):

Category 2.(i). Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording).

The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects cannot readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects.

Your stamped consent form(s) and final versions of your study documents can be found under the Attachments tab within the Submission Details section of your study on Cayuse IRB. Your stamped

consent form(s) should be copied and used to gain the consent of your research participants. If you plan to provide your consent information electronically, the contents of the attached consent document(s) should be made available without alteration.

Please note that this exemption only applies to your current research application, and any modifications to your protocol must be reported to the Liberty University IRB for verification of continued exemption status. You may report these changes by completing a modification submission through your Cayuse IRB account.

If you have any questions about this exemption or need assistance in determining whether possible modifications to your protocol would change your exemption status, please email us at irb@liberty.edu.

Sincerely,

G. Michele Baker, MA, CIP

Administrative Chair of Institutional Research

Research Ethics Office