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STRESS AND LONGEVITY IN PASTORAL MINISTRY:
A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

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STRESS AND LONGEVITY IN PASTORAL MINISTRY:
A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

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PREFACE

From the excellent library staff to the proficient baristas in Founder’s Café and everyone in between, I have come to realize that many have contributed to my advancement on this dissertation. I wish I could mention every one of them, but the limited space I have will not allow. However, I would be remiss not to recognize, at the very least, some of the most influential personalities that impacted my growth as a student and a pastor.

This dissertation was birthed in the coffee shop, Founders Café, on the campus of Southern Seminary. During one of the on-campus seminars, I met with Dr. Michael Wilder to discuss the direction of my research. He knew to ask just the right questions to help me think through and develop a project that not only would add to a growing body of literature but, at the same time, would be something about which I was personally passionate. Then again, that is what he has always been to me—throughout my tenure as a student at SBTS, he has gone from my academic guide and counsellor, to a friend, fellow pastor, and someone I consider to be one of the most influential mentors I have ever had in ministry. Without his guidance, encouragement, patience (lots and lots of patience), and expertise, I am sure I would not have made it this far.

Dr. Hal Pettegrew is another whom I greatly respect. His knowledge of and passion for biblical leadership and Christian education have had a profound impact on my life and ministry. However, his sincerity, compassion, and humility have impacted me most. He not only teaches invaluable truths and concepts well, but models them just as proficiently. Also, Dr. Shane Parker always provided constructive critiques enveloped in passionate encouragement and exhortation. His wise words of direction and invaluable insight was a great asset for the process of this project as well as the final results.

Beyond the seminary campus, I must recognize pastors and friends Dr. Ed Litton and Dr. Fred Wolfe, who assisted me in finding pastor participants for this research project. Their mentorship in my life has provided me great insight into the topic of this research.

I am thankful for my wife, Brandi, who puts up with my procrastination and endless supply of excuses and yet finds a way to encourage me anyway. Our three kids, Collin, Caleb, and Caroline, are the inspiration for me to “get it right.” I am also thankful to be a part of a great church, Mars Hill in Mobile/Fairhope, Alabama, which allowed me the time and energy to focus on this project. And last, my dad, who has never given up on me about anything, even though he had every right to so many times, and my mom, whom I lost and heaven gained while I was working through this dissertation. She was my greatest prayer warrior, and she has been missed tremendously. I wish she could have seen me finish.

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CHAPTER 1

RESEARCH CONCERN

The role of pastor is no doubt, a difficult occupation. Recent statistics from a study done by Lifeway Research point to the seriousness of the matter. Lifeway research states that many pastors often consider leaving the ministry “due to circumstances concerning their families, the demands of the position, or personal moral lapses.”¹ The study goes on to describe the themes developed from the research that cause the greatest stress for pastors: demands and expectations, need for fulfillment, and spiritual and emotional health. Burnout is also a real concern for those who serve in the role of pastor. Lance Witt, president of Replenish Ministries, mentions that one out of every three pastors will burn out within the first five years of ministry. Lifeway Research, which Witt contributed to, also shows that dealing with stress is a prevalent concern for pastors, which affects their ability to fulfill their duties, maintain healthy relationships, and maintain their own personal health.² Burnout is also a real concern as 8 out of 10 pastors feel like they are on call 24 hours a day, 54 percent feel the demands of ministry are overwhelming, 1 out of 5 feel that the church has placed unrealistic demands on them, and 1 out of 3 feel isolated. The LifeWay study reports,

Burnout is one of the more common factors that cause a pastor to leave the ministry. The stress of the ministry may lead a pastor to resign and discourage the pastor from seeking another church. The demands and expectations may be more than the pastor can handle.³

¹Lifeway Research, “Reasons for Attrition among Pastors,” accessed September 1, 2017, lifewayresearch.com/2015/09/01/despite-stresses-few-pastors-give-up-on-ministry, 10.

²Lance Witt, *Replenish* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011), 18-19.

³Lifeway Research, “Reasons for Attrition among Pastors,” 5.

Indeed, much of the precedent literature focuses on the problem of burnout from the perspective of experience, coping, treatment, or prevention. Thus, many of the suggested remedies focus on behavior modification.⁴ However, little to no focus within the existing research looks at this phenomenon from the perspective of a pastor who has been able to walk this minefield victoriously. However, there would seem to be a wealth of knowledge contained in their perceptions of stress and how they have dealt with it over their many years of ministry.

This study sought to explore the phenomenon of why some pastors are seemingly able to manage and benefit from factors that lead others to occupational burnout. The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore, with a sample of pastors, their perceptions of how they have managed stress and continued to spiritually mature over a long period while serving in the same ministry context. It is anticipated that the knowledge generated from this inquiry will afford new insight into the mitigation of harmful stressors and inform the professional and personal practices of younger pastors on proper responses to stressors in their respective ministry context. The concern then, was the perceptions of pastors who have seemingly assuaged the damaging results of stress and have, conversely, matured in ministry because of them.

Introduction to Research Problem

Burnout, caused by occupational stress, is a growing problem for pastors in the United States. Several researchers have concluded that the occupation of pastor is

⁴See Diane J. Chandler, "The Impact of Pastors' Spiritual Practices on Burnout," *Journal of Pastoral Care Counsel* 64, no. 2 (2010): 6.1; Wayne Cordeiro, *Leading on Empty: Refilling Your Tank and Renewing Your Passion* (Bloomington, MN: Bethany House, 2010); Nathan Davis, *Rebound from Burnout: Resilience Skills for Ministers* (Springfield, MO: CreateSpace Independent, 2012); J. J. Turner, *Preventing Ministry Burnout: The Causes, Consequences and Cures for Burnout* (McDonough, GA: CreateSpace Independent, 2012). Ruben Exantus, *Pastoral Burnout and Leadership Styles* (Bloomington, IN: Author House, 2012).

especially prone to burnout.⁵ These same researchers cite varying contributors to this condition, such as time demands, unrealistic expectations, isolation, and loneliness.⁶ Many other proposed causes will be addressed in the precedent literature presented in chapter 2 of this project.

A growing body of literature supports the premise of the detrimental effects of burnout in the life of a pastor. In overviewing the research data, it is clear that most pastors do not manage stress well. Roy Oswald notes that the elevated stress levels present in at-risk pastors are associated with a withdrawal response from significant relationships, oddly, at a time when it would seem those relationships would be beneficial.⁷ A pastor's spiritual health and well-being is highly influential, so when the spiritual life becomes unhealthy it usually becomes an issue with far-reaching impact. Unresolved stress is not only unhealthy for the pastor's professional and social life, it also has negative implications on the pastor's life physically, emotionally, and socially.

A longitudinal study being conducted at Duke University has been following 1,726 pastors since 2007. Researchers have already discovered that the obesity rate among pastors is 10 percent higher than the national average. Additionally, pastors are more likely to suffer from stress-induced illnesses such as arthritis, diabetes, high blood pressure,

⁵H. B. London and Neil B. Wiseman, *Pastors at Greater Risk* (Ventura, CA: Gospel Light, 2003), 20-21. See also George Barna, *Leaders on Leadership: Wisdom, Advice and Encouragement on the Art of Leading God's People* (Ventura, CA: Gospel Light, 1998); John A. Sanford, *Ministry and Burnout* (Louisville: John Knox, 1982); Louis J. Spencer, Bruce E. Winston, and Mihai C. Bocarnea, "Validating a Practitioner's Instrument Measuring the Level of Pastors' Risk of Termination/Exit from the Church: Discovering Vision Conflict and Compassion Fatigue as Key Factors," *Pastoral Psychology* 61 (2012): 85-98.

⁶Michael Jenkins and Keith Wulff, "Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary's Clergy Burnout Survey," *Congregations* 5 (2002), accessed July 17, 2013, <http://oldsite.alban.org/uploadedFiles/Alban/Conversation/pdf/AustinGrad2-app.pdf>. See also Daniel Spaite, *Time Bomb in the Church* (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill, 1999).

⁷Roy Oswald, *How to Build a Support System for Your Ministry* (Herndon, VA: Alban Institute, 1995), 33.

and depression than most Americans.⁸ When pastors burnout, there is always fallout. The very nature of their iconic roles within the church community connect their lives in immeasurable ways to others in the church, not to mention within the communities in which the church resides. Such inauspicious effects of stress, along with their accompanying symptoms of burnout and subsequent damage, can create destructive reverberations that impact the associated relationships of the pastor and ultimately affects the kingdom of God unpropitiously.⁹

Nevertheless, some pastors have effectively managed these factors, mitigating their negative impact. When considering this phenomenon, two primary questions arise: “How do they deal with these prevalent stressors?” and “How do they benefit spiritually in overcoming and managing stress effectively?”

While a plethora of studies have focused on the common factors influencing burnout and the negative impact of unresolved stress, far less attention has been given to the issue from the obverse position.¹⁰ However, not just the obverse position but

⁸Rae Jean Proeschold-Bell and Sara LeGrand, “Physical Health Functioning among United Methodist Clergy,” *Journal of Religious Health* 51 (2012): 734-42.

⁹Stephen Kisslinger, “Burnout in Presbyterian Clergy of Southwestern Pennsylvania” (Ph.D. diss., Indiana University of Pennsylvania, 2007). See also London and Wiseman, *Pastors at Greater Risk*.

¹⁰For studies related to the factors and impacts of occupational stress and burnout, see Diane J. Chandler, “Pastoral Burnout and the Impact of Personal Spiritual Renewal, Rest-Taking, and Support System Practices,” *Pastoral Psychology* 58 (2009): 273-87; Will Evers, “Burnout among Dutch Reformed Pastors,” *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 31 (2003): 329-38; Sabine Sonnentag, “Staying Well and Engaged When Demands Are High,” *Journal of Applied Psychology* 95 (2010): 965-76; Sam Sterland, “Ministry Orientation and Ministry Outcomes: Evaluation of a New Multidimensional Model of Clergy Burnout and Job Satisfaction,” *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology* 83 (2010): 167-88; Peter Stebbins, “Supportive Leadership: Improving Organizational Health and Preventing Burnout in Pastoral Care Managers and Staff,” *Australian Journal of Rehabilitation Counseling* 16 (2010): 99-118; Andrew Miles and Rae Jean Proeschold-Bell, “Overcoming the Challenges of Pastoral Work? Peer Support Groups and Psychological Distress among United Methodist Church Clergy,” *Sociology of Religion* 74, no. 2 (2013): 199-226; Raymond Beebe, “Predicting Burnout, Conflict Management Style, and Turnover among Clergy,” *Journal of Career Assessment* 15 (2007): 257-75; William Grosch and David Olsen, “Clergy Burnout: An Integrative Approach,” *Journal of Clinical Psychology* 56 (2000): 619-32; Andrew Weaver and Kevin Flannelly, “Mental Health Issues among Clergy and Other Religious Professionals: A Review of Research,” *Journal of Pastoral Care & Counseling* 56 (2002): 393-403.

specifically, pastors who have thrived in their ministry in one location, therefore demonstrating longevity and growth in ministry. In a telephone interview, Donald Guthrie, one of the authors of *Resilient Ministry*, stated that a study focused solely on pastors who have been in one location for fifteen years or longer would be fascinating and he would be curious to see how many of the factors in their study (detailed in *Resilient Ministry*) would be prevalent in those men.¹¹ Therefore, this study seeks to discover why some pastors are able to overcome adverse and detrimental factors of stress and burnout and continue to grow in the face of them.

The Primary Concern

There are pastors who have demonstrated growth and longevity in a sustained ministry context. Hence, they have seemingly developed and matured through difficult experiences that have left many of their colleagues defeated. The void in the precedent literature was the lack of observation and self-perception of pastors who have experienced this phenomenon. There have been no empirical studies conducted from a qualitative research perspective that allow these pastors to freely talk about their own perceptions of things such as how they have developed perseverance, how they have grown spiritually and professionally, and how they have approached their occupational stressors.

Research Purpose

The purpose of this phenomenological qualitative study was to describe the experiences of twenty pastors who have encountered the phenomenon of longevity despite occupational and personal stressors, in order to understand how they have been able to achieve success over an extended period of time in a constant ministry context.

¹¹Bob Burns, Tasha D. Chapman, and Donald C. Guthrie, *Resilient Ministry: What Pastors Told Us about Surviving and Thriving* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2013). Donald Guthrie provided me with insight and feedback from his experience concerning this project. Donald Guthrie, telephone interview with author, October 15, 2015. The themes of *Resilient Ministry* are discussed in chap. 2.

This research used qualitative methods to examine the meanings, or “essence,” of this phenomenon.

Delimitations

The research was delimited to pastors who have served in one church within one locale for at least fifteen years. During the pastor’s tenure, the church must have undergone some definable aspects of growth. This growth was verified in several ways such as, but not limited to, numerical growth (attendance, baptism), ministry growth (development of a school, church planting, or building program/relocation/second campus), or ministry development (sending out missionaries or developing and sending of pastors from within the congregation). The process of categorizing and validating “growth” is detailed in chapter 3 of this project.

This delimitation does not suggest that pastors who do not remain in one church for an extended period of time are somehow not “successful,” nor does it suggest that these same pastors have succumbed to the effects of stress in ministry. Rather, this delimitation acts to establish consistency within the research and to abate variances within the population sample.

Research Question

Through a better understanding of a long-tenured pastor’s approach to handling personal and professional factors of stress, and of their perceptions of both the spiritual and professional maturation process, a more informed approach to spiritual and professional development is understood and applied by new or younger pastors, minimizing the more drastic impact that other pastors have experienced. In an effort to illuminate the research problem, the following research questions were addressed as they relate to the central question: *Central Question*: How do tenured, successful pastors perceive their experiences in managing the common factors of occupational stress and burnout?

1. What statements describe their experiences?
2. What themes emerge from these experiences?
3. What are the observable common patterns, if any, in the life of these pastors that exhibit stages of growth, modification, and/or adaptation in their experiences?
4. What is the overall essence of their experiences?

Terminology

For the purpose of this study the following definitions are provided:

Burnout. Maslach, Jackson, and Leiter define *burnout* as a “syndrome of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment that can occur among individuals who do people work of some kind.”¹² For the purposes of this project this definition suffices, and it is understood that *burnout* is the result of mismanaged stress, particularly occupational stress.

Essence. *Essence* is the goal of phenomenological study. It describes the core experiences of the participants. *Essences* are simply aspects or qualities of objects “as intended.” The phenomenologist believes that *essences* do not lurk somehow behind or within objects, but are the objects grasped in its intentional character, grasped as being this or that.¹³ Husserl sees *essence* as commonplace. He surmises that everyone sees *essences* and that they are seen continuously. People operate with them in their thinking and also make judgments about them. He concludes, “It is only from their theoretical ‘standpoint’ that people interpret them away.”¹⁴

Longevity. For the purposes of this study, *longevity* is understood from a narrow perspective. This term encompasses the idea of the successful ministry of a pastor

¹²Christina Maslach, Susan Jackson, and Michael Leiter, *The Maslach Burnout Inventory Manual*, 3rd ed. (Palo Alto, CA: Consulting Psychologists, 1996), 4.

¹³Maurice Natanson, *Edmund Husserl: Philosopher of Infinite Tasks* (Evanston, IL: North Western University Press 1973), 13-14.

¹⁴Edmund Husserl, *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy*, trans. Fred Kersten (London: Kluwer, 1998), 41.

who has remained in one church over a sustained period of time.

Ministry maturation. This term can be defined in many ways and from several perspectives. However, for the purposes of this project, this term is used in relation to the perceived growth a pastor experiences from overcoming and learning from the difficult challenges and/or stressors of ministry. Thus, *ministry maturation* refers to the positive outcome of dealing with stress and avoiding burnout.

Occupational stress. Beehr and Newman define *occupational stress* as “a condition arising from the interaction of people and their jobs and characterized by changes within people that force them to deviate from their normal functioning.”¹⁵ Therefore, it is understood for the purposes of this study that *occupational stress* is any discomfort felt and perceived at a personal level and triggered by instances, events, or situations too intense and frequent in nature so as to exceed a person’s coping capabilities and resources to handle them adequately.¹⁶

Procedural Overview

After the approval of the Ethics Committee, the experiences and perceptions of twenty purposively selected pastors were studied.¹⁷ The research procedure followed a qualitative phenomenological method of study.

Pre-Project

Because the study sought to understand the phenomenon of pastors who are able to mitigate the harmful effects of stress prevalent in ministry contexts, a criteria was

¹⁵Terry Beehr and John Newman, “Job Stress, Employee Health and Organizational Effectiveness: A Fact Analysis Model and Literature Reviews,” *Personal Psychology* 31 (1978): 665.

¹⁶Monica Malta, “Stress at Work: A Concept in Stress Human Factors,” *Limited Business Psychology* 33 (2004): 125-33.

¹⁷Matthew Miles and A. Michael Huberman, *Qualitative Data Analysis* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1994). The number of twenty pastors was used to assure a “well-saturated” theory. See also John Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing among Five Traditions* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2007), 126; Kathy Charmaz, *Constructing Grounded Theory* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2006).

developed that served to identify potential participants. Qualifying participants, purposefully selected, had served in one ministry location for at least fifteen years. Additionally, they were able to substantiate, through means of measurable criteria, a healthy pattern during their tenure in the respective ministry context despite obstacles of occupational and personal stress. This criteria and the process of selection is further explained in chapter 3 of this work.

Data Collection

The data for this qualitative research project was collected through the means of in-depth personal interviews. All interviews were conducted face to face. The interview was loosely structured, beginning with open-ended questions that allowed the participants to speak freely about their self-perceptions related to the phenomenon. The interviews were digitally recorded and subsequently transcribed.

A journal was maintained throughout the project detailing processes, background information, and any other relevant details. The journal was used in the process of analysis in developing “rich, thick descriptions.”¹⁸

Data Analysis

After the data was collected, the process of organizing the data for analysis began the next phase of the project. First, a close “line-by-line” analysis of the transcripts was conducted to identify and become familiar with the experiential claims, concerns, and understandings of each of the participants.¹⁹ After becoming familiar with the data, the focus of the project transitioned to identifying the major themes or emergent patterns. NVivo content analysis software was used to analyze the content of the interview for

¹⁸Matthew Miles and A. Michael Huberman, *Qualitative Data Analysis* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1994) 191, 180-81.

¹⁹Michael Larkin, Simon Watts, and Elizabeth Clifton, “Giving Voice and Making Sense in Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis,” *Qualitative Research in Psychology* 3 (2006): 102-20.

similarities in themes and/or patterns. The content was then coded by a combination of predetermined codes while also allowing for the development of unique, emerging codes.²⁰ Finally, interpretations were made from the major themes and descriptions that emerged from the data.

Reliability Measures

This project sought to approach a subject matter that is reflective and personal on the part of both the researcher and the participants. Therefore, the analysis reflects the quintessence of the research. Smith, Flowers, and Larkin write, “Analysis is an interactive process of fluid description and engagement with the transcript. It involves flexible thinking, processes of reduction, expansion, revision, creativity and expansion.”²¹ For such a project, reliability and validity measure become crucial to arrive at viable conclusions. In an effort to achieve an acceptable degree of reliability, this project utilized an assemblage of supervision, collaboration, and audit to help test and develop the coherence and plausibility of the interpretations. Specifically, four methods were employed.²²

First, the research used member-checking procedures to assure accuracy. Participants were solicited to provide input on the credibility of the project findings and interpretations.²³

Second, a rich, thick description conveyed the findings. The aforementioned research journal served as a dossier of setting, mood, tone, mannerisms, emotions, body

²⁰Robert C. Bogdan and Sari K. Biklen, *Qualitative Research for Education: An Introduction to Theory and Methods* (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1992), 166-72.

²¹Jonathan Smith, Paul Flowers, and Michael Larkin, *Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2012), 61.

²²Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design*, 209, suggests that at least two measures should be employed to assure reliability. For the purposes of this project, four were employed.

²³Yvonna Lincoln and Egan Guba, *Naturalistic Inquiry* (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage, 1985), 314.

language, and/or anything that would assist the reader in getting a fuller picture of how the interviews developed.²⁴

Third, an expert panel offered critique on the interview protocol and analysis of the interview data. This panel consisted of three individuals who retain a research or professional doctorate and offered expertise in the direction of this project: Burke Johnson, Ph.D., Alison Rudd Ed.D., and Ed Litton, D.Min.

Finally, an external audit of the entire project was conducted by an independent firm. This audit examined both the process and the product of the project.

Pilot Interviews

In a further attempt to assure validity, two pilot interviews were conducted after the formation of the interview protocol and schedule. The two interviews were not included in the findings of the overall research. The purpose of the pilot interviews was to demonstrate the availability of participants and the practicality of the interview protocol.²⁵

Research Assumptions

Based on personal experience and background as a lead pastor in a local church context, evidence from the precedent literature, and statistical data, five primary assumptions were made regarding this study.

First, the issue of professional burnout is prominent among senior pastors. This assumption is based on the evidence derived from precedent literature and statistical support. Second, a high percentage of pastors feel ill-equipped to handle the rigors of ministry. This assumption is guided by pastors who commonly admit being overwhelmed by professional stress in ministry. Third, successful pastors who have served in one

²⁴David Erlandson et al., *Doing Naturalistic Inquiry: A Guide to Methods* (Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 1993). See also Lincoln and Guba, *Naturalistic Inquiry*; and Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design*.

²⁵Lawrence Locke, Waneen Spirduso, and Stephen Silverman, *Proposals That Work* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2000), 171.

location over a long period of time have experienced stress factors that lead to burnout to a similar degree as those who succumbed to those factors. This assumption is based on the premise that although church cultures vary based on denomination, culture, and expectation, the situations and factors that cause stress (e.g., relationships, ministry demands, time management) are prevalent in every ministry context. A fourth assumption is that participants reflected candidly and accurately about their past experiences. This assumption is based on personal experience as a pastor and the desire to provide beneficial data that potentially helps other pastors experience meaningful growth in ministry. Fifth, and finally, it is assumed that a maturation process takes place in the ministry context of these participating pastors resulting from, at least in part, their adaptability and developed response mechanisms to stress factors. This assumption is premised on the notion that there is a practical explanation for their continued growth and success in their respective ministry context over an extended period of time.

Rationale and Significance

The rationale for this study was derived from a desire to uncover ways to equip pastors to recognize and adapt to factors of occupational stress that provide for the opportunity of a long and fulfilled ministry experience. These pastors may be currently frustrated, stalled at some stage of the spiritual or professional development, or contemplating abandoning their ministry calling altogether.

Increased understanding of the developmental process of these tenured pastors and their development of the skills needed to adapt to and learn from stressors within ministry may not only reduce the number of pastors that experience burnout, but it may also increase the potential for greater numbers of pastors to experience successful and fulfilled ministry work. The development of these skills in younger pastors may not only provide for a more rewarding professional and personal experience, but could potentially serve to benefit their families and the church culture in which they serve.

In the next chapter, the precedent literature presented will demonstrate the

growing concern of the effects that stress and burnout can have on pastors. In three waves of research over the past 60 years, the problem and contributors of occupational stress are highlighted in relation to the role of pastor. This progression in the literature shows that, in the first wave, the problem of stress is identified, the terminology of “burnout” is defined, and theories on the progression of the effects of stress leading to burnout are proposed and debated. Also during this phase, instrumentation is developed for use in the research of stress and burnout. In the second wave of literature, the focus grows to identifying and understanding coping mechanisms that are developed to endure or deal with stress, and research begins to consider their effectiveness. In the last wave of literature, the role of pastor becomes prominent as a plethora of studies conducted include qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods, as well as longitudinal studies. The significant findings in this literature will now be considered.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

When pastors' lives become askew and their spiritual growth stagnates, the effects can be staggering as stress can affect a pastor's ability to fulfill their duties, their ability to maintain healthy relationships, and their overall personal health.¹ Recent statistics claim that 8 of 10 pastors feel like they are on call 24 hours a day, 54 percent feel the demands of ministry are overwhelming, 1 out of 5 feel that the church has placed unrealistic demands on them, and 1 out of 3 feel isolated.² These statistics are overwhelming and speak to the growing responsibility that many pastors have to shoulder. What often goes undocumented is the aftermath of the inevitable consequences that come when pastors eventually spiral out of control.

In a general sense, the majority of the statistics that demonstrate the prominence of the burnout epidemic among pastors can be contributed to their unique occupation. The expectations placed on pastors, by parishioners, and the culture at large, are increasing, due, in part, to the burgeoning demands of modern-day ministry, advancements in and access to technology, as well as the moral breakdown of the culture. With growing responsibilities and the burgeoning demand for pastors to keep up with the developing bodies of information, technology, and social media, the alarming statistics seem somewhat realistic and believable.

The purpose of this study is to gain a clear understanding of "burnout," the stress factors that cause it, and how it may inform and/or relate to the profession of the

¹Lance Witt, *Replenish* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011), 18-19.

²LifeWay Research, "Reasons for Attrition among Pastors," accessed on September 1, 2017, lifewayresearch.com/2015/09/01/despite-stresses-few-pastors-give-up-on-ministry, 10.

pastorate. In this effort, the following review examines the precedent literature on the research and development progression of this ongoing discourse.

This chapter surveys the original studies on personal and occupational stress by following the empirical discourse that eventually developed into the concept of burnout. First, the research on occupational stress factors and coping measures is explored. Next, the phenomenon of “burnout” is surveyed, of which, occupational stress is a precursor. Finally, the occupation of the pastorate is considered with its multifaceted responsibilities and expectations. These responsibilities and expectations are then considered and examined in light of the larger research of occupational stress and burnout by categorizing the pursuant factors of stress within several key categories/factors of a pastor’s reality: role stress, job satisfaction, and the impact of termination, holistic health, and self-compassion.

The Problem

Burnout has often been attributed to occupational stress and has become a notable and widespread problem within the occupation of the pastorate.³ Several

³Although it is not the focus of this project, many multi-cultural studies conducted related to this problem confirm that the problem transcends any one culture, denomination, or religion. The following publications contain analyses of occupational stress and/or burnout studies of pastors serving in countries found in Europe, Africa, Asia, Australia, and South America: Diane Chandler, “Pastoral Burnout and the Impact of Personal Spiritual Renewal, Rest-Taking, and Support System Practices,” *Pastoral Psychology* 58 (2009): 273-87; Will Evers, “Burnout among Dutch Reformed Pastors,” *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 31 (2003): 329-38; Sabine Sonnentag, “Staying Well and Engaged When Demands Are High,” *Journal of Applied Psychology* 95 (2010): 965-76; Maureen H. Miner, Martin Dowson, and Sam Sterland, “Ministry Orientation and Ministry Outcomes: Evaluation of a New Multidimensional Model of Clergy Burnout and Job Satisfaction,” *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology* 83, no. 1 (2010): 167-88; Peter Stebbins, “Supportive Leadership: Improving Organizational Health and Preventing Burnout in Pastoral Care Managers and Staff,” *Australian Journal of Rehabilitation Counseling* 16 (2010): 99-118; Andrew Miles and Rae Jean Proeschold-Bell, “Overcoming the Challenges of Pastoral Work? Peer Support Groups and Psychological Distress among United Methodist Church Clergy,” *Sociology of Religion* 74, no. 2 (2013): 199-226; Raymond Beebe, “Predicting Burnout, Conflict Management Style, and Turnover among Clergy,” *Journal of Career Assessment* 15 (2007): 257-75; William Grosch and David Olsen, “Clergy Burnout: An Integrative Approach,” *Journal of Clinical Psychology* 56 (2000): 619-32; Andrew Weaver and Kevin Flannelly, “Mental Health Issues among Clergy and Other Religious Professionals: A Review of Research,” *Journal of Pastoral Care & Counseling* 56 (2002): 393-403; Wilmar B. Schaufeli and Arnold B. Bakker, “Job Demands, Job Resources, and Their Relationship with Burnout and Engagement: A Multi-Sample Study,” *Journal of Organizational Behavior* 25, no. 3 (2004): 293-315; Cary L. Cooper, Philip

researchers have concluded that the pastoral occupation is especially prone to burnout.⁴ Some cite contributing factors to this condition, such as time demands, unrealistic expectations, isolation, and loneliness.⁵ This list is not exhaustive, as other various causes/factors have been proposed. Also, researchers have never determined any specific factor present in every case of burnout. The debate surrounding the specific contributing factors of burnout in ministry is ongoing. However, the varied research literature clearly shows the detrimental effects of a pastor with an imbalanced life.

In three waves of research over the past sixty plus years, the problem and contributors of occupational stress have been highlighted in relation to the role of pastor. This progression in the literature shows that in the first wave (1950s to 2000), the problem of stress was identified, the terminology of “burnout” was defined, and theories on the progression of the effects of stress leading to burnout were proposed and debated. Also during this phase, instrumentation was developed for use in the research of stress and burnout. In the second wave of literature (2001-2010), the focus grew to identify and understand coping mechanisms that are developed to endure or deal with stress, and the research began to consider the effectiveness of those mechanisms. In the last wave of literature (2011-present), the role of pastor has become prominent as a plethora of studies

Dewey, and Michael P. O’Driscoll, *Organizational Stress: A Review and Critique of Theory, Research, and Applications* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2001); Cary L. Cooper and Philip Dewey, *Stress: A Brief History* (Berkeley, CA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2004); Jane Cranwell-Ward and Alyssa Abbey, *Organizational Stress* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005); Michael Kompier and Cary L. Cooper, *Preventing Stress, Improving Productivity: European Case Studies in the Workplace* (Hove, UK: Psychology Press, 1999).

⁴See George Barna, *Leaders on Leadership: Wisdom, Advice and Encouragement on the Art of Leading God’s People* (Ventura, CA: Gospel Light, 1998), 320; H. B. London and Neil B. Wiseman, *Pastors at Greater Risk* (Ventura, CA: Gospel Light, 2003), 336; John A. Sanford, *Ministry and Burnout* (Louisville: John Knox, 1982), 128.

⁵Michael Jenkins and Keith Wulff, “Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary’s Clergy Burnout Survey,” *Congregations* (May 2002), accessed July 17, 2013, <http://oldsite.alban.org/uploadedFiles/Alban/Conversation/pdf/AustinGrad2-app.pdf>; Daniel Spaite, *Time Bomb in the Church* (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill, 1999), 200.

are conducted that include qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods, as well as longitudinal studies.

In summarizing the developments of this phenomenon, this chapter presents a brief overview of the historical development of the burnout phenomenon, as well as considers three prominent aspects of a pastor's life (relationships, responsibilities, and capacity) that create vulnerability and make him susceptible to the phenomenon of "burnout."

From Stress to Burnout

The concept of *burnout* arose in the 1970s when Freudenberger used the term to describe feelings of being drained and exhausted, loss of commitment and motivation, and increasingly cynical attitudes that he and others experienced in working with clients at an alternative health care center.⁶ At the same time, Maslach, whose name is most closely connected with burnout, was exploring emotional stress in a broad range of human services workers. Hence, the theoretical and empirical study of burnout grew out of work with caring, helping, and healing professionals whose work depends upon interpersonal interactions. Typically, these individuals have strong intrinsic motivation to help others and their professional (and perhaps personal) identity may hinge on their sense of accomplishment. Paradoxically, the most idealistic individuals may be the most vulnerable to disillusionment.

Religious clergy rank among the most susceptible groups to burnout; indeed, a substantial body of literature attests to an excessively high prevalence of pastoral burnout.⁷ Muse, Love, and Christensen, authors of a unique study of intensive outpatient

⁶Christina Maslach, Wilmar B. Schaufeli, and Michael P. Leiter, "Job Burnout," *Annual Review of Psychology* 52, no. 1 (2001): 397.

⁷See Laura K. Barnard and John F. Curry, "The Relationship of Clergy Burnout to Self-Compassion and Other Personality Dimensions," *Pastoral Psychology* 61, no. 2 (2012): 149-63; Diane J. Chandler, "The Impact of Pastors' Spiritual Practices on Burnout," *Journal of Pastoral Care & Counseling* 64, no. 2 (2010): 1-9; Chandler, "Pastoral Burnout," 273-87; Benjamin R. Doolittle, "The Impact of

therapy for clergy who experience burnout, find it fortunate that the problem of clergy stress and burnout has been gaining increasing research attention.⁸

A convergence of several factors, including growing secularization, decreasing interest in ministry, declining church memberships, and increasing financial constraints, adds to the pressures of ministry, often forcing clergy to take on more responsibilities with fewer external resources and supports.⁹ However, the problem of pastoral burnout is not a novel phenomenon. Three decades ago, Harbaugh and Rogers observed high levels of stress in seminarians, which persisted into the first few years of their ministry.¹⁰ They implicated the failure of theological seminaries to recognize the incidence of high levels

Behaviors upon Burnout among Parish-Based Clergy,” *Journal of Religion and Health* 49, no. 1 (2010): 88-95; Leslie J. Francis, Mandy Robbins, and Keith Wulff, “Are Clergy Serving Yoked Congregations More Vulnerable to Burnout? A Study among Clergy Serving in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.),” *Stress Health* 29, no. 2 (April 2013): 113-16; Leslie J. Francis, Mandy Robbins, and Keith Wulff, “Assessing the Effectiveness of Support Strategies in Reducing Professional Burnout among Clergy Serving in the Presbyterian Church (USA),” *Practical Theology* 6 (2013): 319-31; Leslie J. Francis et al., “Work-Related Psychological Health among Clergy Serving in the Presbyterian Church (USA): Testing the Idea of Balanced Affect,” *Review of Religious Research* 53, no. 1 (2011): 9-22; Grosch and Olsen, “Clergy Burnout,” 619-32; Elizabeth Ann Jackson-Jordan, “Clergy Burnout and Resilience: A Review of the Literature,” *Journal of Pastoral Care & Counseling* 67, no. 1 (2013): 1-5; Maureen H. Miner, “Burnout in the First Year of Ministry: Personality and Belief Style as Important Predictors,” *Mental Health, Religion & Culture* 10, no. 1 (2007): 17-29; Miner, Dowson, and Sterland, “Ministry Orientation and Ministry Outcomes,” 167-88; Philip D. Parker and Andrew J. Martin, “Clergy Motivation and Occupational Well-Being: Exploring a Quadripolar Model and Its Role in Predicting Burnout and Engagement,” *Journal of Religious Health* 50 (2011): 656-74; Kelvin Randall, “Clergy Burnout: Two Different Measures,” *Pastoral Psychology* 62 (2013): 333-41; Kelvin Randall, “Examining Thoughts about Leaving the Ministry among Anglican Clergy in England and Wales: Demographic, Churchmanship, Personality and Work-Related Psychological Health Factors,” *Practical Theology* 6 (2013): 178-89.

⁸Stephen Muse, Milton Love, and Kyle Christensen, “Intensive Outpatient Therapy for Clergy Burnout: How Much Difference Can a Week Make,” *Journal of Religion and Health* 55, no. 1 (2016): 147-58.

⁹Francis, Robbins, and Wulff, “Are Clergy Serving Yoked Congregations More Vulnerable?,” 113-16.

¹⁰Gary Harbaugh and Even Rogers, “Pastoral Burnout: A View from the Seminary,” *The Journal of Pastoral Care* 38, no. 2 (1984): 99-106. In this study, 144 seminary students participated; 55 percent reported sleep disruption due to stress; the number of uninterrupted meals per week was 12; and when asked about the six months prior to their participation in the study, students reported 238 incidents of immobilizing depression and 268 incidents of acute anxiety. More than half the students believed they had experienced a stress-related illness, and almost one third had been prescribed anxiety or depression medication at least once in the last six months.

of stress and intervene accordingly for those most affected. In particular, they advocated a holistic model of health and well-being with emphasis on self-care.

Hans Selye, the pioneer of stress research, proposed a code of behavior he called *altruistic egoism* as the best approach to managing stress.¹¹ At the heart of altruistic egoism is recognition that taking care of one's needs allows the person to devote energy to activities that give life meaning and purpose and to work for the good of self and others. In essence, Selye, who was acutely aware of the detrimental effects of stress on the human organism, was an early advocate of self-compassion and self-care.

It is a cliché in the caring professions that these dedicated individuals who give so much to others often neglect themselves. In outlining the five major themes of resilient ministry, Burns, Chapman, and Guthrie note that the second theme, self-care, may seem surprising because it might be construed as selfishness.¹² However, it is precisely this way of thinking that predisposes caring professionals to burnout, which undermines their ability to carry out their chosen vocation. Tan and Castillo approach self-care from a biblical perspective, noting that Jesus routinely devoted time to solitude and prayer.¹³ Spiritual practices, such as Bible study, meditation, and prayer, facilitate physical and psychological renewal as well as spiritual renewal and growth. A holistic

¹¹Hans Selye, "Forty Years of Stress Research: Principal Remaining Problems and Misconceptions," *Canadian Medical Association Journal* 115, no. 1 (1976): 53.

¹²Bob Burns, Tasha D. Chapman, and Donald C. Guthrie, *Resilient Ministry: What Pastors Told Us about Surviving and Thriving* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2013). In their research, the authors interviewed a select group of pastors over a period of seven years in what they called the "Pastors Summit." From their research, they developed five things that they found common in pastors who experienced resilient ministry: spiritual formation, self-care, emotional and cultural intelligence, marriage and family, and leadership and management. One of the goals of this project is to see how many of these themes are consistent among the twenty pastors interviewed who have experienced longevity in ministry.

¹³Siang-Yang Tan and Melissa Castillo, "Self-Care and Beyond: A Brief Literature Review from a Christian Perspective," *Journal of Psychology and Christianity* 33, no. 1 (2014): 3.

model of health for religious clergy encompasses physical, psychological, and spiritual health, and is influenced by stress, self-care, and coping.¹⁴

Religious clergy are distinguished from other human service professionals by a calling to serve God and a sense that through their ministry they are doing God's work.¹⁵

As described by Barnard and Curry,

Many clergy enter the ministry because they believe that they have been called to use their gifts to lead churches, relying on the grace of God to cover their inadequacies. They aim for no less than leading their congregations to compassionate mission, committed evangelism, and holy living.¹⁶

The statement that "they aim for no less" may be illustrative in understanding the predisposition of clergy to burnout. Excessively high ideals, unrealistic expectations of what they can accomplish, and a strong desire to please parishioners can lead to disillusionment and burnout in church pastors. This effect is further complicated by parishioners whose own expectations mirror such impossibly high ideals. Burnout is particularly high among pastors who serve a "traumatic church," marked by high levels of stress and conflict.¹⁷

Despite having felt a call to serve God, increasing numbers of clergy are leaving the ministry.¹⁸ In the organizational literature, burnout has been associated with

¹⁴Rae Jean Proeschold-Bell et al., "A Theoretical Model of the Holistic Health of United Methodist Clergy," *Journal of Religion and Health* 50, no. 3 (2011): 700.

¹⁵See Burns, Chapman, and Guthrie, *Resilient Ministry*, 63; John M. Faucett, Robert F. Corwyn, and Tom H. Poling, "Clergy Role Stress: Interactive Effects of Role Ambiguity and Role Conflict on Intrinsic Job Satisfaction," *Pastoral Psychology* 62, no. 3 (2012): 291-304; Shaun Joynt and Yolanda Dreyer, "Exodus of Clergy: A Practical Theological Grounded Theory Exploration of Hatfield Training Centre Trained Pastors," *HTS Theological Studies* 69, no. 1 (2013): 1-9; Rae Proeschold-Bell et al., "Closeness to God among Those Doing God's Work: A Spiritual Well-Being Measure for Clergy," *Journal of Religious Health* 53 (2014): 878-94.

¹⁶Barnard and Curry, "The Relationship of Clergy Burnout," 149.

¹⁷Doolittle, "The Impact of Behaviors," 93.

¹⁸J. Louis Spencer, Bruce E. Winston, and Mihai C. Bocarnea, "Predicting the Level of Pastors at Risk of Termination/Exit from the Church," *Pastoral Psychology* 61, no. 1 (2012): 85.

turnover intentions.¹⁹ For those who remain on the job, burnout undermines job performance and productivity and diminishes job satisfaction and commitment.²⁰ Emotional exhaustion and decreased satisfaction are prominent among clergy who have considered leaving the ministry.²¹ Paradoxically, it is not unusual for high levels of stress to coexist with high levels of satisfaction among clergy.²² However, that does not necessarily exclude the negative impact of stress and burnout on personal and professional well-being.

As the precedent literature is delineated, a gap in the literature becomes apparent. A plethora of studies look at the phenomenon of burnout, but none look at the phenomenon from the specific perspective of longevity. Specifically, if one were to look only at pastors that have demonstrated a resilience in ministry despite the presence of occupational stress that has become the demise of so many other pastors, what connections or similarities would be found? What practices or perspectives could be connected to dealing effectively with stress? There should be a treasure trove of insight waiting to be discovered within the perceptions of these men. With this in mind, the following sections further the discussion by examining the conceptual and empirical underpinnings of stress and coping, burnout, and engagement.

Stress and Coping

The recognition of occupational stress and its impact on the individual have had a growing interest in the research field as researchers have sought to understand exactly what positive and negative impacts occupational stress has on an individual, as

¹⁹Schaufeli and Bakker, "Job Demands," 293.

²⁰Maslach, Schaufeli, and Leiter, "Job Burnout," 397.

²¹Randall, "Examining Thoughts," 178-89.

²²Doolittle, "The Impact of Behaviors," 88.

well as identifying the triggers. For the purposes of this research, the interest lies in understanding how the stress of ministry impacts the pastor, both physiologically and spiritually. In this section, stress response and coping mechanisms are highlighted.

In the 1930s, Walter Cannon became the first person to document the fight-or-flight mechanism, now known as the stress response.²³ Cannon detailed the physiological processes that occur in response to stress, including significant increases in sympathetic nervous system and central nervous system activity, along with changes in respiratory and cardiovascular activity. Two decades after Cannon published his initial research, Hans Selye examined the stress response in depth, observing that unrelenting exposure to stress could overwhelm the individual's capacity to adapt, with detrimental consequences. Selye defined stress as "the nonspecific response of the body to any demand."²⁴ Selye's meaning of the term *nonspecific* is that the response has certain characteristics regardless of the nature of the cause or stressor.²⁵ A stressor was defined in similarly broad terms as "an agent that produces stress at any time."²⁶ Contemporary formulations of stress recognize a degree of specificity in the stress response.²⁷ Nevertheless, it was Selye's work that inspired the large and growing body of empirical research demonstrating the detrimental effects of prolonged stress on physical and psychological health.

At roughly the same time that Freudenberg coined the term burnout in the 1970s, the emphasis in scholarly literature shifted from stress per se to coping as the

²³Gregg D. Jacobs, "The Physiology of Mind-Body Interactions: The Stress Response and the Relaxation Response," *The Journal of Alternative & Complementary Medicine* 7, no. 1 (2001): 83.

²⁴Selye, "Forty Years of Stress Research," 53.

²⁵David S. Goldstein and Irwin J. Kopin, "Evolution of Concepts of Stress," *Stress* 10, no. 2 (2007): 109.

²⁶Selye, "Forty Years of Stress Research," 53.

²⁷Goldstein and Kopin, "Evolution of Concepts of Stress," 109.

decisive factor in outcomes such as health, well-being, and social functioning.²⁸ This paradigm shift in thinking was driven to a substantial degree by the work of Richard Lazarus. Lazarus and Folkman's transactional theory continues to be the most popular framework for examining stress and coping. Cognitive judgement is central to the transactional theory—first in determining whether a situation is threatening, and second in deciding the most appropriate coping strategy. Coping serves two major purposes: regulating stressful emotions through emotion-focused coping, and altering the conditions causing the stress through problem-focused coping. The use of adaptive coping strategies helps to alleviate stress while maladaptive coping can exacerbate its harmful effects.

People vary considerably in their approaches to managing stressful events. Interactions between the person and the environment in the process of stress and coping are highly subjective, dynamic, and variable.²⁹ Individual psychological and personality characteristics, the nature of the stressful situation, and the social and cultural environment are all important for understanding stress and coping. In fact, Lazarus criticized the predominant approaches to exploring occupational stress for placing excessive emphasis on organizational features, while paying less attention to the attributes of the individual worker and neglecting the stress process, defined as “actual stressful transactions that take place between workers and the environment, coping, and changes in stress from moment to moment and encounter to encounter.”³⁰

A significant and increasingly popular trend in research is examining the relationships of stress and coping to burnout.³¹ In light of the focus of this project, the

²⁸Richard S. Lazarus and Susan Folkman, “Transactional Theory and Research on Emotions and Coping,” *European Journal of Personality* 1, no. 3 (1987): 141.

²⁹Richard Lazarus, “Psychological Stress in the Workplace,” in *Occupational Stress: A Handbook*, ed. Rick Crandall and Pamela Perrew (Washington, DC: Taylor & Francis, 1995), 141.

³⁰Lazarus, “Psychological Stress,” 3.

³¹Jesus Montero-Marin et al., “Understanding Burnout according to Individual Differences: Ongoing Explanatory Power Evaluation of Two Models for Measuring Burnout Types,” *BMC Public*

interest lies in understanding if pastors who have experienced longevity and success in ministry have similar ways of experiencing, identifying, and responding to stress. However, the majority of the available research and literature focuses on the wages of chronic stress, which is “burnout.”

Burnout

In chapter 1, statistics were presented that alluded to the devastating impacts that unresolved, chronic stress can have on the minister. The stress touches not only his professional life, but his personal, family, and community relationships as well. Truly, every aspect of a minister’s life can reap the consequences of stress that is unrestrained and unmitigated. However, burnout is a term that can be used broadly outside of the research, and so, in this section the development of the phenomenon of burnout is explored as it relates to personality, work relationships, personal achievement, and coping mechanisms.

Burnout is conceptualized as a “prolonged response to chronic emotional and interpersonal stressors on the job.”³² Burnout is composed of the three dimensions of emotional exhaustion, cynicism (depersonalization), and reduced personal accomplishment (inefficacy), which are operationalized in the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI), the most widely used instrument for assessing burnout. The MBI has three versions: the MBI-Human Services Survey (MBI-HSS) for human services and health care workers, the MBI-Educators Survey (MBI-ES), for use in educational settings, and the MBI-General Survey (MBI-GS), which was developed in response to recognition of the burnout phenomenon

Health 12 (2012): 922; Jesus Montero-Marin et al., “Coping with Stress and Types of Burnout: Explanatory Power of Different Coping Strategies,” *PLoS one* 9, no. 2 (2014): 2-12; Hyojung Shin et al., “Relationships between Coping Strategies and Burnout Symptoms: A Meta-Analytic Approach,” *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice* 45, no. 1 (2014): 44.

³²Maslach, Schaufeli, and Leiter, “Job Burnout,” 397.

beyond people-oriented occupations. Both the MBI-HSS and the MBI-GS have been used in research with religious clergy.

Emotional exhaustion—the most palpable manifestation of burnout and the most closely related to stress—is the central facet of burnout.³³ Feeling overwhelmed and exhausted provokes attempts to distance oneself emotional and cognitively from the demands of the job, leading to depersonalization or cynical attitudes toward clients, patients, students, or in the case of religious clergy, parishioners. According to Maslach, Schaufeli, and Leiter, the relationship of inefficacy to the other two facets of burnout is more complicated and varies according to job context.³⁴ A sense of inefficacy may be a direct result of exhaustion, cynicism, or both, but it may also arise simultaneously with the other two aspects of burnout. Maslach, Schaufeli, and Leiter, attribute inefficacy largely to a lack of resources that are important for performing one's work. Resources are both intrinsic and external, and for clergy include spiritual beliefs and practices and congregational and denominational support.³⁵

³³Maslach, Schaufeli, and Leiter, "Job Burnout," 397.

³⁴Ibid., 403.

³⁵For spiritual beliefs and practices, see Grant R. Bickerton et al., "Spiritual Resources and Work Engagement among Religious Workers: A Three Wave Longitudinal Study," *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology* 87, no. 2 (2014): 370-91; Chandler, "Pastoral Burnout," 273-87; Chandler, "The Impact of Pastors' Spiritual Practices," 1-9; Christopher G. Ellison et al., "Religious Resources, Spiritual Struggles, and Mental Health in a Nationwide Sample of PCUSA Clergy," *Pastoral Psychology* 59, no. 3 (2010): 287-304; Jonathan Golden et al., "Spirituality and Burnout: An Incremental Validity Study," *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 32 (2004): 115-25; Jackson-Jordan, "Clergy Burnout and Resilience," 1-5; Maureen Miner et al., "Spirituality and Work Engagement among Church Leaders," *Mental Health, Religion & Culture* 18, no. 1 (2015): 57-71. For denominational support, see Ellison et al., "Religious Resources," 287-304; Bobby L. Trihub et al., "Denominational Support for Clergy Mental Health," *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 38 (2010): 101-10; Carl R. Wells, "The Moderating Effects of Congregational and Denominational Support on the Impact of Stress on Clerical Emotional and Physical Health Status," *Pastoral Psychology* 62, no. 6 (2013): 873-88.

Personality and Burnout

Personality is a prominent factor in burnout. Alarcon, Eschleman, and Bowling present a meta-analysis of research investigating the relationship between personality characteristics and burnout. An analysis of each study analyzed utilized a version of the MBI. A notable feature of the study is that the authors went beyond the Big Five personality traits to include self-esteem, general self-efficacy, hardiness, internal locus of control, optimism, positive affectivity, negative affectivity, and proactive personality.³⁶ In addition to the personality characteristics of conscientiousness, extraversion, and agreeableness, all of these psychosocial factors were connected with emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishment in the directions expected. Type A personality was associated only with personal accomplishment, and general self-efficacy, in particular, was strongly linked with personal accomplishment.³⁷

Studies examining burnout and personality in clergy parallel the overall trend in this line of research. Neuroticism consistently surfaces as a powerful risk factor for burnout.³⁸ On the other hand, extraversion tends to be negatively connected with burnout and positively linked with engagement and satisfaction. Extraversion seems a likely advantage in a vocation heavily centered on interacting with people. Similarly, conscientiousness seems to protect against burnout. In a study of Indian clergy,

³⁶Gene Alarcon, Kevin J. Eschleman, and Nathan A. Bowling, "Relationships between Personality Variables and Burnout: A Meta-Analysis," *Work & Stress* 23 (2009): 246-47. The Big Five personality traits, also referred to as the "five factor model," organize personality traits into five categories: emotional stability, extraversion, conscientiousness, agreeableness, and openness. Emotional stability is the general condition of being free of negative emotions (e.g., anxiety, depression, frustration, and guilt.) Extraversion refers to the personality trait of being fun-loving and enthusiastic. Conscientiousness represents the ability to be dependable, organized, goal driven, and responsible. Agreeableness is the trait of being cooperative and sympathetic toward others. Openness is the trait of desiring change, variety, and uniqueness.

³⁷*Ibid.*, 249. A "Type A Personality" refers to the extent that one can become argumentative, antagonistic, and impatient.

³⁸See Francis et al., "Work-Related Psychological Health"; Eugene Newman Joseph et al., "The Relationship between Personality, Burnout, and Engagement among the Indian Clergy," *International Journal for the Psychology of Religion* 21, no. 4 (2011): 276-88; Miner, "Burnout in the First Year of Ministry"; Randall, "Examining Thoughts."

agreeableness was negatively related to emotional exhaustion and cynicism.³⁹ Openness to experience is the least studied of the Big Five personality traits and its effects tend to vary depending on context. For example, one study examined the stress levels of 144 seminarians, and found that openness protected against stress and anxiety.⁴⁰ However, openness can also lead clergy to question their religious beliefs and perhaps their choice of vocation, to the opposite effect.⁴¹

Self-Perception and Organizational Culture

Grosch and Olsen proposed a model of clergy burnout that synthesizes the focus on personality characteristics with the systems perspective which implicates external factors such as bureaucracy, inadequate management and coworker support, and difficult workplace conditions as the main causes of burnout.⁴² Grosch and Olsen approach the role of personality in burnout from the perspective of Kohut's Self Psychology. Their emphasis is on the less common personal attributes analyzed by Alarcon, Eschleman, and Bowling, such as self-esteem, high idealism, and Type A personality.⁴³ Grosch and Olsen drew from Jung, who described a "God Complex" or "Savior Complex" as a psychological hazard for psychoanalysts. Grosch and Olsen raise the question, "If Jung is correct about the God or Savior complex as a danger for

³⁹Joseph et al., "The Relationship between Personality, Burnout, and Engagement."

⁴⁰Harbaugh and Rogers, "Pastoral Burnout," 106.

⁴¹Miner, "Burnout in the First Year of Ministry," 17.

⁴²Grosch and Olsen, "Clergy Burnout," 620, 625.

⁴³Alarcon, Eschleman, and Bowling, "Relationships between Personality Variables and Burnout," 246-49.

psychoanalysts, then how much more is it a danger for clergy, who speak on some level for God and are ‘called’ to their vocation?”⁴⁴

According to Grosch and Olsen, admiration and idealization on the part of parishioners may actually convince pastors “that they really are extraordinary,”⁴⁵ leading to reckless judgment in interpersonal relationships and more broadly, unprofessional or unethical conduct.⁴⁶ In fact, a powerful association between high levels of stress and sexual misconduct was found in a study of Southern Baptist senior pastors.⁴⁷ Both Weaver and Flannelly, and Grosch and Olsen, cite personality factors, especially narcissism and precarious self-esteem in which one’s self-esteem is dependent on admiration from others, as vulnerability factors for impulsive and self-destructive behaviors in relation to stress and burnout.⁴⁸

A Savior Complex may also heighten vulnerability to compassion fatigue, defined by Figley as the stress resulting from helping or desiring to help others who have experienced trauma or suffering.⁴⁹ Hendron, Irving, and Taylor explain that, conceptually,

⁴⁴Grosch and Olsen, “Clergy Burnout,” 622.

⁴⁵Ibid.

⁴⁶Ibid.

⁴⁷Weaver and Flannelly, “Mental Health Issues among Clergy,” 393. Weaver and Flannelly quote an article that details the research on Southern Baptist senior pastors working in six Southeastern states. In the research, factors that contributed to sexual misconduct with other members of the church were examined. The study found that 5.8 percent of the Southern Baptist pastors studied indicated that they had a sexual relationship with a person currently affiliated with their congregation. The significance is based on the 5.8 percent misconduct rate extrapolated and compared to the US Department of Labor’s 1998 figure of 353,000 clergy, which would translate to more than 20,000 clergy. The study found that these ministers were at greater risk for misconduct because of the chronic stress present in their lives, usually from a personal crisis, such as painful marriages or other emotional difficulties. Exacerbating the issue was the lack of any outlet for their internal struggles (i.e., professional counseling).

⁴⁸Weaver and Flannelly, “Mental Health Issues among Clergy,” 393-403; Grosch and Olsen, “Clergy Burnout,” 619-32.

⁴⁹Charles Figley, “Compassion Fatigue: Toward a New Understanding of the Costs of Caring,” in *Secondary Traumatic Stress: Self-Care Issues for Clinicians, Researchers, and Educators*, ed. Beth H. Stamm (Lutherville, MD: Sidran, 1995), 3-28.

compassion fatigue refers to vicarious traumatization or secondary traumatic stress (STS) experienced by mental health care providers as “the direct result of listening to or being involved with another’s emotionally disturbing material.”⁵⁰ However, Figley adopted the term compassion fatigue as a “friendlier, less stigmatized” alternative to secondary traumatic stress.⁵¹ Clergy are often called on to attend to congregants who are seriously or terminally ill.⁵² Many people turn to religious clergy as their first source of formal support in times of emotional distress or crisis.⁵³

Galek et al. invoked Grosch and Olsen and Self Psychology in their research on burnout, STS, and social support in professional chaplains.⁵⁴ From the perspective of Self Psychology, helping professions often attract individuals whose childhoods were spent striving to satisfy the needs and high expectations of parents but whose own emotional needs were not met. As adults, they repeat this behavior pattern, gaining their sense of self-esteem and self-worth from fulfilling the needs of others. Misconduct toward others and compassion fatigue may seem almost antithetical, but both can arise from self-esteem needs that must be constantly replenished, leading to stress and burnout.

A fragile sense of self-esteem contingent on the admiration of others may underlie the inability of clergy to accept interpersonal criticism. In a focus group study of

⁵⁰Jill 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 (2012): 223.

⁵¹*Ibid.*, 224.

⁵²Chenelle Buys and Sebastiaan Rothmann, “Burnout and Engagement of Reformed Church Ministers,” *SA Journal of Industrial Psychology* 36, no. 1 (2010): 1.

⁵³Stephen M. Beaumont, “Pastoral Counseling Down Under: A Survey of Australian Clergy,” *Pastoral Psychology* 60, no. 1 (2011): 117; Hendron, Irving, and Taylor, “The Unseen Cost,” 221; Gail Kinman, Obrene McFall, and Joanna Rodriguez, “The Cost of Caring? Emotional Labour, Wellbeing and the Clergy,” *Pastoral Psychology* 60, no. 5 (2011): 671.

⁵⁴Kathleen Galek et al., “Burnout, Secondary Traumatic Stress, and Social Support,” *Pastoral Psychology* 60, no. 5 (2011): 635.

22 clergy members, criticism was almost invariably taken negatively.⁵⁵ Participants described criticism as a “negative evaluation,” a “rebuke,” “akin to fault-finding; it’s telling someone they don’t measure up,” “usually a negative assault; often by someone without all the facts,” and a “personal attack.”⁵⁶ One participant summarized the collective opinion by declaring “Criticism is a term that is always negative. There is no such thing as positive criticism.” Criticism was viewed as “a real blow to the ego” and “an assault to our competence,” which “can be demoralizing.”⁵⁷ The overarching perception was that criticism was unfair and usually hostile, provoking an array of negative emotions, including anger, frustration, pain, irritation, and guilt. Consequences of interpersonal criticism included stress, burnout, and in some cases, leaving the ministry.

There was virtually no acceptance among the group that criticism could be constructive. In fact, the minister who described criticism as a personal attack asserted that “*feedback* is used when it is positive.”⁵⁸ A limitation of the study is that Garner did not provide examples of the critical statements that provoked such negative responses, so it is impossible to discern the extent that they actually were offensive. However, the prevailing opinion was that clergy members are especially sensitive to its detrimental impact. In some parishes, clergy members have been the targets of concerted campaigns of bullying, abuse, and harassment, ultimately forcing their resignation with lasting traumatic effect.⁵⁹ However, criticism is inevitable in almost any interpersonal relationship, thereby requiring positive coping skills.

⁵⁵Randy Garner, “Interpersonal Criticism and the Clergy,” *Journal of Pastoral Care and Counseling* 67, no. 1 (2013): 2.

⁵⁶*Ibid.*, 5.

⁵⁷*Ibid.*, 6.

⁵⁸*Ibid.*, 5, emphasis added.

⁵⁹Marcus N. Tanner and Anisa M. Zvonkovic, “Forced to Leave: Forced Termination Experiences of Assemblies of God Clergy and Its Connection to Stress and Well-Being Outcomes,” *Pastoral Psychology* 60, no. 5 (2011): 713; Marcus N. Tanner, Jeffrey N. Wherry, and Anisa M. Zvonkovic, “Clergy

Indeed, Garner observed that the clergy members were eager to learn practical skills and techniques for managing criticism.⁶⁰ Of the themes of resilient ministry outlined by Burns, Chapman and Guthrie, leadership and management is the most neglected in the literature. They concluded that many pastors are daunted by this aspect of ministry; they envision themselves as spiritual leaders, not organizational managers, despite the fact that church ministry involves managerial and leadership tasks.⁶¹ Strategies for managing criticism can be viewed within the broader context of conflict management and resolution skills, which are useful for managing role conflicts that arise in ministry as well as interpersonal conflict.⁶²

Garner noted a shortage of organizational resources for helping clergy effectively manage criticism and its potentially harmful effects. Recognition that burnout is not limited to people-oriented professions led to a reconsideration of the environmental context.⁶³ Regardless of occupation, organizational structures and processes influence people's emotional and cognitive attachment to their work and can either facilitate or impede their ability to perform their job. To explain the external factors that affect pastoral burnout, Grosch and Olsen invoked a systems theory (i.e., Bowen's Theory), which expands systems theory to include family-of-origin influences.⁶⁴ Analogous to the

Who Experience Trauma as a Result of Forced Termination," *Journal of Religion and Health* 52, no. 4 (2013): 1281.

⁶⁰Garner, "Interpersonal Criticism and the Clergy," 10-11.

⁶¹Burns, Chapman, and Guthrie, *Resilient Ministry*, 199-200.

⁶²Faucett, Corwyn, and Poling, "Clergy Role Stress," 291-304; Edward R. Kemery, "Clergy Role Stress and Satisfaction: Role Ambiguity Isn't Always Bad," *Pastoral Psychology* 54, no. 6 (2006): 561.

⁶³Maslach, Schaufeli, and Leiter, "Job Burnout," 397.

⁶⁴Murray Bowen, *Family Therapy in Clinical Practice* (New York: Jason Aronson, 1978). Bowen's Theory adds a dimension of multigenerational transmission and the concept of self-differentiation to traditional systems theory—system theory itself is concerned with how the parts of the individual interact with the whole and how each of them interact within the larger context. System theory explains how the different dimensions of the whole work together to regulate themselves and create a balance or homeostasis. Bowen's theory suggests that people relate to their families on a continuum that has two extremes that are

notion that intra-psychoic mechanisms in burnout involve repetition of childhood patterns, from this systems perspective, maladaptive patterns from childhood such as blurred interpersonal boundaries, avoidance of conflict, and an inability to say “no,” are not only repeated in ministry but are exacerbated, producing anxiety under pressure and raising the risk for high levels of stress and burnout.

Grosch and Olsen’s model of clergy burnout integrates self-psychology and systems theory. Maslach, Schaufeli, and Leiter developed a generic model of burnout that integrates individual and environmental characteristics. Expanding the concept of job-person fit, this model of burnout centers on the degree of match (or mismatch) between the person and six features of the work environment. Greater discrepancy between the person and the job environment increases the probability of burnout while greater congruence between the person and the environment increases the probability of work engagement. The model encompasses an array of factors that fall under each of the six dimensions of the work environment associated with burnout: workload, control, reward, community, fairness, and values. The conceptual framework allows for exploring burnout from a variety of perspectives, including individual and occupational differences in relation to the six dimensions, interactions among the six dimensions, and the relationships of the various dimensions to the three facets of burnout. The interaction between the person and characteristics of the work environment is central to Lazarus’s transactional theory of occupational stress and coping.

Work Engagement and Burnout

According to Maslach, Schaufeli, and Leiter, the traditional focus in psychology has been on negative states as opposed to positive states. The emergence of

“cut off” from family to “fused” with family. Bowen contends that individuals within either extreme have failed to differentiate from their family of origin. They are still “emotionally attached,” and this pattern will carry over into work relationships and will create or exacerbate stressors.

positive psychology marked a notable shift from that perspective to greater emphasis on “human strengths and optimal functioning.”⁶⁵ Research undertaken from the perspective of positive psychology focuses on elements that enable people to thrive even under adverse conditions and thus can be useful for understanding resilience in relation to pastoral burnout.⁶⁶ Work engagement represents the reverse of the negative state of burnout.⁶⁷

In what is arguably the most widely used definition of work engagement, Schaufeli and Bakker, define engagement as “a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption.”⁶⁸ Engagement denotes “a persistent and pervasive affective-cognitive state that is not focused on any particular object, event, individual, or behavior.”⁶⁹ Vigor is characterized by high levels of energy and mental resilience while working, willingness to invest effort in work, and persistence in the face of difficulties. Dedication refers to a “sense of significance, enthusiasm, inspiration, pride, and challenge.”⁷⁰ Schaufeli and Bakker frame vigor and dedication as antithetical to exhaustion and cynicism, respectively. Absorption implies being completely and happily immersed in one’s work. Engagement is operationalized in the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES), which encompasses the three elements of vigor, dedication, and absorption.

Work engagement is influenced by the relative presence or absence of job demands and job resources.⁷¹ Job resources refer to the physical, psychological, social,

⁶⁵Bowen, *Family Therapy in Clinical Practice*, 416.

⁶⁶Jackson-Jordan, “Clergy Burnout and Resilience,” 1.

⁶⁷Maslach, Schaufeli, and Leiter, “Job Burnout,” 397.

⁶⁸Schaufeli and Bakker, “Job Demands,” 295.

⁶⁹Ibid.

⁷⁰Ibid.

⁷¹Ibid.

and organizational aspects of work that stimulate personal growth and development, promote the pursuit of important goals, and counteract job demands. Spirituality has been described as a pertinent but often neglected personal resource in promoting pastors' occupational well-being.⁷²

Burnout occurs when job demands exceed job resources. The Job Demand-Resources (JD-R) model was designed to capture the combined effects of job resources and job demands.⁷³ Adding work engagement to the model allowed investigation of work engagement and burnout as separate and opposite entities.

To test the proposed model, Schaufeli and Bakker used structural equation modeling to analyze data from four independent respondent samples.⁷⁴ As predicted, engagement and burnout were negatively associated and preceded by different factors. Burnout was mainly predicted by job demands, with some effect from the absence of job resources, while engagement was predicted entirely by the available job resources. Furthermore, burnout was linked with health problems and turnover intentions while engagement was associated with turnover intentions but not health. Finally, burnout mediated the connection between job demands and health problems, while engagement mediated the connection between job resources and turnover intentions.⁷⁵

In a study exploring the relationship of engagement, job satisfaction, and turnover intentions, Alarcon and Edwards found engagement to be a significant factor in job satisfaction and turnover intentions after controlling for burnout.⁷⁶ Counter to claims

⁷²Bickerton et al., "Spiritual Resources and Work Engagement," 370; Miner et al., "Spirituality and Work Engagement," 57.

⁷³Schaufeli and Bakker, "Job Demands," 293.

⁷⁴Ibid., 303.

⁷⁵Ibid., 307-8.

⁷⁶Gene Alarcon and Jean Edwards, "The Relationship of Engagement, Job Satisfaction and Turnover Intention," *Stress and Health* 27 (2011): 296-97.

by some researchers that absorption should be eliminated from the model, absorption was a significant predictor of both job satisfaction and turnover intentions. In fact, Alarcon and Edwards are among the scholars who view absorption as the aspect of engagement that makes it unique from other constructs used in organizational research.

Burnout and Coping

As understanding of stress and coping evolves, the boundaries between problem-solving and emotion-focused coping seem to be blurring; or more accurately, ideas of what represents effective coping are expanding.⁷⁷ For example, seeking out social support, originally conceived as a type of emotion oriented coping, is now viewed as a distinct coping strategy (social support coping) with practical and emotional aspects. The pivotal element in successful coping lies in matching the particular coping strategy to the situation.

As Folkman and Moskowitz pointed out, seeking social support can be an active and effective coping strategy.⁷⁸ Seeking social support was negatively related to depersonalization and diminished personal accomplishment.⁷⁹ Building and sustaining close and supportive relationships with others serves as an important resilience factor for clergy, who often experience feelings of isolation and loneliness as a consequence of the unique demands of ministerial work.⁸⁰ Social support can protect against compassion fatigue.⁸¹

⁷⁷Susan Folkman and Judith Tedlie Moskowitz, "Coping: Pitfalls and Promise," *Annual Review of Psychology* 55, no. 2 (2004): 745.

⁷⁸Ibid., 758.

⁷⁹Shin et al., "Relationships between Coping Strategies and Burnout Symptoms," 44.

⁸⁰Ryan C. Staley et al., "Strategies Employed by Clergy to Prevent and Cope with Interpersonal Isolation," *Pastoral Psychology* 62, no. 6 (2013): 843.

⁸¹Galek et al., "Burnout, Secondary Traumatic Stress, and Social Support," 633.

Reappraisal coping was negatively associated with emotional exhaustion as well as reduced personal accomplishment.⁸² Folkman and Moskowitz noted that cognitive reappraisal is often used in conjunction with problem-focused coping, which could explain its effect on emotional exhaustion. Intuitively, reappraisal coping, which involves reassessing and objectively viewing the situation, would seem useful for counteracting a sense of inefficacy.⁸³

Positive religious coping was effective for reducing depersonalization,⁸⁴ which should not be surprising as religious coping has been found to reduce hostility, insensitivity, and negative emotions that can drive cynicism. However, religious coping has both positive and negative aspects. In a study involving a national sample of Presbyterian clergy, elders, and members, positive religious coping was associated with greater well-being.⁸⁵ This effect was especially pronounced for clergy, who engaged in positive religious coping to a greater degree than elders or members and for whom religion was more meaningful to their sense of identity. Ministers engaged in negative religious coping to a slightly greater extent than elders, but the use of this coping technique was uncommon among all three groups. Shin et al. noted that the effectiveness of specific coping strategies in relieving burnout differed for various professional groups.⁸⁶ For ministers, the respective effects of positive and negative religious coping on depression and religious satisfaction are intensified.⁸⁷

⁸²Shin et al., "Relationships between Coping Strategies and Burnout Symptoms," 44.

⁸³Folkman and Moskowitz, "Coping," 752-53.

⁸⁴Ibid., 759-60.

⁸⁵Kenneth I. Pargament et al., "Religious Coping among the Religious: The Relationships between Religious Coping and Well-Being in a National Sample of Presbyterian Clergy, Elders, and Members," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 40, no. 3 (2001): 497.

⁸⁶Shin et al., "Relationships between Coping Strategies and Burnout Symptoms," 51-52.

⁸⁷Ibid.

The research of Montero-Marin et al. explored individual differences in burnout and variations in the effectiveness of specific coping strategies in relation to subtypes of burnout. They approached the problem of burnout from a novel perspective, which they operationalized in the *Burnout Clinical Subtype Questionnaire* (BCSQ-36). Their framework is based on the degree of dedication or energy that people invest in job-related activities. The *frenetic* subtype is characterized by high dedication or active coping style, the *under-challenged* subtype by intermediate dedication, and the *worn-out* subtype by low dedication or passive coping style. Research with university employees who were presented with the MBI-GS, BCSQ-36, and the short-form BCSQ-12 showed that both instruments were superior to the MBI in explaining emotional exhaustion, cynicism, and inefficacy.⁸⁸

In further research with the BCSQ-12, Montero-Marin et al. examined the relationships between the three burnout subtypes and various coping strategies. The frenetic subtype was conceptualized as *overload*, under-challenged as *lack of development*, and *worn-out* as neglect. Overload was primarily explained by venting emotions, but also by problem-focused and religious coping; lack of development was largely explained by cognitive avoidance although behavioral disengagement and venting emotions were also significant; and neglect was explained entirely by behavioral disengagement.⁸⁹

Montero-Marin et al. view these three dimensions of burnout as three stages in the burnout process, whereby workers overwhelmed with excessive demands become increasingly disengaged.⁹⁰ Emotion-focused coping is typically used in situations where

⁸⁸Montero-Marin et al., "Understanding Burnout," 922.

⁸⁹Montero-Marin et al., "Coping with Stress," 6-7.

⁹⁰*Ibid.*, 4.

the person feels helpless to alter the situation.⁹¹ According to Montero-Marín et al. the use of religious coping in response to overload could reflect an effort to retain a sense of meaning, hope, and purpose as well as control.⁹² For religious clergy who are routinely confronted with high demands, this coping mechanism could heighten the benefits of their roles.⁹³ Research on stress and coping is continually evolving, with innovative new concepts and assessment tools.⁹⁴

However, for the purposes of this research, the concern lies within a particular subset of the many hazardous occupations. Pastors regularly engage in emotionally volatile situations and contexts, oftentimes with unrealistic expectations and demands placed on them. The work of a minister overwhelmingly involves serving and giving to those who have great needs, emotional, physical, spiritual, and relational. In addition, there is much to manage and be responsible for in terms of people, finances, resources, facilities, as well as their own physical, emotional, and spiritual health. It is no wonder that the pastorate is a breeding ground for burnout.

Burnout in Ministerial Work

The pastor carries a heavy load of responsibility and stewardship. Indeed, the pastorate is quite a unique occupation in which so many expectations are placed on one individual. Pastors are often expected to be “experts” in Greek, Hebrew, English, ancient culture, modern culture, marriage and relationships, finances, technology, counseling, administration, leadership, fund raising, parenting, writing, speaking, and vision casting, just to name a few. It is no wonder that with such high expectation, mixed with so many

⁹¹Folkman and Moskowitz, “Coping,” 745.

⁹²Montero-Marín et al., “Coping with Stress,” 6.

⁹³Pargament et al., “Religious Coping among the Religious,” 497.

⁹⁴Folkman and Moskowitz, “Coping,” 745.

great needs to be met, that pastors are prime candidates for burnout. In this section, the literature of stress and burnout that specifically relates to ministry is examined.

However, before delving into the studies that consider the stress pastors contend with, the impact it can have on their lives, and its contribution to burnout, it is important to set a biblical context for the phenomenon. While it is important to understand stress and to learn ways to minimize its impact, it is just as important to understand that suffering and stress should be expected by every minister.

Pastors, Stress, and Burnout

In light of the research that highlights the negative impacts of unmitigated stress and the insight the research provides concerning how to mitigate or avoid stressors and burnout, it is important to understand that Scripture teaches there should be an expectation that all Christians, especially pastors, will experience suffering. In Acts 14:22, Paul and Barnabas were advancing the gospel in the face of much persecution and they revisited several cities to encourage the new converts “to continue in the faith, and saying that through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God.” Clearly, it was an expectation in the early church that suffering was expected for those following after Christ.

Even though suffering is expected, it does not mean that the suffering is without purpose. In 2 Corinthians 4:8-10, the apostle Paul writes, “We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies.” With the expectation of certain suffering and stress there is also a promise that the circumstances of suffering will not have the final say, but in fact, the suffering will offer opportunity for the believer to grow and mature in faith. Paul’s words remind his readers that the suffering can be mental, physical, emotional, and even spiritual. Suffering and stress can take on many forms and the scriptures provide ample warning to be prepared to endure.

The scriptures also remind that even though suffering is inevitable, help with the suffering should be expected. In fact, suffering provides opportunities to serve. In 2 Corinthians 1:3-7, Paul reminds the Corinthian Christians about being comforted as well as comforting others:

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. For as we share abundantly in Christ's sufferings, so through Christ we share abundantly in comfort too. If we are afflicted, it is for your comfort and salvation; and if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which you experience when you patiently endure the same sufferings that we suffer. Our hope for you is unshaken, for we know that as you share in our sufferings, you will also share in our comfort.

God comforts in the midst of affliction, but there is an expectation that the comfort experienced should also be demonstrated in Christian community. Therefore, current suffering should be viewed as preparation for future ministry. In God's economy, it all has a purpose. David Powlison concisely states,

When you pass through your own fiery trials, and found God to be true to what he says, you have a real hope to offer. You have first-hand experience of both his sustaining grace and his purposeful design. He has kept you through pain: he has reshaped you more into his image. . . . What are you experiencing from God, you can give away an increasing measure to others. You are learning both the tenderness and the clarity necessary to help sanctify another person's deepest distress.⁹⁵

This more hopeful view of stress and its benefits does not deny the negative impacts stress can have on a person's life, especially that of a pastor, but it does provide context on how to interpret and apply the research regarding this phenomenon. Scripture makes it clear that Christians (pastors not excluded) should expect suffering, difficulty, and the stress that those situations bring. At the same time, Scripture calls believers to think of others more highly than themselves.⁹⁶ In applying the findings and conclusions of the research from this precedent literature to the specific role of the pastor, these

⁹⁵David Powlison, "The Grace of God in Suffering" in John Piper, *Suffering and the Sovereignty of God* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2007), 166.

⁹⁶Phil 2:3-4; John 15:12-14; 1 Thess 5:15; Gal 5:14; Acts 20:24; Rom 12:3; 1 Cor 10:24.

biblical parameters must be kept in mind. The goal is not to be stress-free, but to understand ways to deal with the inevitable stress of ministry in healthy ways to embrace maturity and avoid burnout.

Measuring Burnout

With specific versions for human service professionals and educators, and a general version for occupations that are less interpersonally oriented, the MBI is by far the most popular instrument for assessing burnout. On the rationale that some of the MBI items are not suitably worded for the pastoral vocation, Francis, Wulff, and Robbins, rephrased some of the items and, afterwards, further adapted and refined the MBI for work with clergy.⁹⁷ Ultimately, they created an instrument based on the notion of *balanced affect*. Noting that it is not unusual for clergy to experience high levels of positive affect and negative affect simultaneously, Francis, Wulff, and Robbins conceptualized negative affect as emotional exhaustion and positive affect as ministry satisfaction. These constructs were operationalized into two, eleven-item scales: The Scale of Emotional Exhaustion in Ministry (SEEM) and Satisfaction in Ministry Scale (SIMS). Together, these scales form the Francis Burnout Inventory (FBI).⁹⁸

Francis et al. tested the notion of balanced affect in a sample of 744 parish-based clergy from the Presbyterian Church (USA). The participants included solo pastors, associate pastors, co-pastors, designated pastors, and heads of staff. In addition to the SEEM and the SIMS for assessing work-related psychological health, personality was assessed with the brief version of the Revised Eysenck Personality Questionnaire (EPQR-S). Two additional items captured self-perceived burnout and physical health.⁹⁹

⁹⁷Leslie J. Francis, Keith Wulff, and Mandy Robbins, "The Relationship between Work-Related Psychological Health and Psychological Type among Clergy Serving in The Presbyterian Church (USA)," *Journal of Emperical Theology* 21, no. 1 (2008): 167-69.

⁹⁸Ibid., 172.

⁹⁹Francis et al., "Work-Related Psychological Health," 5.

The majority of clergy reported some degree of burnout, ranging from mild or “small extent” (40 percent), to some degree (25 percent), and a great degree (7 percent). More than one-third displayed emotional exhaustion, reflected in lost enthusiasm, feelings of being drained by ministry roles, and routinely feeling irritated and fatigued. Yet despite these feelings the overwhelming majority of participants felt a strong sense of accomplishment combined with high levels of satisfaction. According to Francis et al., their findings highlighted the importance of recognizing that pastors may enjoy high levels of satisfaction but still experience the detrimental effects of emotional exhaustion. Therefore, strategies to promote psychological health should simultaneously strive to reduce negative affect while enhancing satisfaction. In terms of personality, neuroticism predicted higher levels of burnout and lower levels of satisfaction.¹⁰⁰

Francis et al. acknowledged that additional research was warranted to confirm the validity of the balanced affect model in the context of clergy burnout.¹⁰¹ In response, Randall examined the Francis Burnout Inventory (FBI) in conjunction with a version of the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) adapted for clergy. The study was part of an ongoing research project involving Anglican clergy in England and Wales. The original 340 participants had all been ordained in 1994. Within 7 years, 27 had left the ministry.¹⁰² A total of 234 male and female Anglican clergy participated in this study as well as in further research exploring factors that influence clergy to contemplate leaving the ministry.¹⁰³ In similar fashion to Francis et al., Randall used the EPQR-S to assess personality.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰⁰Francis et al., “Work-Related Psychological Health,” 16.

¹⁰¹Ibid., 17.

¹⁰²Randall, “Clergy Burnout,” 338-39.

¹⁰³Randall, “Examining Thoughts,” 182.

¹⁰⁴Ibid., 183.

In Randall's first study he found that regardless of age or gender, a substantial minority of respondents experienced emotional exhaustion, feeling drained, frustrated, and fatigued.¹⁰⁵ At the same time, most respondents reported high satisfaction; 72 percent felt their ministry positively influenced people's lives, 64 percent reported enjoying great satisfaction working with people, and 69 percent felt very glad they entered the ordained ministry.¹⁰⁶ Although positive, these figures are lower than the proportions of clergy expressing similar satisfaction (91 percent for positively affecting people's lives and 84 percent for being very glad to have entered the ministry) in the original survey of Francis et al.¹⁰⁷

Randall's overall findings confirmed that high satisfaction could coexist with burnout. However, a high inverse correlation between the SEEM and the SIMS demonstrated that while high satisfaction could somewhat neutralize the effects of emotional exhaustion, high levels of burnout were likely to diminish satisfaction over time. Similar to Francis et al., Randall's follow-up study advocates strategies simultaneously targeting burnout and satisfaction.¹⁰⁸ As in the earlier study, neuroticism was linked with higher levels of burnout and lesser satisfaction, suggesting that personality assessment could be useful for identifying clergy at elevated risk for burnout.¹⁰⁹

Burnout and Engagement

Using the JD-R Questionnaire, the MBI, and the Work Engagement Scale (WES), Buys and Rothmann examined the effects of job demands and job resources on

¹⁰⁵Randall, "Clergy Burnout," 336-37.

¹⁰⁶Ibid., 338-39.

¹⁰⁷Francis et al., "Work-Related Psychological Health," 16.

¹⁰⁸Randall, "Examining Thoughts," 183.

¹⁰⁹Ibid., 186.

burnout and engagement in a sample of male Reformed church ministers in South Africa.¹¹⁰ In addition to these measures, the survey included self-assessed general health and commitment as assessed by the Congregational Commitment Questionnaire (CCQ).¹¹¹ The findings confirmed the significant positive impact of job resources on engagement, which in turn enhanced affective commitment and social functioning. Conversely, high job demands generated burnout, which undermined physical and psychological health and well-being. Specifically, opportunities for growth, social support, and meaningful work stimulated engagement, while exhaustion produced somatic symptoms and mental distance, or disengagement, predicted depression.¹¹² The overall findings are consistent with patterns commonly found in the literature on burnout and engagement.¹¹³

Spirituality and Protective Behaviors

Doolittle approached the issue of pastoral burnout from the perspective that engaging in specific behaviors may have a protective effect. These behaviors encompass *relational* activities, such as spending time with family, *professional* activities such as mentorship (as mentor or protégé) and scholarly reading or writing, and *physical* activities.¹¹⁴ The survey, involving 358 United Methodist clergy, included demographic data, the MBI, and the Hatch Spiritual Involvement and Beliefs Scale (SIBS), which examines for broad dimensions of spirituality: internal beliefs, external practices, humility and forgiveness, and existential beliefs.¹¹⁵

¹¹⁰ Buys and Rothmann, "Burnout and Engagement of Reformed Church Ministers," 3-4.

¹¹¹ Ibid., 5.

¹¹² Ibid., 7-8.

¹¹³ Maslach, Schaufeli, and Leiter, "Job Burnout," 397; Schaufeli and Bakker, "Job Demands," 293.

¹¹⁴ Doolittle, "The Impact of Behaviors upon Burnout," 93.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 90-91.

According to Doolittle, the pastors were well attuned to the extent that they were burned out. Those respondents who identified as “burned out” were more than thirty times more likely to score in the high range for emotional exhaustion and sixteen times more likely to meet criteria for being highly depersonalized. Emotional exhaustion was especially high among ministers who served a “traumatic church.” Notably, these effects lingered, making pastors significantly more susceptible to emotional exhaustion even after leaving the traumatic work environment.¹¹⁶ It is possible that they were forced out, driven by relentless psychological abuse from parishioners.¹¹⁷

On the positive side, the pastors’ awareness of burnout led many to seek formal support, as high levels of burnout were associated with involvement in regular counseling.¹¹⁸ However, that is not always the case with clergy who experience burnout, as shown by the relative ineffectiveness of the Rural Pastors Initiative (RPI), a nationwide program developed and implemented by the Center for New Community (CNC) in Chicago.¹¹⁹ Designed to help rural pastors overcome some of the major challenges they face in their ministry, including loneliness and isolation, burnout, work-life imbalance, and a lack of self-care activities. The program promotes spiritual activities, social support, and above all, self-care activities as strategies for simultaneously relieving these stressors and enhancing the ministers’ spiritual closeness to God.

Program evaluation revealed that despite the pastors’ awareness that they had recourse to a comprehensive support system, they opted *not* to turn to it for self-care.¹²⁰

¹¹⁶Doolittle, “The Impact of Behaviors upon Burnout,” 93.

¹¹⁷Tanner and Zvonkovic, “Forced to Leave,” 713; Tanner, Wherry, and Zvonkovic, “Clergy Who Experience Trauma,” 1281.

¹¹⁸Doolittle, “The Impact of Behaviors,” 93.

¹¹⁹Greg Scott and Rachel Lovell, “The Rural Pastors Initiative: Addressing Isolation and Burnout in Rural Ministry,” *Pastoral Psychology* 64, no. 1 (2015): 71.

¹²⁰*Ibid.*

Rather, they continued to engage in self-sacrificing behavior despite its potentially damaging effects on the pastors' relationships with parishioners (by exacerbating compassion fatigue), but also because, as Scott and Lovell write, "If support systems remain underutilized and under nurtured, they will wither on the vine."¹²¹ The pastors engaged in activities that are done in solitude, such as prayer, reflection, and Bible study, but appeared to view self-care activities as a "luxury."

Burns, Chapman, and Guthrie are aware that this attitude is not unusual among pastors, while emphasizing the vital importance of self-care to resilient, successful ministry.¹²² Self-sacrifice may be a manifestation of the Savior Complex, with roots in childhood relationship patterns.¹²³ One minister explicitly related her workaholic tendencies and predisposition to burnout to unresolved family issues, reflecting, "I never learned that my needs mattered."¹²⁴ Ultimately, burnout led her to seek formal (coaching) support in addition to engaging in daily prayer and reflection. Moreover, she had the support of her staff in ensuring that she was not over-extending herself. Scott and Lovell propose that for pastors who view self-sacrifice as intrinsic to their vocation, self-care must be redefined in terms of "work" in order to counteract a "self-reinforcing cycle of heightened burnout risk."¹²⁵

The rural pastors' spiritual practices did enhance their feelings of closeness to God and experience of the divine, and they generally expressed high levels of compassion satisfaction.¹²⁶ In Doolittle's study, satisfaction with one's spiritual life

¹²¹Scott and Lovell, "The Rural Pastors Initiative," 92.

¹²²Burns, Chapman, and Guthrie, *Resilient Ministry*, 61-63.

¹²³Grosch and Olsen, "Clergy Burnout," 622.

¹²⁴Chandler, "The Impact of Pastors' Spiritual Practices," 5.

¹²⁵Scott and Lovell, "The Rural Pastors Initiative," 93.

¹²⁶*Ibid.*

proved to be a powerful force in protecting against all three dimensions of burnout: emotional exhaustion, cynicism, and diminished personal accomplishment. In contrast, behaviors tended to interact with specific aspects of burnout. Exercising consistently, having a mentor, engaging in scholarly reading, and attending a retreat twice a year were all associated with lower emotional exhaustion. Going on retreat also protected against cynicism as did regular Bible study. Mentoring a protégé and taking regular personal time protected against inefficacy. Having a rich social network beyond the ministerial role also seemed to reduce vulnerability to exhaustion.¹²⁷

Interestingly, in their ongoing research with Presbyterian clergy, Francis, Robbins, and Wulff found that *none* of the five support strategies they examined (i.e., taking a sabbatical, taking study leave, having a mentor, belonging to a minister support group, or having a spiritual director) significantly reduced emotional exhaustion.¹²⁸ However, having taken study leave within the past five years (which 87 percent of the ministers had done) and having a mentor both enhanced satisfaction with ministry. Having a mentor, which did reduce emotional exhaustion in Doolittle's study, was viewed as the most promising strategy for countering burnout.¹²⁹

According to Doolittle, the benefits of specific activities in buffering against burnout could be summarized by the *balance and variety* they bring to the everyday lives of pastors.¹³⁰ Doolittle proposed that resilient pastors may be adept at setting healthy boundaries and devoting time to beneficial activities, and may also possess the ability to disengage emotionally as well as physically from the demands of their ministry thereby

¹²⁷Doolittle, "The Impact of Behaviors," 93-94.

¹²⁸Francis, Wulff, and Robbins, "Assessing the Effectiveness of Support Strategies," 327-28. See also Doolittle, "The Impact of Behaviors," 93-94.

¹²⁹Francis, Wulff, and Robbins, "Assessing the Effectiveness of Support Strategies," 328.

¹³⁰Doolittle, "The Impact of Behaviors," 93.

rejuvenating themselves.¹³¹ The rural pastors seemed to lack this ability, even with access to a variety of formal and informal supports.¹³²

The positive impact of psychological disengagement is supported by a study examining the relationship between job demands and psychological detachment from work during time off the job.¹³³ Sonnentag, Binnewies, and Mojza explored this effect in a longitudinal study of 309 human service employees (including social workers, psychologists, health care workers, and other employees) drawn from nonprofit organizations serving clients with special needs.¹³⁴ Over the one-year time frame, high job demands were associated with emotional exhaustion, psychosomatic symptoms, and reduced work engagement. However, psychological detachment from work during off-hours buffered the adverse effects of high job demands on both well-being and work engagement. In contrast, lack of psychological detachment, or preoccupation with work, heightened the risk of emotional exhaustion regardless of the degree of job demands.¹³⁵

Through quantitative and qualitative research, Chandler explored the impact of pastors' spiritual activities on burnout. In the first study Chandler conducted an online survey that drew 270 pastors.¹³⁶ In addition to the MBI-HSS, the pastors were presented with a questionnaire assessing involvement in spiritual renewal activities (prayer, worship, Bible reading or study, meditation, journaling, and fasting) and recreational and leisure

¹³¹Doolittle, "The Impact of Behaviors," 93.

¹³²Scott and Lovell, "The Rural Pastors Initiative," 93.

¹³³Sabine Sonnentag, Iris Kuttler, and Charlotte Fritz, "Job Stressors, Emotional Exhaustion, and Need for Recovery: A Multi-Source Study on the Benefits of Psychological Detachment," *Journal of Vocational Behavior* 76, no. 3 (2010): 355.

¹³⁴Sabine Sonnentag, Carmen Binnewies, and Eva J. Mojza, "Staying Well and Engaged When Demands Are High: The Role of Psychological Detachment," *Journal of Applied Psychology* 95 (2010): 968.

¹³⁵*Ibid.*, 971-72.

¹³⁶Chandler, "Pastoral Burnout," 277.

activities.¹³⁷ Emotional exhaustion, the major dimension of burnout, accounted for 41 percent of the variation in burnout. Spiritual dryness emerging as its key predictor, leading Chandler to frame spiritual dryness as a “depletion of spiritual vitality,” signifying a need for “ongoing spiritual renewal.”¹³⁸ Ministry involvement that precludes rest also contributed to emotional exhaustion, while feeling rested and renewed inversely predicted emotional exhaustion. In fact, feeling rested and renewed had the most powerful impact on all three dimensions of burnout.¹³⁹ Family support also buffered against inefficacy but the effect was not as strong.¹⁴⁰

Framing rest and renewal in terms of the need for pastors to engage in “ongoing spiritual renewal,” Chandler conducted a follow up study that further explored spiritual practices, well-being, and burnout in an in-depth exploration of 8 church leaders, 7 serving non-denominational congregations and 1 serving a mainline denominational church.¹⁴¹ A connection between spiritual practices and personal well-being was universal. All 8 pastors took time for practices that made them feel closer to God. For personal well-being, they engaged in regular physical exercise, cultivated friendships and marriage and family bonds, and in some cases practiced the psychological detachment that protects against burnout.¹⁴²

A second theme common to all the pastors was keeping up with the excessive demands and multiple roles of the contemporary ministry.¹⁴³ A third theme centered on

¹³⁷Chandler, “Pastoral Burnout,” 278.

¹³⁸Ibid., 283.

¹³⁹Ibid., 285.

¹⁴⁰Ibid.

¹⁴¹Chandler, “The Impact of Pastors’ Spiritual Practices,” 2.

¹⁴²Ibid., 5-6.

¹⁴³Ibid.

personal identity and conceptions of ministerial success. External pressures for congregational growth or internal pressures to meet impossibly high standards could be equally detrimental. A fourth theme emerged in relation to gender, with female pastors feeling they were under particular scrutiny due to their gender.¹⁴⁴ United Methodist clergywomen in North Carolina expressed being subject to similar pressures.¹⁴⁵ A tendency to give precedence to the needs of others was common among all pastors involved in the focus group study. However, LeGrand points out that this effect was magnified in female pastors as a consequence of “the default role of women as the caretaker of the family and the congregation.”¹⁴⁶ Female pastors often found it difficult to set boundaries in addition to being compelled to assume the nurturing role, to the detriment of their own health.¹⁴⁷

The fifth theme to emerge in the study of Chandler was the role of relational support, accountability, and coaching in helping the pastors attain spiritual and emotional balance and health. The sixth and final theme centered on the impact of marital relationships to the pastors’ spiritual and personal equilibrium and sense of professional efficacy.¹⁴⁸ According to Burns, Chapman, and Guthrie, a common complaint of pastoral spouses is that, emotionally, the church takes precedence over them.¹⁴⁹ They stress the importance of maintaining healthy, supportive marriage and family relationships, which

¹⁴⁴Chandler, “The Impact of Pastors’ Spiritual Practices,” 6.

¹⁴⁵Sara LeGrand et al., “Healthy Leaders: Multilevel Health Promotion Considerations for Diverse United Methodist Church Pastors,” *Journal of Community Psychology* 41, no. 3 (2013): 303.

¹⁴⁶*Ibid.*, 308.

¹⁴⁷*Ibid.*

¹⁴⁸Chandler, “The Impact of Pastors’ Spiritual Practices on Burnout,” 6.

¹⁴⁹Burns, Chapman, and Guthrie, *Resilient Ministry*, 178.

entails sharing enjoyable recreational activities as well as emotional intimacy. Engaging in self-care activities allows pastors to devote time and energy to their families.¹⁵⁰

Beyond family relationships, the eight ministers in Chandler's study gained relational support and support from fellowship groups and friendships, which were perceived as essential for sustaining a "personal sense of balance and health."¹⁵¹ Peer support groups are often recommended for preventing or reducing psychological distress in religious clergy, but their benefits seem to depend heavily on the interplay between the group and its activities and the individual coping styles of group members.¹⁵² On the other hand, in Doolittle's study, involvement in a support group reduced emotional exhaustion.¹⁵³

A nuanced effect for social support emerged in the study of emotional labor, (defined as "the requirement to regulate personal emotion and manage the emotions of others as part of the job role) and psychological well-being in British clergy.¹⁵⁴ Having a broader social network appeared to have a protective effect, but it could also present a risk factor for burnout as a larger network was associated with involvement in more emotional labor.¹⁵⁵

Occupational Stress and Burnout

Two studies of British clergy presented the perspectives of clergy men and women regarding occupational stress, burnout, and well-being.¹⁵⁶ Using balanced affect

¹⁵⁰Burns, Chapman, and Guthrie, *Resilient Ministry*, 186.

¹⁵¹Chandler, "The Impact of Pastors' Spiritual Practices," 6.

¹⁵²Miles and Proeschold-Bell, "Overcoming the Challenges," 199.

¹⁵³Doolittle, "The Impact of Behaviors," 93.

¹⁵⁴Kinman, McFall, and Rodriguez, "The Cost of Caring?," 672.

¹⁵⁵*Ibid.*, 671.

¹⁵⁶Amanda Berry et al., "Ministry and Stress: Listening to Anglican Clergy in Wales," *Pastoral Psychology* 61, no. 2 (2012): 165; Rodger Charlton et al., "Clergy Work-Related Psychological Health:

as a framework, Charlton et al. conducted a qualitative exploration involving 58 ministers of the United Reformed Church. All but 8 respondents reported enjoying their work at least most of the time, and the 8 who deviated were ambiguous rather than negative. In fact, it was especially striking that there were no flatly negative responses, thus implying relatively high levels of satisfaction.¹⁵⁷ At the same time, while their individual definitions of stress varied, including personal feelings of being overwhelmed and under intense pressure, scholarly definitions, and theological conceptualizations, it was clear that stress was pervasive.¹⁵⁸

Selye used the term *eustress* to denote stress that is psychologically healthy.¹⁵⁹ As opposed to situations perceived as threatening (which provoke *distress*), challenging situations such as work assignments that allow for autonomy and innovation can induce eustress, with potentially positive effects on health, well-being, and productivity. While recognizing the potentially harmful effects of stress, several ministers felt that a certain degree of stress could be energizing, and in fact, is essential for optimum everyday functioning.¹⁶⁰ Burnout, however, was construed as something entirely negative. Charlton et al. discerned five common themes which they framed as the “five marks of burnout.”¹⁶¹ In descending order of how frequently they were mentioned, these were inability to function or carry on; physical, emotional, and spiritual shutdown; exhaustion; response to continuous excessive pressure; and depression and clinical anxiety. Broadly,

Listening to the Ministers of Word and Sacrament within the United Reformed Church in England,” *Pastoral Psychology* 58, no. 2 (2009): 133-49.

¹⁵⁷Charlton et al., “Clergy Work-Related Psychological Health,” 137-38.

¹⁵⁸Ibid., 139.

¹⁵⁹Selye, “Forty Years of Stress Research,” 56.

¹⁶⁰Charlton et al., “Clergy Work-Related Psychological Health,” 133.

¹⁶¹Ibid., 140.

these themes reflected dimensions of burnout embedded in the MBI, the SEEM, and the stage model outlined by Montero-Marín et al.¹⁶²

The ministers described many causes of stress, ranging from interpersonal conflicts, to unduly high expectations, to demands for pastoral care, to having to perform mundane administrative tasks; however, excessive workload was by far the predominant cause of stress.¹⁶³ Beyond its effect on exhaustion, excessive workload impedes the ability to perform effectively, thus contributing to the sense of inefficacy.¹⁶⁴ Theological issues were the least common cause of stress, reflecting internal and interpersonal spiritual struggles.¹⁶⁵

Overall, the ministers expressed the combination of high levels of stress and high satisfaction that was subsequently operationalized in the FBI.¹⁶⁶ Notably, the ministers engaged in a variety of practices to help them maintain good psychological and physical health.¹⁶⁷ Twenty-two of the 58 clergy strived to maintain a healthy lifestyle through physical exercise, diet, and relaxation. A comparable number deliberately took time off, and 15 turned to prayer, reflection, and spiritual practices. In essence, the ministers understood the value of self-care in managing stress and maintaining good health.

In response to the question of what the church could do to support ministers' psychological health, the two most common responses were ensuring that ministers have

¹⁶²See Christina Maslach, Susan E. Jackson, and Michael P. Leiter, *The Maslach Burnout Inventory Manual* (Palo Alto, CA: Consulting Psychologists, 1996); Francis et al., "Work-Related Psychological Health," 1-30; and Montero-Marín et al., "Understanding Burnout," 2-12.

¹⁶³Ibid.

¹⁶⁴Maslach, Schaufeli, and Leiter, "Job Burnout," 397.

¹⁶⁵Ellison et al., "Religious Resources," 287.

¹⁶⁶Francis et al., "Work-Related Psychological Health," 9.

¹⁶⁷Charlton et al., "Clergy Work-Related Psychological Health," 133.

time off during the week (and ideally vacation time), and setting reasonable expectations for what ministers can accomplish.¹⁶⁸ Other recommendations centered on the provision of formal and informal supports. Least cited but perhaps most important was the assertion that the church must acknowledge the high levels of stress and burnout in clergy and make efforts to address them.

Berry et al. conducted their research on stress and burnout with Anglican clergy (10 women and 63 men). At the onset of the study, participants were asked for a subjective assessment of their overall health. The majority (60 percent) perceived their health as excellent or good. An additional 25 respondents described their health positively but with some reservations; in a few cases, a chronic condition such as diabetes or hypertension. Of the remaining 5 ministers, 2 had taken steps to improve their health while the others seemed resigned to declining health.¹⁶⁹ A survey of United Methodist clergy in North Carolina disclosed an excessively high prevalence of obesity, diabetes, asthma, arthritis, and hypertension.¹⁷⁰ Ironically, the ministers assessed their health functioning as superior to the health status implied by their disease burden.

With regard to managing stress, several of the Anglican ministers felt that pastoral care for clergy was available but that clergy members are reluctant to accept help,¹⁷¹ which was the case with pastors involved in the RCI.¹⁷² At the same time, there are practical barriers to the full utilization of support services offered religious clergy. In a US study of 434 pastors representing three denominations, the pastors described a variety of support services. Time off, prayer support groups, and pastoral retreats, in

¹⁶⁸Charlton et al., "Clergy Work-Related Psychological Health," 133.

¹⁶⁹Berry et al., "Ministry and Stress," 168.

¹⁷⁰Rae Jean Proeschold-Bell and Susan LeGrand, "Physical Health Functioning among United Methodist Clergy," *Journal of Religious Health* 51, no. 3 (2012): 740.

¹⁷¹Berry et al., "Ministry and Stress," 165.

¹⁷²Scott and Lovell, "The Rural Pastors Initiative," 71.

particular, were highly popular, sufficiently provided, and extensively utilized. However, financial constraints emerged as a formidable obstacle to using these services for many pastors, followed by difficulties with getting time to partake of the available services, concerns over confidentiality, and lack of awareness of the available services. These practical barriers can be addressed by denominational leaders. Psychological barriers to self-care are much harder to overcome.

Self-sacrificing attitudes present a major barrier to self-care.¹⁷³ Proeschold-Bell and LeGrand suggested that the discrepancy between the objective health status and self-assessed health functioning of the Methodist clergy might reflect self-sacrifice; indeed, avoiding self-care while giving precedence to the needs of others could be a cause of their health conditions.¹⁷⁴ Furthermore, stress typically plays a role in the development of obesity and high blood pressure.¹⁷⁵ Younger clergy tend to be most aware of the importance of maintaining physical and psychological health and therefore most inclined to incorporate healthy eating and physical exercise into their daily lives and welcome support from peers.¹⁷⁶

Beyond perceptions of physical health, the Anglican clergy described numerous manifestations of stress in their lives.¹⁷⁷ These largely paralleled the stressors reported by the United Reformed ministers.¹⁷⁸ Informal social networks emerged as the main sources of support for most participants.¹⁷⁹ Berry et al. noted that the ministers

¹⁷³Scott and Lovell, "The Rural Pastors Initiative," 71.

¹⁷⁴Proeschold-Bell and LeGrand, "Physical Health Functioning," 740.

¹⁷⁵Jacobs, "The Physiology of Mind-Body Interactions," 83.

¹⁷⁶LeGrand et al., "Healthy Leaders," 303.

¹⁷⁷Berry et al., "Ministry and Stress," 165.

¹⁷⁸Charlton et al., "Clergy Work-Related Psychological Health," 133.

¹⁷⁹Berry et al., "Ministry and Stress," 165.

drew far more support from friends, colleagues, and spouses than from the archdeacon, the bishop, or the area dean.¹⁸⁰ They were also much more inclined to turn to physicians for support than to mental health professionals.¹⁸¹ For relaxation, most participants turned to reading, going on vacation, and watching television.¹⁸²

The overwhelming majority of Anglican ministers felt their training was inadequate for preparing them for the stress they would face in ministry.¹⁸³ Significantly, Harbaugh and Rogers expressed the same concern more than thirty years ago.¹⁸⁴ The large body of literature that has since accumulated on clergy stress and burnout makes it clear that not only has this issue not been addressed in seminaries, or typically by church hierarchies, but that clergy today are under increasing pressure than they were in the 1980s. In particular, contemporary clergy are more involved in counseling and are therefore more vulnerable to compassion fatigue.¹⁸⁵ Adequate training has been found to significantly reduce psychological distress from emotional labor and enhance job satisfaction.¹⁸⁶ However, clergy are often poorly prepared for counseling work.

Analogous to the clergy surveyed by Doolittle, the ministers interviewed by Charlton et al. and Berry et al. are dedicated to their vocation, attuned to their personal levels of work-related stress and burnout, and without formal support engage in various

¹⁸⁰Berry et al., "Ministry and Stress," 175.

¹⁸¹Ibid., 173.

¹⁸²Ibid., 174.

¹⁸³Ibid., 175.

¹⁸⁴Harbaugh and Rogers, "Pastoral Burnout," 104.

¹⁸⁵Hendron, Irving, and Taylor, "The Unseen Cost," 221.

¹⁸⁶Kinman, McFall, and Rodriguez, "The Cost of Caring?," 671.

self-care practices. That does not, however, negate the need for formal support at the denominational and congregational levels.¹⁸⁷

Motivation and Occupational Health

Parker and Martin used a quadripolar achievement needs framework, the Motivation and Engagement Wheel (MEW) to create hypothetical motivational profiles of clergy and assess the relationship of these profiles to occupational well-being as denoted by low burnout and high engagement.¹⁸⁸ Parker and Martin cited Lazarus as among the researchers who argue that motivation should have a more prominent place in the research on occupational stress; however, that channel of research is scant. They suggest this may be due to the lack of a cohesive framework, which is addressed by their study.¹⁸⁹ The four profiles derived from the model are (1) success-oriented individuals, constituting the most adaptive group; (2) over-strivers, whose fear of failure drives them to seek success but for whom the prospect of failure presents a perennial threat to their self-worth; (3) self-protectors, who, similar to over-strivers are failure-avoidant, but who turn to inefficient strategies to avoid failure; and (4) failure accepters, who as the term implies are resigned to lack of success and hence to not aim for achievement in any purposeful manner.¹⁹⁰

Parker and Martin tested their model in sample of 200 Australian clergy representing 8 denominations. The Motivation and Engagement Scale-Work (MES-W) was used to capture the factors embedded in the MEW, in conjunction with the MBI and engagement and job satisfaction measures. Cluster analysis confirmed the validity of the four proposed motivational profiles. Not surprisingly, success-oriented individuals displayed the highest levels of engagement and the lowest levels of burnout. The self-

¹⁸⁷Trihub et al., “Denominational Support,” 101-10; Wells, “Moderating Effects,” 873.

¹⁸⁸Parker and Martin, “Clergy Motivation and Occupational Well-Being,” 662.

¹⁸⁹Ibid., 658.

¹⁹⁰Ibid., 659.

protecting group displayed the reverse profile. Over-strivers were fairly similar to the success-oriented group but more negative in terms of engagement and burnout. In particular, over-strivers were significantly less buoyant and more emotionally exhausted. Finally, failure accepters exhibited relatively adaptive degrees of emotional exhaustion and cynicism, but scored significantly lower than success-oriented individuals on personal accomplishment and all facets of engagement.¹⁹¹

As Lazarus emphasized, people's responses to occupational stress are highly individual.¹⁹² Parker and Martin view the quadripartite model as a useful framework for targeted interventions for managing stress and preventing burnout according to the characteristics of the particular motivational profile.¹⁹³ McDevitt recommends motivational interviewing (MI) techniques for stimulating motivation in clergy who are burned out, or based on the model formulated by Montero-Marín et al. worn out.¹⁹⁴ Originally developed for substance abuse treatment, MI is a person-centered, nonjudgmental, non-directive approach to facilitating behavior change.¹⁹⁵ MI acknowledges individuals' resistance or ambivalence toward change and helps them work through it through reflection rather than confrontation in a safe, supportive, non-threatening environment. Given the nature of MI, McDevitt believes it is ideally suited for use with religious clergy.¹⁹⁶ Thus far there appear to be no empirical studies of this application of MI.

¹⁹¹Parker and Martin, "Clergy Motivation and Occupational Well-Being," 669-70.

¹⁹²Lazarus, "Psychological Stress," 3-4.

¹⁹³Parker and Martin, "Clergy Motivation and Occupational Well-Being," 658.

¹⁹⁴Patrick McDevitt, "Ministerial Burnout: Motivation and Renewal for Mission," *Journal of Pastoral Care & Counseling* 64, no. 4 (2010): 5; Montero-Marín et al., "Understanding Burnout," 4.

¹⁹⁵William R. Miller and Stephen Rollnick, *Motivational Interviewing: Preparing People for Change* (New York: Guilford, 2012).

¹⁹⁶McDevitt, "Ministerial Burnout," 5.

Burnout and Job Satisfaction

Miner, Dowson, and Sterland drew on the concept of internal orientation to ministry as a potential source of job satisfaction and protector against burnout in religious clergy.¹⁹⁷ Internal orientation is composed of three dimensions: a sense of spiritual relatedness, a sense of ministry competence derived from training and ministry skills, and a perceived ability to function without direct congregational support, implying personal autonomy. Burnout was assessed with 28 items derived from the SEEM and SIMS as well as Maslach's theoretical framework. The participants were 2,132 leaders (ministers of various ranks, lay leaders, and specialist ministers) drawn from the Australian National Church Life Survey.¹⁹⁸

The analyses confirmed the validity of the three-dimensional model of internal orientation to ministry and the instrument used to measure burnout.¹⁹⁹ According to Miner, Dowson, and Sterland, in contrast to the proposal of Maslach, Schaufeli, and Leiter that personal accomplishment is related to job resources as opposed to job demands, their findings held personal accomplishment to be a unique dimension of clergy burnout. Personal accomplishment was also found to be independent from satisfaction in ministry. Of the three facets of internal orientation to ministry, autonomy appeared to be especially protective against burnout; high levels of autonomy predicted low emotional exhaustion and cynicism and a strong sense of personal accomplishment.²⁰⁰ This finding is not surprising as perceived lack of control is a significant risk factor for burnout.²⁰¹

¹⁹⁷Miner, Dowson, and Sterland, "Ministry Orientation and Ministry Outcomes," 169.

¹⁹⁸Ibid., 171-72.

¹⁹⁹Ibid., 191.

²⁰⁰Ibid., 182-83.

²⁰¹Maslach, Schaufeli, and Leiter, "Job Burnout," 397.

The relationship of competence to personal accomplishment was also expected.²⁰² Greater satisfaction with spiritual relatedness was moderately related to lower emotional exhaustion and depersonalization and higher personal accomplishment. Miner, Dowson, and Sterland view ministry orientation as especially relevant to the study of clergy burnout and job satisfaction in an era of increasing secularization.²⁰³

Spiritual Resources and Work Engagement

In a study of United Methodist clergy using the MBI and the Spiritual Transcendence Scale (STS), which assesses the three dimensions of connectedness, universality, and prayer fulfillment, Golden et al. found that spirituality, specifically prayer fulfillment, or the person's relationship to God, had a small but significant effect on burnout.²⁰⁴ Golden et al. acknowledged that this effect was modest, but when combined with work environment and personality, spirituality added incrementally to understanding of clergy burnout.²⁰⁵

For understanding work engagement among clergy, Bickerton et al. and Miner et al. frame spirituality in terms of *spiritual resources*, which they distinguish from *personal resources* (such as self-efficacy and goal congruence).²⁰⁶ Bickerton et al. focused on three spiritual resources: secure attachment to God, collaborative religious coping, and sacred calling to religious work by God. These resources were selected due to their theoretical and empirical connections with the personal resources of resilience

²⁰²Miner, Dowson, and Sterland, "Ministry Orientation and Ministry Outcomes," 167.

²⁰³Ibid., 185.

²⁰⁴Golden et al., "Spirituality and Burnout," 122.

²⁰⁵Ibid., 123.

²⁰⁶Bickerton et al., "Spiritual Resources and Work Engagement," 371; Miner et al., "Spirituality and Work Engagement," 58.

and perceived control over one's environment.²⁰⁷ Spiritual resources were hypothesized to increase work engagement by enhancing the meaningfulness of religious work along with the ability to achieve desired goals. The role of spiritual resources in the proposed model paralleled the typical role of personal resources in the relationship between resources and work engagement.

The study presented by Bickerton et al. was part of a large, three-wave longitudinal research project investigating personal, spiritual, and organizational antecedents of occupational stress and well-being among Australian Christian religious workers (parish ministers, chaplains, missionaries, youth workers, and other workers such as denominational leaders, theological educators, and administrative personnel) for a total of 496 participants. While Bickerton et al. had expected a reciprocal relationship between spiritual and job resources and work engagement, structural equation modelling proposed stronger support for a model composed of four unidirectional relationships.²⁰⁸ Over a nine-month period, spiritual resources had a positive impact on work engagement, work engagement had a positive impact on job resources, job resources were negatively linked to subsequent spiritual resources, and work engagement was negatively linked with subsequent spiritual resources through the mechanism of job resources.²⁰⁹

Bickerton et al. were somewhat surprised by the negative (though indirect) effect of work engagement on spiritual resources, although they noted that spiritual resources stayed relatively stable over time. Given the pattern, they surmised that the greater availability of job resources might lead religious workers to rely less on spiritual

²⁰⁷Bickerton et al., "Spiritual Resources and Work Engagement," 372.

²⁰⁸Ibid., 382-83.

²⁰⁹Ibid., 384-85.

resources and more intensive work engagement might reduce the time and energy invested in cultivating spiritual resources.²¹⁰

Spiritual Resources and Psychological Health

Ellison et al. investigated the interaction of religious resources and spiritual struggles on the psychological health of ordained Presbyterian clergy in a test of three conceptual models. The study focused on three types of religious resources and three aspects of spiritual struggle.²¹¹ The religious resources examined were positive religious coping techniques, emotional support from church members, and anticipated support from church members. The three facets of spiritual struggle were divine, interpersonal, and intrapsychic.²¹² The divine aspect reflected negative religious coping. Interpersonal struggle focused on negative interactions with congregation members, and intrapsychic factors referred to religious doubts.²¹³ The study involved a large sample of 1,272 ministers.

The findings strongly supported the main effects model in which stressors, resources, and struggle factors were all independently associated with the outcome measures of psychological well-being or distress.²¹⁴ Specifically, religious resources were closely associated with psychological well-being while spiritual struggles were closely linked with distress. Interestingly, although stressful life events tended to amplify the negative impact of spiritual struggles on psychological health, the findings showed negligible support for the assumption that religious resources buffer against stress and

²¹⁰Bickerton et al., "Spiritual Resources and Work Engagement," 384.

²¹¹Ellison et al., "Religious Resources," 289.

²¹²Ibid., 293-94.

²¹³Ibid., 287.

²¹⁴Ibid.

minimal evidence that spiritual struggles exacerbate stress. Ellison et al. noted that their study focused on stressful life events (such as bereavement or financial setbacks) experienced within the last year. They surmised that religious resources and spiritual struggles would assume greater significance in relation to chronic stress.²¹⁵

From the research presented it becomes obvious the impact that the environment, organizational culture, and the amount of available resources has on the level of stress a pastor will face, as well as providing some indications on how well equipped he will be to deal with the stress. However, another important perspective to consider would be the pastor's perception of his job. In the next section, literature relating to the stress that comes from the role of a pastor and the satisfaction he receives from working in that role is considered.

Role Stress and Clergy Job Satisfaction

Many pastors struggle with unclear roles and undefined expectations. Oftentimes, their job includes expectations from the congregants not listed in his job description. When these expectations are not met, it can create relational tension, sometimes unbeknownst to the pastor until things have become emotionally volatile. Role stress, particularly role conflict and role ambiguity, has been studied extensively in the organizational literature since the 1970s. Most empirical research supports the assumption that role conflict and role ambiguity adversely affect work attitudes such as job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and job engagement.²¹⁶ However, some researchers have raised the question of whether role conflict and role ambiguity must

²¹⁵Ellison et al., "Religious Resources," 300.

²¹⁶Kemery, "Clergy Role Stress and Satisfaction," 561.

always be negative. That perspective is consistent with Selye's conception of eustress and the perceptions of the United Reformed Church ministers.²¹⁷

Kemery tested the theory that the positive or negative effect of role ambiguity on satisfaction is contingent on the level of role conflict in a sample of 293 United Methodist clergy.²¹⁸ The findings showed that, consistent with prior research, when role conflict and role ambiguity were analyzed independently, a greater degree of each one adversely affected satisfaction. However, when role conflict and role ambiguity were analyzed in relation to one another, the pattern supported Kemery's assumption that low levels of role conflict combined with low levels of role ambiguity translated into greater satisfaction. As expected, high levels of both role conflict and role ambiguity diminished satisfaction.²¹⁹

Kemery observed that many clergy practice in churches with few formal policies and protocols for decision-making that leave them "free to creatively proclaim the word of God in a variety of ways" and "free to serve God's calling to them."²²⁰ From this perspective, role ambiguity could enhance clergy job satisfaction. On the other hand, if conflict is high in that setting, the absence of formal procedures for resolving conflicts would have the reverse effect on satisfaction.²²¹

According to Faucett, Corwyn, and Poling, a potential limitation in Kemery's research is his use of a global assessment of job satisfaction. They proposed that a nuanced measure might be more useful due to the precedence of intrinsic factors in clergy job

²¹⁷Selye, "Forty Years of Stress Research," 56; Charlton et al., "Clergy Work-Related Psychological Health," 147.

²¹⁸Kemery, "Clergy Role Stress and Satisfaction," 564.

²¹⁹Ibid., 566.

²²⁰Ibid., 563.

²²¹Ibid., 567.

satisfaction.²²² For their own research, they surveyed clergy on three dimensions (Relationships and Support, Denominational Involvement, and Intrinsic Aspects) of the Ministerial Job Satisfaction Scale (MJSS), which was designed to reflect key facets of ministerial work. Role ambiguity and role conflict were assessed with the scale developed by Rizzo and colleagues, with two items specific to ministry added by Kemery.²²³ The participants were 179 United Methodist clergy.

As in Kemery's study, role conflict and role ambiguity analyzed independently each had a negative impact on job satisfaction. This effect extended to the three facets of clergy job satisfaction. However, the interactions between role conflict and role ambiguity were more complex and were only significant in relation to intrinsic job satisfaction. In the presence of low role ambiguity, the association between role conflict and intrinsic satisfaction was not significant, but in the presence of high role ambiguity, role conflict was negatively associated with intrinsic job satisfaction.²²⁴

In illuminating these patterns, Faucett, Corwyn, and Poling made an important point. Denominational Involvement and Relationships and Support refer respectively to organizational factors and relationships with supervisors, ministerial colleagues, congregation members and family, all of which are largely analogous to facets of the work environment for non-ministerial occupational groups. Only the items of the Intrinsic Aspects dimension capture pastors' sense of "how well their job allows them to answer God's calling as they interpret it," thus invoking a unique aspect of the ministerial vocation.²²⁵ Nevertheless, as Wells concluded, congregational and denominational

²²²Faucett, Corwyn, and Poling, "Clergy Role Stress," 293.

²²³Ibid., 294.

²²⁴Ibid., 298.

²²⁵Ibid., 299.

support are both important resources for reducing or moderating the negative impact of stress on the physical and emotional health of religious clergy.²²⁶

Interestingly, while Kemery focused on role ambiguity as potentially positive as it may allow pastors more professional autonomy, Faucett, Corwyn, and Poling view role conflict as a prospective source of eustress for pastors with a strong sense of mission. From their perspective, the seemingly negligible effect of role conflict on satisfaction when role ambiguity is minimal

may relate to the strength and clarity of ministers' spiritual calling. . . . Clergy with a firm, unambiguous inner sense of calling may take conflict in stride, perhaps even welcome it to some extent, believing theological conflict to be inevitable in the struggle to win hearts and minds for God.²²⁷

Conversely, according to Faucett, Corwyn, and Poling, role ambiguity for intrinsic aspects of ministry may reflect "a sense of the relativity of personal religious beliefs, ontological insecurity, and existential angst, resulting in less resilience in the face of role ambiguity," which in turn amplifies the effect of role conflict on job satisfaction when role ambiguity is high.²²⁸ Cynicism may be a particular hazard for ministers with more precarious personal religious beliefs.²²⁹

The works of Kemery and of Faucett, Corwyn, and Poling, both suggest that organizational strategies for reducing role conflict might be valuable for increasing ministers' job satisfaction. Kemery, in particular proposed training in various aspects of management such as conflict management, collaborative decision making, program development, and agenda setting.²³⁰ Burns, Chapman, and Guthrie observed that new

²²⁶Wells, "Moderating Effects," 873.

²²⁷Faucett, Corwyn, and Poling, "Clergy Role Stress," 299.

²²⁸Ibid.

²²⁹Maureen H. Miner, "Changes in Burnout Over the First 12 Months in Ministry: Links with Stress and Orientation to Ministry," *Mental Health, Religion & Culture* 10, no. 1 (2007): 9.

²³⁰Kemery, "Clergy Role Stress and Satisfaction," 567.

ministers are often shocked by the number of leadership and management skills their vocation entails, and at how poorly their training prepared them for these aspects of ministry.²³¹ Interestingly, Burns, Chapman, and Guthrie implicitly view role ambiguity as having a positive effect, as it allows pastors to develop the *artistic* facet of leadership. However, the more pragmatic elements of leadership and management are best acquired through training, both prior to and after entering the ministry.²³²

A convergence of the trends Francis, Wulff, and Robbins observed as affecting contemporary ministries has led to the phenomenon known in the US Presbyterian church as “yoked congregations” and in the Church of England as “multi-parish benefices”: ministers who serve more than one church.²³³ At least superficially, this type of structure would seem to produce role stress. In response to suggestion that this phenomenon may exacerbate stresses and burnout, Francis, Wulff, and Robbins conducted a survey of 735 Presbyterian clergy, including 13 percent serving two congregations and 5 percent who serve three or more congregations. The instruments used were the FBI and the brief EPQR. The findings showed no significant differences on burnout or satisfaction depending on whether the clergy served one or more congregations.²³⁴

Occupational stress is known to intrude on the personal lives of religious clergy. Wells is involved in exploring the relationship of occupational stress to the physical and emotional health of religious clergy. One of the gaps he observed in research relates to the impact of work-to-family conflict on job satisfaction and health.²³⁵ Wells explored

²³¹Burns, Chapman, and Guthrie, *Resilient Ministry*, 200.

²³²*Ibid.*, 201.

²³³Francis, Robbins, and Wulff, “Are Clergy Serving Yoked Congregations More Vulnerable?,” 114.

²³⁴*Ibid.*, 115.

²³⁵Carl R. Wells, “The Effects of Work-Related and Boundary-Related Stress on the Emotional and Physical Health Status of Ordained Clergy,” *Pastoral Psychology* 62, no. 1 (2013): 103.

this issue in a national sample of 883 sole or senior pastors drawn from more than 80 denominations and faith groups. The instruments used captured clergy stress and perceptions of health.²³⁶

Analyzed independently, work stress exerted a definite impact on health, demonstrating that high levels of work stress were detrimental to physical and emotional health.²³⁷ Boundary stress analyzed independently affected physical and emotional health in a similar manner. When both types of stress were included in the model, both manifestations of stress affected physical and emotional stress. Congregational and denominational support worked to decrease the negative effects of both sources of stress on physical and emotional health.²³⁸

Voluntary and Involuntary Termination

Barna Research reports that mainline congregations are served by the same pastor for only about four years.²³⁹ There are many reasons for a pastor leaving a church, from opportunity to a moral failure. However, what would be interesting to understand is exactly what role stress and burnout play in the decision of both voluntary and forced terminations. Are there any warning signs or determining factors that become predictors to help make sense of these terminations? In this section, the research related to the risk of leaving ministry either voluntary or involuntary is presented.

²³⁶Wells, "The Effects of Work-Related and Boundary-Related Stress," 104.

²³⁷Ibid., 114.

²³⁸Wells, "Moderating Effects," 884.

²³⁹George Barna, "Report Examines the State of Mainline Protestant Churches," accessed November 11, 2016, <https://www.barna.com/research/report-examines-the-state-of-mainline-protestant-churches/#>.

Risk of Leaving the Ministry

The literature presented throughout this chapter, as well as the previous chapter, shows the growing number of clergy exiting the ministry. Spencer, Winston, and Bocarnea investigated the probability of voluntary or forced resignation in a sample of 285 evangelical pastors who responded to an online survey using the Pastors at Risk Instrument (PaRI).²⁴⁰ The PaRI was developed by Charles Wickman, who devoted more than twenty years to exploring the various factors that make clergy vulnerable to leaving the ministry. The forty-two-item instrument encompasses the dimensions of burnout operationalized in the MBI with items specific to ministry. Demographic data revealed that 36 percent of the respondents were between the ages of 35 and 49, which Wickman found to be the most challenging years for clergy.²⁴¹ A similar proportion of pastors (34 percent) were serving their first church, while a majority (53 percent) were serving their second or third church. More than half (55 percent) reported their church's attendance had recently declined or plateaued, 30 percent had no regular support team, and 28 percent helmed a church that had forced a pastor to resign at some point.²⁴²

Two key issues emerged from the analysis: vision conflict and compassion fatigue.²⁴³ According to Spencer, Winston, and Bocarnea, while the term *vision conflict* per se has not been defined in the empirical literature, it is implicit in the disparity expressed by many clergy between their expectations upon entering the ministry and the realities of their experiences.²⁴⁴ In the PaRI, vision conflict is expressed through items portraying dissatisfaction, limited sense of joy, and loss of meaning and calling. Spencer,

²⁴⁰Spencer, Winston, and Bocarnea, "Predicting the Level of Pastors at Risk," 85-98.

²⁴¹Ibid., 85.

²⁴²Ibid., 87.

²⁴³Ibid., 88.

²⁴⁴Ibid., 91.

Winston, and Bocarnea also view vision conflict in relation to clergy members' sense of calling and motives for entering the ministry.²⁴⁵

Unlike vision conflict, compassion fatigue is recognized in the scholarly theoretical and empirical literature and has also appeared in the popular media.²⁴⁶ Spencer, Winston, and Bocarnea advocate focusing attention to issues surrounding vision conflict and compassion fatigue for the purpose of primary and secondary prevention of burnout.²⁴⁷

As part of his ongoing research on Anglican clergy in England and Wales, Randall investigated factors that predispose clergy to contemplate leaving the ministry. The 234 respondents were 78 percent male (77 percent in the original sample) and most were in their 30s (36 percent) and 40s (39 percent), the age range when clergy are thought to be most vulnerable to leaving.²⁴⁸ Beyond demographic data, the survey encompasses churchmanship, personality (as assessed by the EPQR-S), and work-related psychological health, captured by the SEEM and SIMS.²⁴⁹

Although Randall's earlier findings showed that 28 percent of the women had left the ministry, female and male respondents were equally likely to have contemplated leaving the ministry. Younger clergy considered leaving more often, which supports the idea that younger clergy are most in need of support. Although age is often inversely related to burnout, it is difficult to discern whether older clergy (or other professionals) have developed more effective coping skills over time or whether attrition has left a

²⁴⁵Spencer, Winston, and Bocarnea, "Predicting the Level of Pastors at Risk," 88-89.

²⁴⁶See Galek et al., "Burnout, Secondary Traumatic Stress, and Social Support," 633-49; Kinman, McFall, and Rodriguez, "The Cost of Caring?," 671-80; Hendron, Irving, and Taylor, "The Unseen Cost," 221-31; Spencer, Winston, and Bocarnea, "Predicting the Level of Pastors' Risk," 85-98.

²⁴⁷Spencer, Winston, and Bocarnea, "Predicting the Level of Pastors at Risk," 95.

²⁴⁸Randall, "Examining Thoughts," 182.

²⁴⁹Ibid., 183.

particularly hardy and resilient group.²⁵⁰ Wells advocates mentoring for younger clergy.²⁵¹

Randall had previously argued providing personnel and pastoral support for clergy within the first ten years of their ministry should be a key priority. In terms of churchmanship, the findings revealed that liberal clergy were most inclined to consider leaving, which might be ascribed to less concern with security by ministers with a liberal orientation, or to a mismatch between the theology of the minister and a more conservative congregation.²⁵²

A liberal orientation is often associated with openness to experience.²⁵³ In the Pace Studies, seminarians who viewed change as a challenge and opportunity as opposed to a threat or an obstacle displayed significantly lower situational and trait anxiety.²⁵⁴ This pattern is consistent with Lazarus and Folkman's transactional theory of coping.²⁵⁵ Specific to those who choose a religious vocation, seminarians who saw opportunity in change also viewed themselves, according to Harbaugh and Rogers, as "individuals with choices and options" and were "conscious of Christ's presence and care in time of adversity."²⁵⁶ They were prone to engage in self-care (particularly physical exercise) and display spiritual discipline. It should not be surprising that individuals who welcome challenge and change might consider the possibility of a new vocation. However, the

²⁵⁰Randall, "Examining Thoughts," 186-87.

²⁵¹Wells, "The Effects of Work-Related and Boundary-Related Stress," 101; Wells, "Moderating Effects," 873.

²⁵²Randall, "Examining Thoughts," 183.

²⁵³Ibid.

²⁵⁴Harbaugh and Rogers, "Pastoral Burnout," 104.

²⁵⁵Lazarus and Folkman, "Transactional Theory and Research," 159.

²⁵⁶Harbaugh and Rogers, "Pastoral Burnout," 103.

juxtaposition of Harbaugh and Rogers' and Randall's findings suggest that without specific support churches may risk losing a subgroup of resilient and talented clergy. Given the traumatic nature of forced termination, the prospect that clergy may leave due to a mismatch between the minister and the congregation should be an important concern for church leaders.²⁵⁷

Consistent with the overall body of research on burnout and personality, ministers who scored lower on extraversion and higher on neuroticism were significantly more predisposed to consider leaving.²⁵⁸ Among work-related factors, not unexpectedly, clergy who reported higher levels of emotional exhaustion and diminished satisfaction were more inclined to contemplate leaving. Randall noted that these findings correspond to earlier research with MBI. He concluded, "At the very least, pastoral care and attention should be paid to young, liberal, introverted, emotionally unstable clergy."²⁵⁹

Novice Ministers

The Pace Studies revealed high levels of stress that often persisted from the time students entered the seminary into their first three years in the parish or even longer.²⁶⁰ The narratives of active ministers show that many feel their training failed to prepare them for leadership roles, and in particular, left them poorly equipped to deal with emotions: their own as well as their congregants.²⁶¹ Harbaugh and Rogers ascribed the pervasive stress to the failure of seminaries to recognize and respond to the presence of significant levels of stress, and of particular note, the failure to recognize the urgent

²⁵⁷Tanner and Zvonkovic, "Forced to Leave," 713; Tanner, Wherry, and Zvonkovic, "Clergy Who Experience Trauma," 1281.

²⁵⁸Randall, "Examining Thoughts."

²⁵⁹Ibid., 187.

²⁶⁰Harbaugh and Rogers, "Pastoral Burnout."

²⁶¹Burns, Chapman, and Guthrie, *Resilient Ministry*, 103-8.

need for pastoral self-care.²⁶² Three decades later these issues are still poorly addressed, leaving pastors at high risk for stress and burnout.²⁶³

From the perspective of secularization theory, Miner proposed that ministers who are *cognitively secularized*, that is, open to the prospect that their beliefs could change, would be vulnerable to existential anxiety.²⁶⁴ Harbaugh and Rogers' conception of openness to change and challenge did not necessarily involve change of beliefs. From the opposite standpoint, Miner's research also suggested that in a time of increasing secularization, ministers who are *privatized*, those whose beliefs are unquestioned but still precarious, are prone to high levels of stress and burnout.²⁶⁵ In research using the *Orientations to the Demands of Ministry Survey* (ODM-S), composed of the three dimensions of spiritual connectedness, autonomy, and efficacy, Miner found strong associations between an external orientation and anxiety, depression, and burnout.²⁶⁶ However, the ODM-S did not differentiate between a privatized and cognitively secularized orientation, leading Miner to develop an exploratory measure of openness to change of beliefs for future research.²⁶⁷

Miner's research took place with 60 graduating theology students recruited from colleges in Sydney, Australia. The participants had a mean age of nearly 34 years and 72 percent had some experience in paid ministry (34 percent 2 years or less, 28 percent 3-10 years) before earning formal theological credentials. At the time of the

²⁶²Harbaugh and Rogers, "Pastoral Burnout," 104.

²⁶³Burns, Chapman, and Guthrie, *Resilient Ministry*, 103.

²⁶⁴Miner, "Changes in Burnout," 26-27.

²⁶⁵Miner, "Burnout in the First Year of Ministry," 28.

²⁶⁶*Ibid.*, 26.

²⁶⁷*Ibid.*, 27.

survey, all were in the first 12 months of their ministry.²⁶⁸ In addition to the ODM-S and items designed to capture openness to changing beliefs, the participants were assessed with the MBI, the Neo Five Factor Inventory (NEO-FFI), and measures of depression and trait anxiety.²⁶⁹

As a group, the new ministers experienced moderate levels of burnout. Similarly, anxiety and depression were relatively low.²⁷⁰ According to Miner, high levels of burnout are most prevalent 6 to 20 years after ordination rather than at the onset of one's vocation. At the same time, the findings disclosed certain attributes that might identify theological students at higher risk for psychological distress. Not surprisingly, neuroticism was the strongest predictor of depression, anxiety, and emotional exhaustion. As Miner proposed, being open to changing beliefs was also associated with psychological distress, emerging as the key predictor of depersonalization. In contrast, extraversion predicted high personal accomplishment, reflecting the social nature of ministry.²⁷¹ In view of the risk of burnout associated with more precarious Christian beliefs, Miner suggested that secularization theory could enhance the ability to identify students and clergy at risk for burnout and devise appropriate intervention strategies.²⁷²

Forced Termination

According to Tanner and Zvonkovic, amidst a growing body of scholarly literature on stress and burnout in ministry, the topic of forced termination, and its

²⁶⁸Miner, "Burnout in the First Year of Ministry," 20-21.

²⁶⁹Ibid., 21-22.

²⁷⁰Ibid., 24.

²⁷¹Ibid., 26.

²⁷²Ibid., 28.

psychologically damaging consequences, has largely been ignored.²⁷³ Indeed, one of the few studies to examine the issue was the pilot study conducted by Tanner and Zvonkovic. The proportion of pastors (28 percent) in the survey of Spencer, Winston, and Bocarnea whose church had previously forced a minister to resign is not insignificant.²⁷⁴ Tanner and Zvonkovic argue that the ministry presents a unique work environment in which workplace demands and stressors intrude upon the private lives of ministers and their spouses. Rather than being controlled by impersonal entities such as stockholders or boards of directors, the church is controlled by the members who call it “home.”²⁷⁵ As a result, forced termination is typically not due to organizational changes but to a “demeaning and systematic process” in which an instigator enlists key congregation members as “sympathizers” in an effort to blame the minister for problems confronting the church.²⁷⁶ In workplace settings, this phenomenon is known as *mobbing*, defined by Tanner and Zvonkovic as a process by which a “victim is subjected to a systematic, stigmatizing process and encroachment of his or her civil rights.”²⁷⁷

In their pilot project involving 227 active Assemblies of God ministers in the Southwest, Tanner and Zvonkovic found that 41 percent had experienced forced termination. Compared to their colleagues who had not had that experience, these ministers reported poorer general health, along with a lower sense of family well-being and higher levels of psychological stress. However, variations based on the interaction of stress with perceived family well-being and personal health highlighted the individual

²⁷³Tanner and Zvonkovic, “Forced to Leave,” 722.

²⁷⁴Spencer, Winston, Bocarnea, “Predicting the Level of Pastors’ Risk,” 87.

²⁷⁵Tanner and Zvonkovic, “Forced to Leave,” 714.

²⁷⁶Ibid., 716.

²⁷⁷Ibid.

nature of people's responses to stress.²⁷⁸ Specifically, ministers who had been terminated but had a strong sense of family well-being and enjoyed good personal health did not display signs of stress, suggesting that family support and positive health behaviors served as effective resources for coping with stress.²⁷⁹

Building on the work of Tanner and Zvonkovic, Tanner, Wherry, and Zvonkovic explored the effects of forced termination on ministers' psychological health. For this research they developed the *Perceptions of Terminated Ministers* (PTM) scale. In light of the distressful nature of forced termination, the revised version (PTM-R) included five questions reflecting symptoms of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD). For further assessment of psychological trauma, the study included the Impact of Event Scale: Revised (IES-R), along with the Back Anxiety Inventory (BAI), the Negative Acts Questionnaire (NAQ) to capture mobbing, and versions of the SEEM and the SIMS. The participants represented a purposive sample of 55 clergy from various denominations.²⁸⁰

The findings clearly demonstrated the detrimental impact of forced termination on ministers' mental health.²⁸¹ Ministers who were forced to resign were subjected to mobbing and other forms of psychological harassment, often leading to clinical levels of symptoms of PTSD and anxiety. Alarming, close to half (46 percent) of the ministers surpassed the clinical cut-off for PTSD and more than one-third (36 percent) exceeded the clinical cut-off for generalized anxiety disorder (GAD). Moreover, for many participants, the traumatic event had occurred more than a year earlier yet their anxiety

²⁷⁸Tanner and Zvonkovic, "Forced to Leave," 722. Also see Lazarus, "Psychological Stress," 3; Richard S. Lazarus and Susan Folkman, *Stress, Appraisal, and Coping* (New York: Springer, 1984); Lazarus and Folkman, "Transactional Theory and Research," 141.

²⁷⁹Tanner and Zvonkovic, "Forced to Leave," 713.

²⁸⁰Tanner, Wherry, and Zvonkovic, "Clergy Who Experience Trauma," 1286.

²⁸¹*Ibid.*, 1291.

persisted.²⁸² Although Doolittle did not examine the reasons for which pastors had left a position, he observed a “residual toxic effect” of having served a traumatic church, which adversely affected their current ministry.²⁸³ Of the issues leading to forced termination, unresolved conflict and loyalty to the previous minister accounted for 23 percent of the variations in perceptions of termination.²⁸⁴ In fact, the pastors’ perceptions had the most powerful impact on their psychological health.

Based on their findings, Tanner, Wherry, and Zvonkovic call on Christian organizations to recognize the devastating impact of forced termination, and make efforts to raise awareness and devise solutions to this pervasive problem. They propose training for leaders of local churches on recognizing and dealing with psychological abuse as well as training for seminarians on coping with such abuse. In particular, they call on governing bodies of Christian ministries to acknowledge the problem and “take appropriate steps to protect those that are called on to serve the Church.”²⁸⁵

Holistic Health in Religious Clergy

When surveying the populist literature on burnout and stress management, the content often takes one aspect of the minister’s life and focuses on developing that aspect to help mitigate the negative effects of stress and to prevent burnout. However, ministers are complex individuals that encompass a multiplicity of inter- and intrapersonal factors. Truly, it is hard to determine where the spiritual life ends and the physical life begins, not to mention the intertwining of the emotional into both of them. Therefore, a minister cannot be completely understood in such segmented categories, but rather, the whole of the person

²⁸²Tanner, Wherry, and Zvonkovic, “Clergy Who Experience Trauma,” 1292.

²⁸³Doolittle, “The Impact of Behaviors,” 93.

²⁸⁴Tanner, Wherry, and Zvonkovic, “Clergy Who Experience Trauma,” 1291.

²⁸⁵Ibid., 1292.

should be considered. The life dynamics of a minister cannot be compartmentalized but should be understood more like concentric circles. Something is at the center and it impacts everything else that surrounds it. This is what is meant by a “holistic” approach.

According to Proeschold-Bell et al., spiritual well-being can be an important element of a holistic model of health, especially for clergy in view of the significance of God to their personal and professional lives.²⁸⁶ However, measuring spiritual-wellbeing is complicated. Proeschold-Bell et al. created a measure of closeness to God for Christian clergy, the Clergy Spiritual Well-being Scale, which they subjected to psychometric analysis at two time points.²⁸⁷ The sample was composed of United Methodist clergy who completed two surveys, in 2008 and 2010. The MBI was included in the study, along with measures of psychological distress (depression and anxiety) and quality of life. The analysis supported a two-factor model consisting of the Presence of God in Daily Life and the Presence and Power of God in Ministry.²⁸⁸ The researchers view the Clergy Spiritual Well-being Scale as a promising instrument for the assessment of holistic health in Christian clergy.²⁸⁹

The recommendations of Proeschold-Bell et al. for reducing stress and enhancing physical, psychological, and spiritual health include peer support marked by confidentiality and trust, training for pastors in conflict resolution and boundary setting, institutional support for strategies to improve health, and a compensation structure based on experience, which might be perceived as fairer than the current reward system and would ensure that pastors are not penalized for seeking mental health services.²⁹⁰

²⁸⁶Proeschold-Bell et al., “Closeness to God,” 891.

²⁸⁷Ibid., 884.

²⁸⁸Ibid., 884-85.

²⁸⁹Ibid., 891.

²⁹⁰Proeschold-Bell et al., “A Theoretical Model,” 714-16.

Although the Socioecological Framework is obviously specific to a particular denomination, the use of an ecological framework for developing a model of holistic health for religious clergy can be a valuable tool for understanding stress and burnout and designing appropriate interventions can be adapted to fit any faith or denomination. Pastors would benefit greatly from such a support structure but an emphasis on “self-care” cannot be overstated. At some point, pastors must take responsibility for their own health and the care and maintenance of their whole self.

Self-Compassion

Finlay-Jones, Rees, and Kane explain that self-compassion has been conceptualized as an

adaptive form of self-relation that involves three primary capacities: cultivating mindful awareness of one’s own suffering; treating oneself with understanding and kindness during times of difficulty; and relating one’s stressful experiences to the wider perspective of human experience.²⁹¹

Self-compassion is consistently linked with lower levels of anxiety and depression. As described by Johnson and O’Brien, self-compassion exerts this effect by “soothing or pre-empting the operation of the ego-threat system.”²⁹² In their research, self-compassion effectively reduced depressive symptoms in shame-prone individuals.

Reflection and low self-esteem are additional markers of activation of the ego-threat system.²⁹³ From this perspective, interventions designed to increase self-compassion

²⁹¹Amy L. Finlay-Jones, Clare S. Rees, and Robert T. Kane, “Self-Compassion, Emotion Regulation and Stress among Australian Psychologists: Testing an Emotion Regulation Model of Self-Compassion Using Structural Equation Modeling,” *PloS One* 10, no. 7 (2015): 2.

²⁹²Edward A. Johnson and Karen A. O’Brien, “Self-Compassion Soothes the Savage Ego-Threat System: Effects on Negative Affect, Shame, Rumination, and Depressive Symptoms,” *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology* 32 (2013): 958.

²⁹³*Ibid.*

may be especially valuable for reducing stress and preventing burnout in clergy who have tenuous self-esteem.²⁹⁴

Barnard and Curry explored the association of clergy burnout to self-compassion, desire to please others, and guilt or shame proneness. The participants were 75 United Methodist clergy who completed the FBI, the Test of Self-Conscious Affect-3 (TOSCA-3), which was also used by Johnson and O'Brien to assess shame and guilt proneness, the Self-Compassion Scale (SCS), and the Differentiation of Self from Role-clergy version (DSRC).²⁹⁵ As anticipated, the findings revealed that clergy who were higher in self-compassion enjoyed greater satisfaction in ministry and experienced lower levels of emotional exhaustion. The other personality factors examined were associated with neither satisfaction nor emotional exhaustion to any significant degree.²⁹⁶ Johnson and O'Brien found that, unlike shame, guilt was not affected by self-compassion, suggesting that guilt is not part of the ego-threat system.²⁹⁷

Based on their findings, Barnard and Curry recommend strategies designed to increase self-compassion to prevent burnout in clergy.²⁹⁸ In their examination of self-compassion, emotion regulation, and stress in psychologists, Finlay-Jones et al. observed that self-compassion did not directly affect stress, but rather, self-compassion reduced stress by neutralizing self-regulation difficulties. Notably, this effect was observed after controlling for neuroticism, which is consistently associated with emotion regulation difficulties, and in turn with stress and burnout.²⁹⁹

²⁹⁴Grosch and Olsen, "Clergy Burnout," 619.

²⁹⁵Barnard and Curry, "The Relationship of Clergy Burnout," 152-53.

²⁹⁶Ibid., 159.

²⁹⁷Johnson and O'Brien, "Self-Compassion Soothes the Savage Ego-Threat System," 959.

²⁹⁸Ibid., 160, 161.

²⁹⁹Finlay-Jones, Rees, and Kane, "Self-Compassion, Emotion Regulation and Stress," 10. See also Francis, Robbins, and Wulff, "Are Clergy Serving Yoked Congregations More Vulnerable?," 113-16;

Emotion regulation is a facet of emotional intelligence. Emotional intelligence (EI) has been conceptualized in various ways. The model delineated by Mayer, Salovey, and Caruso consists of four branches: (1) perceiving emotions in the self and others (2) facilitating thought and using emotions, which is essential for effective communication, (3) understanding emotions, and (4) managing emotions.³⁰⁰ Interestingly, the most striking finding in the study Hendron et al. conducted with Irish clergy is that EI tended to be relatively low; in fact, the mean score not only fell below the mean for groups of mental health professionals, but also below the mean for other occupational groups, and even groups composed of prisoners.³⁰¹

Developing Self-Compassion through Intensive Therapy

Hendron et al. called for further exploration of why these pastors in their research ranked so low in their levels of EI. Given the heavily interpersonal nature of ministry, they recommend training to increase EI in religious clergy.³⁰² Burns, Chapman, and Guthrie recommend prayer, reflection, and journaling for cultivating EI as well as regular physical exercise to promote emotional recovery from compassion fatigue.³⁰³

Muse, Love, and Christensen, described the Clergy in Kairos program at the Pastoral Institute, a unique program that provides intensive week-long outpatient therapy for clergy who succumb to depression and burnout. Reflecting Grosch and Olsen's conceptual of clergy burnout as rooted in childhood experiences, the program is designed

Joseph et al., "The Relationship Between Personality, Burnout, and Engagement," 276-88; Miner, "Burnout in the First Year of Ministry"; Randall, "Examining Thoughts."

³⁰⁰Hendron, Irving, and Taylor, "The Emotionally Intelligent Ministry," 472.

³⁰¹Ibid., 475.

³⁰²Ibid., 476.

³⁰³Burns, Chapman, and Guthrie, *Resilient Ministry*, 117-19.

to help clergy “find compassion for the child they once were in order to lay down the compulsive cross-bearing of a suppressed childhood” and “willingly embrace the cross of freedom, charismatically supported by grace from the wellspring of faith and love.”³⁰⁴

Clergy in Kairos provides highly individualized program, making use of multiple therapists and drawing from psychodynamic and systems theory, mindfulness, and spiritual direction.³⁰⁵ For the purpose of evaluating program effectiveness, the participants were assessed on burnout and depression at the onset of the program and at a six-month follow-up. For qualitative responses, an exit interview was conducted with each participant at the end of the week-long intervention. In addition, the quasi-experimental design involved a control group.³⁰⁶ The multi-denominational sample included 144 clergy members in the treatment and control groups.³⁰⁷

In response to the intensive intervention, the treatment group enjoyed significant improvements on depression, emotional exhaustion, and depersonalization. Furthermore, at the six-month assessment, the intervention participants exhibited normal levels of burnout and depression while the control group members continued to have elevated levels.³⁰⁸ An intriguing finding was that at the onset of the study, the treatment group had a higher sense of personal accomplishment than the control group despite having equivalent levels of emotional exhaustion and depersonalization.³⁰⁹ Muse, Love, and Christensen, interpreted this as a sign of resilience in clergy who sought treatment before their burnout

³⁰⁴Muse, Love, and Christensen, “Intensive Outpatient Therapy,” 152.

³⁰⁵Ibid.

³⁰⁶Ibid., 153.

³⁰⁷Ibid., 154.

³⁰⁸Ibid., 155.

³⁰⁹Ibid., 155-56.

intensified. However, the treatment group was not entirely self-selected as some clergy members were mandated to treatment.³¹⁰

In several studies, clergy members were aware of their levels of burnout and engaged in self-care behaviors on their own.³¹¹ Perhaps clergy who are more attuned to their psychological and emotional states are more agreeable to engaging in self-care or help-seeking behaviors. Muse, Love, and Christensen conclude that the week-long intensive intervention could “make a significant difference in the lives of persons who get treatment before their exhaustion has penetrated deep enough into their soul to bring their sense of self-worth and their call into question.”³¹²

Resiliency in Ministry

Resilience has been defined as a “successful adaptation despite challenging and threatening circumstances.”³¹³ As the literature has made abundantly clear, stress in ministry is inevitable. The goal of pastoral ministry is not to be stress free but to handle stress in appropriate ways that allow for growth and benefit, resulting in resiliency. Resilience can serve as inoculation against burnout. The overarching aim of the Pastors Summit, an ambitious six-year project involving 73 pastors and their families from 26 US states, was to illuminate factors that promote resilient ministry.³¹⁴ The pastors were carefully chosen based on a range of criteria for pastoral excellence, which was conceptualized in terms of *fruitfulness*, denoting Christian leaders who “bear fruit by

³¹⁰Muse, Love, and Christensen, “Intensive Outpatient Therapy,” 156.

³¹¹See Berry et al., “Ministry and Stress”; Charlton et al., “Clergy Work-Related Psychological Health”; Doolittle “The Impact of Behaviors.”

³¹²Muse, Love, and Christensen, “Intensive Outpatient Therapy,” 156.

³¹³Wendy Kliewer, “Resiliency,” in *Baker Encyclopedia of Psychology & Counseling*, 2nd ed, ed. David Benner and Peter Hill (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999), 1037.

³¹⁴Burns, Chapman, and Guthrie, *Resilient Ministry*, 112-13.

sharing their faith and nurturing the fruit of God's grace in their own lives and in the lives of others."³¹⁵

Faithfulness and success are both embedded in fruitfulness. Ultimately, five key themes emerged from the analysis of the voluminous data: (1) Spiritual formation is the process of personal maturation. Because pastors can have so much going on with busy schedules and lifestyles, they can become distracted from being self-aware to the demise of their own spiritual health. (2) Self-care involves the pastor taking a holistic approach to their own health. The research found that many pastors are tempted to find their identity solely in their role as a pastor. Self-care sets boundaries to focus on responsibilities and gratifying activities outside of their church work. (3) Emotional and cultural intelligence is the ability of pastors to be aware of their own feelings and emotions as well as the emotions of others and then responding appropriately. It is the ability to understand the differences that exist in personal relationships and learning from them instead of dreading them. (4) The marriage and family theme recognizes the importance of family as an asset to health and stability and making sure that adequate and intentional time is spent developing those crucial relationships. (5) Leadership and management may be the more underdeveloped of the five themes as it requires not only the resolve to lead the church with vision and tenacity, but to also manage the aspects of that vision responsibly through clear communication and delegation.

These five themes have been mentioned throughout this chapter and should be highlighted for both the benefit and detriment that they can be to a pastor. The benefits are obvious as attention to these themes in one's life will increase opportunities to create a balanced life. The only detriment would be to think that these themes are an end unto themselves. The goal is not just a balanced life, but a balanced life that serves as a catalyst to the Great Commission. Angela Duckworth highlights this goal-focused life and adds

³¹⁵Burns, Chapman, and Guthrie, *Resilient Ministry*, 13.

some important perspective. Duckworth lays out four elements of what she refers to as “grit”: interest, the capacity to practice, purpose, and hope. She summarizes, “To be gritty is to keep putting one foot in front of the other. To be gritty is to hold fast to an interesting and purposeful goal. To be gritty is to invest, day after week after year, in challenging practice. To be gritty is to fall down seven times, and rise eight.”³¹⁶ This “grit” is the heart of resiliency. What a pastor believes about what he does will be significant to the effort he puts forth in those activities. These beliefs can provide stability and meaning in times of difficulty.

Aaron Antonovsky proposes a “salutogenic model” of health and illness. In his model, he postulates that it is, in fact, stress that offers the opportunity for wellness. It is the value of what a person strives for that gives meaning to their struggles, which he calls “coherence.” Coherence is “a belief that life is comprehensible, manageable, and meaningful,” and explains why some people remain healthy despite stress.³¹⁷ This definition is an articulation of resiliency. Burnout is when circumstances endure longer than the person, but resiliency is when the person refuses to give up. This person does not just endure to succeed; rather, they find value in the process of enduring. Duckworth explains,

They are the opposite of complacent. And yet, in a very real sense, they are satisfied being unsatisfied. Chasing something of unparalleled interest and importance, and it is the chase—as much as the capture—that is gratifying. Even if it is boring, or frustrating, or even painful, they don't dream of giving up. Their passion is enduring.³¹⁸

Duckworth's words are not dissimilar to that of the apostle Paul's view of current sufferings in light of future glory (2 Cor 4:17-18).

³¹⁶Angela Duckworth, *Grit: The Power of Passion and Perseverance* (New York: Scribner, 2016), 275.

³¹⁷Maurice Mittelmark et al., eds., *The Handbook of Salutogenesis* (New York: Springer, 2017), 10.

³¹⁸Duckworth, *Grit*, 8.

Conclusion

In sum, an accumulating body of theoretical and empirical literature describes excessively high levels of stress and burnout in religious clergy. To a significant degree, this is not an unusual occurrence among caring professionals.³¹⁹ As knowledge of the burnout phenomenon expanded, it became evident that it is not limited to people-oriented professions and typically involves an interaction of personal and organizational characteristics. In the case of religious clergy, predisposition to burnout is heightened by factors such as unrealistic expectations (on the part of congregation members as well as self-imposed) and prioritizing the needs of others to the neglect of self-care.³²⁰

Paradoxically, self-care is essential for enabling clergy to carry out their vocation to serve. Self-care is an intrinsic element of resilient ministry.³²¹ Cultivating self-compassion may be an essential step in incorporating self-care behaviors into ministry. An array of coping strategies and self-care behaviors can effectively reduce vulnerability to stress and burnout. However, it is important to point out that self-care cannot be considered independent of complementing strategies as well as a biblical perspective.

For instance, in Mark 12:30-31, Jesus responds to the questions posed to him about what the greatest commandment would be. He responded, “And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’ The second is this: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.”³²² James Edwards comments on this passage:

Jesus’ answer avoids the danger of mysticism, which results in a detached and disembodied love of God; as well as the danger of humanism, which acts toward

³¹⁹Maslach, Schaufeli, and Leiter, “Job Burnout,” 397.

³²⁰Burns, Chapman, and Guthrie, *Resilient Ministry*, 61-63; Scott and Lovell, “The Rural Pastors Initiative,” 71.

³²¹Burns, Chapman, and Guthrie, *Resilient Ministry*, 63-64.

³²²All Scripture references are from the English Standard Version, unless otherwise noted.

humanity without reference to God and without the understanding that human beings are inviolable creatures of God.³²³

Interestingly, this verse fits into the larger research and literature of burnout. In the process of burnout there comes a point where the minister will experience a decrease in personal accomplishment. Many pastors go into ministry to help others, and yet it is those same people who become their source of stress (emotional exhaustion), which can cause the pastor to view them with disdain (depersonalization).

Therefore, it is key to understand that Jesus says to love your neighbor “as you love yourself.” To get to the point of having disdain for those who were originally the target of compassion would mean that a comparison between self and other has taken place and the determination made that “self” is worthier than the “other.” Duckworth highlights the antithesis of this when she points out that people with “grit” are “other’s focused.” Not only that, but this focus on others is a part of living with “purpose.” She states, “At its core, the idea of purpose is the idea that what we do matters to people other than ourselves.”³²⁴

Surely ideals such as self-care, self-compassion, and self-awareness are beneficial for ministers to understand and practice. However, the heart of Jesus’ statement is focused on the “neighbor” and not “self.” William Lane states,

Jesus responds to the question about the *first* commandment with reference to the first and second because they are inseparable. A whole-hearted love for God necessarily finds its expression in a selfless concern for another man which decides and acts in a manner consistent with itself.³²⁵

In other words, when a pastor gets to the point of allowing himself to have disdain for those he is called to serve, he has forgotten this commandment and has lapsed in seeing that person as created in the image of God. So, physical weariness has translated

³²³James Edwards, *The Gospel according to Mark*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 372.

³²⁴Duckworth, *Grit*, 145.

³²⁵William Lane, *The Gospel of Mark*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), 432.

to spiritual weariness. That is not to say that self-care is not important, for surely it is (as the literature in this chapter has attested to), but from a biblical perspective it is not the *only* focus. Therefore, there is a need for balance. Lane's explanation taken with Edwards promotes a sense of awareness of God, others, and self. Self-compassion is important but should be understood as a means to an end and not the end itself. Therefore, the lack of self-compassion is a marker or a symptom of something that is wrong.

With the literature and research developing so rapidly, the temptation is to think that there is a specific answer to make ministry less stressful and more enjoyable, or to find that one coping mechanism that can be implemented in stressful times to make the feeling pass more quickly or to distract from the negative experience. However, it is important to contextualize the research within biblical truth. Paul writes,

This light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal. (2 Cor 4:17-18)

Paul is reminding his readers what must also be kept in mind when studying the literature on stress and burnout and implementing subsequent conclusions. The reminder is sobering, and that reminder is that it is human nature to want to strive for stress-free environments and to avoid suffering at all costs. While it is never the case that pastors are called to create stress for themselves, or even to desire it, it is to be expected and even embraced when it does come, and to understand that, while only temporary, it serves the purpose of eternal joy, and as Paul declares, it even carries an eternal weight of glory! Powlison, eloquently writes of the application in modern context of the truth that Paul wrote about so long ago:

There are countless ways to simply lessen anxiety feelings: vigorous exercise, getting all the facts, Prozac, cognitive behavioral therapy, finding the best possible doctor, yoga, a vacation in Bermuda, a glass of wine, getting some distance from the problem, finding support from fellow sufferers, throwing yourself into work. Some of these are fine in their place. But none of them will make you fearless in the face of trouble. None of them creates that fruit of the Spirit called "endurance," which is mentioned repeatedly when the New Testament talks about God's purposes in suffering. None of the strategies for personal peace gives you the disposition and power to love another person considerably in the small choices of daily life. None

of them gives you high joy in knowing that your entire life is a holy experiment as God's hands shape you into the image of his Son. None of them changes the way you suffer by embedding it in deeper meaning. None gives you a reason to persevere in fruitfulness through all your days, even if the scope of your obedience is constricted to your interactions with nurses at your bedside. Grace also teaches wise love. In fact, fearless endurance is for the purpose of wise love. God is making you like Jesus in the hardships of real life.³²⁶

The goal is growth and spiritual maturity *through* the difficulties of life and the stressors of ministry. The growing precedent literature research brings clarity to the causes of stress, healthy and unhealthy responses to stress, and even the way that stress impacts so many facets of a pastor's life, such as their family, ministry, and self. Still, the literature must be understood in light of biblical truth, which is why this study fills a void in the literature. One area absent in the literature is the collective voice of ministers that are located in growing, effective churches and have already experienced longevity in ministry. If one were to listen solely to those who have overcome these stressors to demonstrate effectiveness and longevity in ministry, would it provide a sense of validation to insight presented in the research? Would they describe aspects of resiliency and grit?

Therefore, considering research presented in this chapter, it was the goal of this project to add to the growing body of literature focused on this on-going problem of stress and burnout in the pastorate. The focus of this research was to interview twenty pastors who have experienced longevity and fruitfulness in ministry. The interviews did not seek to presume on the precedent literature, but allowed for the pastors to add their voices and perceptions on how they encountered, dealt with, and even learned from the stressors of ministry. With the analysis and conclusions drawn for the emerging themes, there is hope that what these pastors reveal can bring light and understanding not only to resiliency, but also longevity for other pastors.

Duckworth states, "Many of us, it seems, quit what we start far too early and far too often. Even more than the effort a gritty person puts in on a single day, what

³²⁶Piper, *Suffering and the Sovereignty of God*, 165.

matters is that they wake up the next day, and the next, ready to get on that treadmill and keep going.”³²⁷ It is the ambition of this project to put information and insight into the hands of young pastors, weary pastors, and those who educate and support them. It is this ambition that drove the formulation of the methodology used in this project. In the next chapter, the development and protocol of this study is explained. This protocol allowed for the pastor participants to speak openly and candidly about their perceptions of ministry stressors as well as what keeps them going and growing.

³²⁷Duckworth, *Grit*, 50.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGICAL DESIGN

The preceding literature suggests that the role of “pastor” creates the opportunity for monumental levels of stress. As shown in chapter 2, a multiplicity of research has addressed the issues of burnout and its presence in pastoral ministry. However, missing from the literature base is the perspective of pastors who have escaped the clutches of burnout and occupational stress. What a valuable, yet untapped, resource! How do pastors think about their roles? How do pastors feel about the pressures of ministry? What is the thought process that leads to a pastor’s specific actions in dealing with occupational stress?

The first objective of this study was to discover commonly expressed themes by exploring the precedent literature regarding occupational stress and pastoral burnout. The second objective was to take that knowledge base and talk with pastors who have faced occupational stressors without succumbing to burnout. A better understanding of this phenomenon will allow unseasoned pastors to proceed from a more informed perspective in terms of personal practices and spiritual disciplines. In accomplishing this second objective, twenty pastors were interviewed who complement the purposive criteria for this project. Then, the essence that surfaced from those interviews was compared with findings in the literature base presented in chapter 2.

This chapter outlines the purpose and appropriateness of the research methodology that was employed, including procedures and methods, instrumentation, population and sampling, and delimitations. The chapter concludes with a consideration for limitations of the research as well as generalizability. A strict adherence to these proposed controls promoted and preserved a greater assurance of the study’s validity and reliability.

Research Questions Synopsis

In an effort to illuminate the research problem, the following research questions were addressed as they relate to the central question: How do tenured, successful pastors perceive their experiences in managing the common factors of occupational stress and burnout?

1. What statements describe their experiences?
2. What themes emerge from these experiences?
3. What are the observable common patterns, if any, in the life of these pastors that exhibit stages of growth, modulation, and/or adaptation in their experiences?
4. What is the overall essence of their experiences?

Research Design Overview

After the research protocol was approved by the Ethics Committee, a study of the experiences and perceptions of twenty purposively selected pastors was conducted.¹ The research procedure followed a qualitative, phenomenological method of study.

Qualitative Design

John Creswell describes the purpose of qualitative research as “exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem.”² It is an avenue to approach research philosophically, and the focus is on the concern of understanding how specific events are experienced, interpreted, and understood.

The unique intent of the qualitative perspective is to examine the interaction, social situation, or some other phenomenon by allowing the researcher to attempt entrance

¹Matthew B. Miles, A. Michael Huberman, and Johnny Saldaña, *Qualitative Data Analysis* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1994). The number of 20 pastors was used to assure a “well-saturated” theory. See also John Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing among Five Traditions* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2007), 126; and Kathy Charmaz, *Constructing Grounded Theory* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2006).

²John Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2009), 4.

into the world of the research concern from a more holistic understanding.³ The emphasis of this methodological approach is on discovery and description in an effort to extrapolate meaning from the observed experience.⁴ Merriam states that qualitative research is

an effort to understand situations in their uniqueness as part of a particular context and the interactions there. This understanding is an end in itself, so that it is not attempting to predict what may happen in the future necessarily, but to understand the nature of that setting—what it means for participants to be in that setting, what their lives are like, what’s going on for them, what their meanings are, what the world looks like in that particular setting. . . . The analysis strives for depth of understanding.⁵

This inductive process takes large amounts of content from interviews, document reviews, and/or personal observations, and then categorizes them in an effort to identify patterns within the larger categories. The research intends to discover meaning, which emerges from the data somewhat “organically.”⁶ The researcher is the primary research instrument because of the idiographic nature of qualitative research; adaption throughout the process is highly desired. This need for adaptation, facilitated by the “human” element, makes the researcher the key figure in collecting, summarizing, and interpreting the emerging data.⁷

For several reasons, a qualitative research design provided the best framework for interpreting pastoral burnout from the stakeholders’ perspective.⁸ First, my role as a pastor in a local congregation with fourteen years of experience in the same church will

³John Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2009), 61-62.

⁴Ibid., 64.

⁵Sharan B. Merriam, *Qualitative Research in Practice: Examples for Discussion and Analysis* (San Francisco: Jossey Bass, 2002), 5.

⁶James H. McMillan and Sally Schumacher, *Research in Education: A Conceptual Introduction* (New York: HarperCollins College Publishers, 1993), 479.

⁷Merriam, *Qualitative Research in Practice*, 5. See also Creswell, *Research Design*, 175.

⁸Bonnie Yegidis, Robert Weinbach, and Barbara Morrison-Rodriguez, *Research Methods for Social Workers* (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 2012), 17.

afford great insights into the conversations and resulting information from other pastors. Second, personal experience with burnout and occupational stress resulting from the role of a pastor will allow for empathy with participants. Third, my years in ministry have provided many contacts through denominational agencies, seminary professors, college professors, and other colleagues in ministry, and proved to be invaluable in identifying and selecting qualified participants. Lastly, the aim of this project was not to test a theory, but to discover meaning, gain understanding, and to find “essence.”⁹ This research protocol and its underlying assumptions stand well within the conceptual framework and intentions of this project.

Phenomenological Method

Within the framework of a qualitative approach, the present study was most suited for a phenomenological design. As a form of research methodology, phenomenology is a qualitative research approach committed to the examination of how people make sense of their major life experiences.¹⁰ John Creswell describes qualitative phenomenological research as a strategy of inquiry in which the researcher identifies the essence of lived human experiences about a phenomenon described by the participants.¹¹ Nieswiadomy explains this process as the researcher setting aside his or her own experiences in an attempt to understand those of the participants in the study.¹²

⁹Creswell, *Research Design*, 3-4

¹⁰Jonathan A. Smith, Paul Flowers, and Michael Larkin, *Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2012) 50-51. See also Bruce L. Berg, *Qualitative Research Methods* (Boston: Allyn & Bacon, 2004); Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design*; Sharan Merriam, *Qualitative Research and Case Study Application in Education* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1998); Sharan Merriam, *Qualitative Research in Practice* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2002); Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, *Qualitative Data Analysis*; Robert Stake, “The Case Study Method in Social Inquiry,” in *The American Tradition in Qualitative Research*, ed. Norman Denzin and Yvonna Lincoln (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2001), 2:131-38.

¹¹Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design*, 57-58.

¹²Rose Mary Nieswiadomy, *Foundations of Nursing Research* (Norwalk, CT: Appleton &

For Edmund Husserl, phenomenology involves the careful examination of human experience. He was particularly interested in finding a means by which someone might come to accurately know his own experience of a given phenomenon, and would do so with a depth and rigor, which might allow him to identify the essential qualities of that experience. Husserl reasoned that if this could be done, then these essential features of an experience would transcend the particular circumstances of their appearance, and might then illuminate a given experience for others, too.¹³

This research project and its stated goals fit well into Husserl's criteria because the intended purpose was to understand how some pastors can avoid the detrimental effects of occupational stress and burnout; the same phenomenon that overwhelmingly has a negative impact in other pastors' lives and ministry experiences.

Population

When it comes to identifying and selecting the participants for a phenomenological study, Moustakas states that there are no "in-advance criteria." In fact, he indicates that the central requirement is that the participant has experienced the phenomenon being studied, which in this case was occupational longevity in a single ministry setting.¹⁴ However, more specific criteria was needed to prevent the introduction of possible participants that may have experienced the phenomenon of longevity, but their ministry setting does not create the same levels of stress. For example, a pastor in a rural setting may serve in a church for fifteen years or longer, but may not have the demands and expectations that are placed on other pastors for various reasons. Thus, the goal was to find pastors that not only have experienced longevity in ministry, but have

Lange, 1993).

¹³Edmund Husserl, *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy* (Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Kluwer, 1982), 79.

¹⁴Clark Moustakas, *Phenomenological Research Methods* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1994), 107.

also had ample opportunity to experience the effects of occupational stress.

The research population for this study was senior/lead pastors who have served in that capacity in one church for a period of no less than fifteen years. The goal was to find pastors who have experienced stress in their ministry tenure at that church and yet have remained in service there despite the personal impacts stress often creates (as noted in the research presented in chapter 2). Each potential participant was presented to the expert panel for consideration for suitability to partake in the study.

Overall, these pastors were from large churches (with only one having less than a thousand congregants), some have served as leaders in their respective denominations, some oversaw large building programs. Other factors also considered were large-scale outreach programs, formation of multi-sites, or the development and implementation of a church planting strategy. Each of these factors, as well as growth in church attendance, greatly increases the opportunity and intensity of occupational stress for pastors. However, each participant was validated by the expert panel and a short anonymous biography of each pastor was presented in chapter 4 detailing their suitability for the study.

Sampling

A purposive sampling procedure was used to select this study's participants. The purposive sampling approach provided participants that are "information rich" about stress in ministry and yielded the pertinent information about the phenomenon these participants experienced. This approach to sampling is typically used in a phenomenological methodology.¹⁵

Participants were selected through personal referrals and connected individuals

¹⁵Meredith D. Gall, Walter R. Borg, and Joyce P. Gall, *Educational Research: An Introduction* (White Plains, NY: Longman, 1996), 310. See also Michael Q. Patton, *Qualitative Evaluation and Research Methods*, 2nd ed. (Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 1990); and David Silverman, *Doing Qualitative Research: A Practical Handbook* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2000).

who had professional dealings with this population.¹⁶ Thus, a “snowball sampling” strategy was employed in which each participant or potential participant was asked to refer other individuals whom they may know to be qualified according to the aforementioned established criteria.¹⁷ This “criterion-based” sampling is quite different from a population sample typically used in a quantitative study.¹⁸ Instead of randomly selected participants from a larger population, these participants were selected because they can provide a particular perspective on the research topic that the majority of the population will not have.¹⁹ As Smith, Flowers, and Larkin explain, “They ‘represent’ a perspective, rather than a population.”²⁰

In determining an adequate and appropriate sample size, researchers do not have a consensus. Some state that one person is enough, but most agree that the number of sufficiency lies somewhere between three and ten participants.²¹ Creswell suggests that the ideal size is three to six, stating that “this should provide sufficient cases for the development of meaningful points of similarity and difference between participants.”²² The size of the sample for this project was twenty participants, which was determined

¹⁶Smith, Flowers, and Larkin, *Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis*, 48-49.

¹⁷Patton, *Qualitative Evaluation and Research Methods*. See also Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, *Qualitative Data Analysis*.

¹⁸Linda Dale Bloomberg and Marie Volpe, *Completing Your Qualitative Dissertation* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2012), 104.

¹⁹Ibid.

²⁰Smith, Flowers, and Larkin, *Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis*, 49.

²¹Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design*, 126. Creswell references several studies that range from 1 participant to 325. He references several researchers and their proposals for sample sizes that will create a “well-saturated theory.” Particular Sheree Dukes, “Phenomenological Methodology in the Human Sciences,” *Journal of Religious Health* 23 (1984): 197, recommends 3 to 10 participants. Dorris J. Riemen, “The Essential Structure in a Caring Interaction: Doing Phenomenology,” in Patricia Munhall, *Nursing Research: A Qualitative Perspective* (Norwalk, CT: Apple Century Crofts, 2006), 85, studied 10 individuals.

²²Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design*, 51. See also Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln, *Handbook of Qualitative Research* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1994), 202.

through dialog with the project chairperson to ensure a thorough project and well saturated theory. Clearly, this meets and exceeds the suggested number of participants by the majority of researchers for a phenomenological research protocol.

Delimitations and Limitations

This study was delimited to the position of senior pastor (or lead pastor). It is not intended to suggest that senior pastors are necessarily the most likely to experience occupational stress. The delimitation served only as an added safeguard to create as much consistency and similarity between participants as possible.

This study was delimited to pastors who have served a minimum of fifteen years in one location. This delimitation is an effort to exclude a pastor who may seem to have had success in ministry but reacts to stress and/or burnout by leaving to take on a new ministry endeavor. Again, this is only for the purposes of this study and is not an indication that every pastor who moves on to another church is coping with burnout.

This study was delimited to pastors of churches that meet at least one of the following criteria: (1) attendance of over 1000, (2) an annual budget of over one million dollars, (3) a building program during the tenure of the pastor, or (4) an addition of a second or multiple campuses.²³ Pastors who have worked through any of these growth issues during their tenure have most likely endured seasons of stress and possibly burnout. Great care was taken to only include pastors of which no one would argue with their suitability and qualification for this project.

This study was also delimited to pastors serving in evangelical churches. Excluding pastors who are part of other theological persuasions is not meant to minimize the presence of stress in their respective roles, but only to create a level of homogeneity in

²³Any criterion outside that stated here was approved by the expert panel and approved by the dissertation chair before inclusion for the study. All criteria considered for qualification were included in the introductory biography included in chap. 4 of this project.

the sample selection.²⁴ Smith, Flowers, and Larkin explain,

The purposive homogeneous sampling is not seen as treating the members of the sample as an identikit. Quite the contrary, by making the group as uniform as possible according to obvious social factors or other theoretical factors relevant to the study, one can then examine in detail psychological variability within the group, by analyzing the pattern of convergence and divergence which arises.²⁵

With regard to the possible limitations to this study, several factors within the conceptual framework of the study could be seen as limitations. The qualitative research methodology itself presents potential limitations. This limitation is rooted in the process of analysis, which ultimately rests with the thinking and decision-making ability of the researcher. This decision-making process opens the door for limitation based on a researcher's assumptions, interest, perceptions, and general biases.

One of the key limitations of this study is the issue of subjectivity and potential biases regarding my profession as a pastor. However, with the admitted biases comes extra scrutiny on the research protocol and added measures to prevent any influence from such bias. These measures were detailed in the section on research procedures.

Another perceived limitation of this project could be the opinion that the sample size is too limited or that the limited size could constrain the possibility of generalizing the findings to other pastors and/or contexts. However, as previously stated, transferability, not generalizability, is the intended goal of phenomenological research and this study in particular.²⁶ Transferability is the way in which a reader determines whether, and to what extent, this particular phenomenon in this particular context can be transferred to a different context. Patton calls this "context bound extrapolations," which

²⁴Nineteen of the twenty participants are from autonomous churches and one participant serves in a United Methodist church in which pastors are placed in a church by the bishop annually. However, the participant in this study had a unique situation in that he remains at the United Methodist Church he founded 37 years ago.

²⁵Smith, Flowers, and Larkin, *Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis*, 49.

²⁶Smith, Flowers, and Larkin, *Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis*, 51.

he defines as “speculations on the likely applicability of findings to other situations under similar, but not identical, conditions.”²⁷ With this perspective in mind, issue of transferability was enhanced through the rich, thick descriptive language that emerged from the interview process and created a relatable picture of the participants and their context. This depth and richness help to provide viability of the discoveries within this qualitative account to a broader context and application.²⁸

In an effort to account for these potential limitations, the research agenda and stated assumptions were acknowledged up front to allow for critique and evaluation of coding schemes and the ensuing interpretive grid through peer review, and all interviews were professionally transcribed. These documents do not contain the participants’ names to limit the potential association of any material or data with a particular participant. Despite the proposed study’s bounded nature, specific lessons may apply to other situations because “the general lies in the particular.”²⁹ Readers can learn vicariously when a relevant narrative can become a model they can follow.³⁰

Raising awareness of pastoral burnout is the first step toward implementing the essence originating from those who have endured its relentless assault, having grown and adapted from their experience. Implications for the church-at-large are significant. The meanings and applications that originate from this study could prove invaluable to struggling pastors in the throes of burnout as well as circumspection for unseasoned ministers in the dawn of their ministry career.

²⁷Patton, *Qualitative Research and Evaluation Methods*, 489.

²⁸Thomas H. Schram, *Conceptualizing Qualitative Inquiry* (Columbus, OH: Merrill Prentice Hall, 2003).

²⁹Fredrick Erikson, “Qualitative Methods of Research on Teaching,” in *Handbook of Research on Teaching*, ed. Martin C. Whittrock (Old Tappan, NJ: Macmillan, 1986), 152.

³⁰Elliot Eisner, *The Enlightened Eye: Qualitative Inquiry and the Enhancement of Educational Practice* (Old Tappan, NJ: Macmillan, 1991), 199.

Research Instrumentation

For a phenomenological study, a research protocol that allows for rich, detailed first-person account of the participants' experiences is ideal. Smith, Flowers, and Larkin point out that in-depth interviews and research diaries/journals are ideal instruments for acquiring this kind of data: "These facilitate the elicitation of stories, thoughts, and feelings about the phenomenon."³¹ The participants need to be granted the freedom to speak freely, openly, and comfortably to facilitate the kind of rich data needed for a meaningful project. The process of data collection and analysis took place in three stages. Each of these stages with their respective instrumentation was detailed in the section on "Research Procedures."

Research Procedures: Phase 1, Preliminary Procedures

The following paragraphs outline and describe the progressing phases of the research protocol. The study developed methodically over three phases of data collection and analysis: (1) preliminary, (2) interview schedule, and (3) data organization.

This study sought to understand the phenomenon of pastors who are able to mitigate the harmful effects of stress prevalent in ministry contexts; therefore, criteria was developed that served to identify potential participants and provided them an opportunity to tell their stories and share their perspectives. As previously mentioned, qualifying participants were purposively selected, having served in one ministry locale for at least fifteen years, and led churches that met the aforementioned criteria of a healthy pattern.

Creation of Questions/Schedule

Tailoring the questions for the interview process is a balanced approach. Open-ended questions allow for the participant to share what they feel is important and relevant. Congruent is the need for the interview to be productive. The productivity

³¹Smith, Flowers, and Larkin, *Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis*, 56.

comes from influence of the research questions, which are foundational to creation of the interview questions; therefore, the research questions and precedent literature determine the direction and content of the interview questions.

The questions were open-ended and worded in such a way as to not make assumptions about the participants' experiences, values, or concerns. Well-formed questions will not lead the participants toward certain answers, which protects the reliability of the research itself.

Expert Panel

The next step in this first phase was to form an expert panel to assist in sharpening the research questions and protocol. This panel consisted of three individuals who retain a research or professional doctorate degree and offered expertise in the direction of this project.

Burke Johnson, Ph.D. Johnson is a professor at the University of South Alabama in the Department of Education. He has a Ph.D. REMS (research, evaluation, measurement and statistics) from the University of Georgia. In addition, he has graduate degrees in psychology, sociology, and public administration. Johnson has authored, co-authored and edited several books and articles.³² Johnson is a recognized authority of research and statistics, and his *Educational Research: Quantitative, Qualitative, and Mixed Approaches* is used by many universities as their text for statistics. His expertise in research protocol and statistics and deep understanding of NVivo statistical software will help to create a solid project with the necessary validity and reliability measures in place.

³²Burke Johnson and Larry Christensen, *Educational Research: Quantitative, Qualitative, and Mixed Approaches*, 5th ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2014); Larry B. Christensen, R. Burke Johnson, and Lisa A. Turner, *Research Methods, Design, and Analysis*, 12th ed. (New York: Pearson, 2014); Paul W. Vogt and Burke Johnson, *The SAGE Dictionary of Statistics and Methodology*, 5th ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2015); Burke Johnson and Sharlene Hesse-Biber, *The Oxford Handbook of Multimethod and Mixed Methods Research Inquiry* (New York: Oxford University Press,(2015); Burke Johnson and Paul Vogt, eds., *Correlation and Regression Analysis* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2012); and Larry Sullivan et al., eds., *The SAGE Glossary of the Social and Behavioral Sciences* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2009).

Johnson will serve as the chair of this expert panel.

Alison Rudd, Ed.D., M.S.N., R.N. Rudd serves as the director of the Human Simulation Program in the nursing department of the University of South Alabama, where she also serves as a professor. Rudd has served as a nurse in local hospitals as well as has experience in the academy. Since nursing is a helping profession with similarities to the caring profession of a pastorate, and with her background in research and education, her insight was invaluable to this project.

Ed Litton, D.Min. Litton is the Senior Pastor of Redemption Church in Mobile, Alabama. Litton holds an M.Div. from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary and a Doctor of Ministry from the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. Litton has served on the board of trustees at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary and has served as the president of the Pastor's Conference of the Southern Baptist Convention. He has planted a church, Mountain View Community Church in Tucson, Arizona. He is currently the Senior Pastor at Redemption Church (formerly North Mobile Baptist Church) in Mobile, Alabama, where he has been for twenty-three years. Litton has experienced longevity in his current pastorate and his connection to other pastors proved to be a great benefit for this project, both in his perspectives of ministry and his assistance in locating qualified pastors to serve as participants.

This panel has reviewed and provided feedback about the wording, direction, and clarity of the research questions, as well as the number of total questions appropriate for the interview schedule. These observations were taken into consideration and incorporated, then resubmitted for approval.

Formation of Interview Protocol

After the questions were sharpened by the input of the expert panel, a protocol was developed that formed the schedule for each of the twenty interviews. The interview process took place face-to-face. The interview process was loosely structured allowing

open-ended questions to guide the discussion. Ultimately, the goal was to encourage the interviewee to speak freely about their self-perceptions related to the phenomenon. The interviews were digitally recorded by video with a separate audio recording for back up. Each interview was subsequently transcribed. The purpose of using video was to take into consideration body language, verbal pauses, and emotional responses that could give more richness and depth in the data collection. After the successful conclusion of this project, the audio/video recordings were destroyed to protect the privacy of the participants.

The following principles were used to create the interview schedule:

1. The interview questions were created to reflect the nature of the research questions.
2. The scope of topics to be considered were arranged in a logical order.
3. Along with each of the open-ended questions, corresponding secondary prompts were formulated.
4. The questions were scrutinized by the expert panel and subsequently adjusted.
5. Two pilot interviews were conducted to test the interview protocol for appropriateness and flow of discussion.
6. The interview questions/schedule was again adjusted from this process and reviewed by the expert panel.

This process assisted in formulating the final number of questions as well as their specific wording and sequence. A copy of the research protocol can be found in appendix 1.

Research Journal

A research journal was kept throughout the project detailing processes, background information, and other relevant aspects of the interview environment. Also recorded in the journal were personal discoveries, frustrations, and developmental characteristics of the interviewer about the on-going project. The journal was used in the process of analysis in developing “rich, thick descriptions”³³ and is one way of reflecting on the data as to engage what Heidegger refers to as the “hermeneutic circle,” allowing

³³Creswell, *Research Design*, 191, 180-81.

the researcher to move fluidly between the “parts” and the “whole” of the text.³⁴

Pilot Interviews

In a further attempt to ensure quality as well as validity, two pilot interviews were conducted after the formation of the interview protocol and schedule. The two interviews were not included in the findings of the overall research; however, they were treated as such, employing all the scrutiny and reliability measures expected in the actual research. The purpose of the pilot interviews was twofold. First, they demonstrated the availability of participants and practicality of the research procedures. Adjustments and adaptations to the research schedule served to make the project more fluid and productive. As Locke, Spirduso, and Silverman state, “The modest pilot study is the best possible basis for making wise decisions in designing research.”³⁵ Second, the pilot interviews provided an opportunity to become familiar with the interview schedule and unexpected developments that inevitably arise throughout the interview process.³⁶ A familiarity with the interview protocol helped to facilitate a smooth discussion without interruptions or unneeded distractions.

Along with two pilot interviews, the preliminary themes that emerged from the precedent literature were considered against the research questions for evaluation. From this process, the series of open-ended questions were finalized. This flexible interview schedule allowed for unpredicted yet fortuitous directions to emerge during the interview.

³⁴Smith, Flowers, and Larkin, *Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis*, 27-28.

³⁵Lawrence Locke, Waneen Spirduso, and Stephen Silverman, *Proposals That Work* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2000), 171.

³⁶David R. Krathwohl and Nick L. Smith, *How to Prepare a Dissertation Proposal* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2005), 130.

Research Procedures: Phase 2, Interview Schedule

The method of in-depth phenomenological interviewing is a method that combines “life history” interviewing and focused, in-depth interviewing informed by assumptions drawn from phenomenology.³⁷ Smith, Flowers, and Larkin state, “The aim of developing a schedule is to facilitate a comfortable interaction with the participant which will in turn, enable them to provide a detailed account of the experience under investigation.”³⁸ Similarly, Kvale and Brinkann suggest, “A successful interview is about entering the subject’s setting, interacting collaboratively, finding meaning in themes, capturing the complexity of nuances, allowing for ambiguity, responding to new insights, and opening new doors.”³⁹

With this in-depth and personal approach in mind, one could conclude that the importance of phase 2 was not just asking questions and recording answers. On the contrary, the major task was building on and exploring responses to discover their essence. The goal was to have the participants reconstruct their experiences within the framework of occupational stress and burnout.

One of the keys to this particular phase was to build rapport with the participants through the interview process, which is where the largest amount of data was collected from the twenty semi-structured interviews—a crucial aspect to the success of the project. Many authors have offered great insight into technique and awareness during the interviews. Kvale and Brinkann point out, “An interview is literally an inter-view, an inter-change of views between two persons conversing about a theme of mutual interest.”⁴⁰

³⁷Irving Seidman, *Interviewing as Qualitative Research* (New York: Teacher’s College Press, 2006), 15.

³⁸Smith, Flowers, and Larkin, *Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis*, 59

³⁹Steinar Kvale and Svend Brinkmann, *Interviews: Learning the Craft of Qualitative Research Interviewing*, 2nd ed. (Los Angeles: Sage, 2009), 28.

⁴⁰Kvale and Brinkmann, *Interviews*, 2.

Interview quality depends more on skill and judgment than systematic methodology.⁴¹

Smith reminds that the participant is the experiential expert on the topic in hand; therefore, they should be given much leeway in taking the interview to “the thing itself.”⁴²

Member Checking

Also a part of phase 3, member checking, actually began in phase 2 since each interview was transcribed in that phase. Even though member checking served as a measure of reliability, it also helped to ensure that accuracy was included through the interview process of phase 2. Participants were solicited to provide input on the credibility of the project findings and interpretations and they were also provided with “quotable quotes” from their interviews. They were offered the opportunity to provide feedback and make any modification to clarify their true intent. Lincoln and Guba consider this approach to be “the most critical technique to establishing credibility.”⁴³ After the analysis, participants were provided with the themes, or “essence,” that emerged from the research and were offered an opportunity to provide feedback and insight regarding those deductions. In short, participants could examine rough drafts of the findings and offer insight into wording, critical observations, or even analysis.⁴⁴ This feedback opportunity allowed the participants to play a major role in the findings as well as the data collection process.

Research Procedures: Phase 3, Data Organization

After data collection, the goal of the analysis was to interpret this large amount of data, consolidate the information, identify significant patterns, and then to construct a

⁴¹Kvale and Brinkmann, *Interviews*, 17.

⁴²Smith, Flowers, and Larkin, *Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis*, 58.

⁴³Yvonna Lincoln and Egan Guba, *Naturalistic Inquiry* (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage, 1985), 314.

⁴⁴Stake, “The Case Study Method,” 131-38.

framework. The formal process of data analysis began with a coding process. Coding allowed for the categorizing of information and applying descriptors to pertinent data. The initial codes were determined by the precedent literature and research questions. However, this methodology allowed for new codes to be developed as unexpected themes emerge from the data. Pre-coding was based on common themes found in the literature review. All interviews were digitally recorded by video and audio. The video was primary with the audio serving the purpose of a backup in case anything went wrong with the video recording.⁴⁵ This combination of pre-coding and developmental coding helped to organize the data more efficiently while also preserving the unique perspectives of the participants.⁴⁶

The purpose of the coding process was to take large amounts of information and break them apart to examine smaller details. In the analysis of the information, the picture of an integrated explanation for the phenomenon is created by putting the pieces back together.

Overall, the approach allowed for a number of clusters and themes to be linked together, similarly or divergently, to collectively describe the research concern. A three-step approach was employed in analyzing the resulting data. First, each category was examined for emerging patterns in the data. Second, the categories were evaluated, as a whole, to determine if there are any associations linking the categories. Last, the categories were compared back against the precedent literature.

After the data was collected, the process of organizing the data for analysis began the next phase of the project. A close “line-by-line” analysis of the transcripts from the interviews was used to identify and become familiar with the experiential claims,

⁴⁵Paul Leedy and Janice Ormrod, *Practical Research: Planning and Designing* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2005), 142.

⁴⁶*Ibid.*, 187.

concerns, and understandings of each of the participants.⁴⁷ After becoming familiar with the data, the focus of the project transitioned to identifying the major themes or emergent patterns. These patterns and themes were developed by searching for information within the experience and the rich data that speaks to convergence and divergence within singular experiences as well as between the collective experiences of the participants.

Data Analysis

Simply stated, data analysis is the crucial step for making sense of the collected data so that inferences and conclusion can be drawn.⁴⁸ Although there are many approaches to data analysis, three broad categories stand out that encompass a large majority of them: word counts, computer programs such as NVivo, and human scored. Word counts look for correlations with the number of times a particular word shows up.⁴⁹ For this project, the human-scored approach was implemented, where the text was coded and then grouped into categories, which are, in turn, grouped into meanings, or “essences.” NVivo software was used to assist in identifying themes and for grouping. John Creswell suggests that, for this approach to research, a combination of human coding with the assistance of a content analysis software is a more reliable and preferable than using either of the approaches independently.⁵⁰

The content was coded by a combination of predetermined codes while also allowing for the development of unique, emerging codes.⁵¹ These codes were used to generate a description of categories or themes for analysis. Finally, interpretations were

⁴⁷Michael Larkin, Simon Watts, and Elizabeth Clifton, “Giving Voice and Making Sense in Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis,” *Qualitative Research in Psychology* 3 (2006): 102-20.

⁴⁸Krathwohl and Smith, *How to Prepare a Dissertation*, 132.

⁴⁹Smith, Flowers, and Larkin, *Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis*, 98.

⁵⁰Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design*, 165-66.

⁵¹Robert C. Bogdan and Sari K. Biklen, *Qualitative Research for Education: An Introduction to Theory and Methods* (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1992), 166-72.

made from the major themes and descriptions that emerge from the data. In preparing the data, files were created and organized for data, re-read through the text making notes in the margin and forming initial codes, describe personal experiences through bracketing, describe the essence of the phenomenon, develop significant statements, and group statements into units of meaning.

Reliability Measures

This project sought to approach a subject matter that is reflective and personal on the part of both the researcher and the participants. Therefore, the analysis should reflect the quintessence of the research. Smith, Flowers, and Larkin assert, “Analysis is an interactive process of fluid description and engagement with the transcript. It involves flexible thinking, processes of reduction, expansion, revision, creativity and expansion.”⁵² For such a project, reliability and validity measures become crucial to arrive at viable conclusions. In an effort to achieve an acceptable degree of reliability, this project utilized an assemblage of supervision, collaboration, and audit to help test and develop the coherence and plausibility of the interpretations. Specifically, four methods were employed.⁵³ The first method, member checking, was discussed in phase 2 detailed earlier in this chapter. The last three are (1) rich, thick descriptions, (2) peer debriefing, and (3) external audit.

Rich, Thick Descriptions

A rich, thick description conveyed the findings. The aforementioned research journal served as a dossier of setting, mood, tone, mannerisms, emotions, body language, and/or anything that allows for the reader to get a fuller picture of how the interviews

⁵²Smith, Flowers, and Larkin, *Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis*, 61.

⁵³Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design*, 209, suggests that at least two measures should be employed to assure reliability. For the purposes of this project, four were employed.

developed. This data from the journal can assist readers in making decisions about “transferability” as these details and variables are described in detail. This detailed communiqué will aid readers in transferring information to other settings, or warrant whether the findings can be transferred because of “shared characteristics.”⁵⁴

External Audit

Finally, Brad Vermurlen Ph.D., a sociologist and independent reviewer, oversaw an independent external audit of the entire project. This independent reviewer examined both the process and the product of the project. In assessing the product of the project, Vermurlen conducted a thorough examination of the findings, interpretations, and conclusions to ensure that they are supported by the data.⁵⁵ His suggestions were considered and utilized appropriately to enhance the overall quality of the project.

In summary, this project utilized a qualitative approach to a phenomenological study of how some pastors dealt with the negative effects of occupational stress and, instead, learn and grow from these experiences. A purposive sample provided the participants needed, and open-ended questions were developed from the precedent literature to guide the interview protocol. The transcriptions from the interviews serve as the data source for analysis. Four specific validation measures (rich, thick description, inter-coder agreement, member checking, and an external audit) were employed to ensure reliability. The knowledge obtained through the twenty individual interviews will subsequently form the foundation for the overall discoveries of this study. Each interviewee was identified by a pseudonym, and all interviews were digitally recorded and subsequently transcribed.⁵⁶

⁵⁴David Erlandson et al., *Doing Naturalistic Inquiry: A Guide To Methods* (Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 1993). See also Lincoln and Guba, *Naturalistic Inquiry*; and Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design*.

⁵⁵Denzin and Lincoln, *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, 439.

⁵⁶Creswell, *Research Design*, 191.

Research Assumptions

Based on experience and background as a lead pastor in a local church context, evidence from the precedent literature, and statistical data, five primary assumptions were made regarding this study.

First, the issue of professional burnout is prominent among senior pastors. This assumption is based on the evidence derived from precedent literature and statistical support. Second, a high percentage of pastors feel ill-equipped to handle the rigors of ministry. This assumption is guided by a common admission by pastors who have admittedly been overwhelmed by professional stress in ministry. Third, successful pastors who have served in one location over a long period of time have experienced stress factors that lead to burnout to a similar degree as those who succumbed to those factors. This assumption is based on the premise that, although church cultures vary based on denomination, culture, and expectation, the situations and factors that cause stress (e.g., relationships, ministry demands, time management) are prevalent in every ministry context.

A fourth assumption is that participants will reflect candidly and accurately about their past experiences. This assumption is based on my personal experience as a pastor and the desire to provide beneficial data that will potentially help other pastors experience meaningful growth in ministry. Fifth, and finally, it is assumed that a maturation process taking place in the ministry context of these participating pastors is resulting from, at least in part, their adaptability and developed response mechanisms to the stress factors. This assumption is premised on the notion that there is a practical explanation for their continued growth and success in their respective ministry context over an extended period of time.

Rationale and Significance

The rationale for this study emanated from a desire to understand the phenomenon of how some pastors are able to mitigate the negative aspects of occupational stress to experience growth and longevity in ministry. In addition, the hope was to provide

insights for new and young pastors that will assist them in identifying and dealing with the stress of ministry and to uncover ways to equip pastors in general to recognize and adapt to factors of occupational stress that provide for the opportunity of a long and fulfilled ministry experience. These pastors may be currently frustrated, stalled at some stage of the spiritual or professional development, or may be contemplating abandoning their ministry calling altogether.

Increased understanding of the developmental process of these tenured pastors and their development of the skills needed to adapt to and learn from stressors within ministry may not only reduce the number of pastors that experience burnout, but it may also increase the potential for greater numbers of pastors to experience successful and fulfilled ministry work. The development of these skills in younger pastors may not only provide for a more rewarding professional and personal experience, but could potentially serve to benefit their families and the church culture in which they serve

Summary

In summary, this chapter provided a detailed description of the study's research methodology. A qualitative phenomenological study was employed to understand the phenomenon of why some pastors are able to avoid the negative impact of stress and burnout that affects so many of their colleagues. The participant sample was made up of twenty purposefully selected pastors. The data collection method used was individual interviews. The interview questions were determined by precedent literature and the established research questions. In the analysis stage, research questions were reviewed against the precedent literature on burnout and occupational stress to find corresponding themes.

Various strategies were employed to enhance dependability and trustworthiness of the results. A conceptual framework was developed for the analysis of the study that includes a coding system for key themes. The findings were reviewed and validated by qualified colleagues. Interpretation and conclusions were drawn from the analysis and

further studies were recommended. This study contributes to the understanding of how some pastors are able to overcome the prevalent influences of stress and burnout to achieve occupational longevity and spiritual maturation.

CHAPTER 4

ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS

This study sought to explore the phenomenon of why some pastors are able to manage and benefit from occupational stressors that lead other pastors to burnout, in hopes of finding some elements of perspectives and practices that could be identified, categorized, and explained to the benefit of young pastors going into ministry, as well as those who find themselves in the throes of stress and burnout in their current ministry.

In an effort to illuminate the research problem, the following research questions were addressed: *Central Question*: How do tenured, successful pastors perceive their experiences in managing the common factors of occupational stress and burnout?

1. What statements describe their experiences?
2. What themes emerge from these experiences?
3. What are the observable common patterns, if any, in the life of these pastors that exhibit stages of growth, modification, and/or adaptation in their experiences?
4. What is the overall essence of their experiences?

Compilation Protocol

For this phenomenological study, the research protocol allowed for rich, detailed first-person account of the participants' experiences through in-depth interviews. The study developed progressively over three phases of data collection and analysis: (1) preliminary, (2) interview schedule, and (3) data organization. After interview questions were sharpened by the input of the expert panel, a protocol was developed that formed the schedule for

each of the twenty interviews.¹ All interviews were digitally recorded, and transcribed verbatim for accuracy.²

All interviews were analyzed using NVivo software and with the aid of a statistician. The formal process of data analysis began with a coding process, which was determined by the precedent literature and research questions. A three-step approach was used to analyze the resulting data. First, each category was reviewed for emerging patterns in the data. Second, the categories were evaluated as a whole to determine if there were any connections relating the categories. Last, the categories were compared and contrasted against the precedent literature.

Demographic and Sample Data

The research population for this study was senior/lead pastors who have served in that capacity in one church for a period of no less than fifteen years. This study was delimited to pastors of churches that meet at least one of the following criteria:

(1) attendance of over 1000, (2) an annual budget of over one million dollars, (3) a building program during the tenure of the pastor, (4) an addition of a second or multiple campuses. Some may question the level of stress that pastors in large churches experience being transferable to other pastors in smaller churches with less staff to assist in day to day ministry. However, research has shown that the larger the church the more hours the pastor works.³ Relatedly, many of the pastors interviewed for this project identified that the greatest source of their stress came from issues of dealing with and managing staff members.⁴

¹The interview protocol can be found in appendix 1.

²Transcriptions of all twenty interviews in their entirety are included in appendix 2.

³Bob Burns, Tasha D. Chapman, and Donald C. Guthrie, *Resilient Ministry: What Pastors Told Us about Surviving and Thriving* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2013), 15.

⁴See table 1 for distribution of sources of organizational stressors.

Identifying Participants

A purposive sampling procedure was used to select this study's participants. Potential participants were identified through personal referrals and connected individuals who had professional dealings with this population. Thus, a "snowball sampling" strategy was employed in which each participant was asked to refer other individuals they knew to be qualified according to the aforementioned established criteria. In total, twenty participants were chosen for this study.

PP1. Pastoral participant 1 is the senior/lead pastor of a Southern Baptist Church in South Louisiana. The church has a weekly attendance of 7,000 people. This pastor is a denominational leader both at the state level as well as the convention. He has been at this church for thirty-one years.

PP2. Pastoral participant 2 was previously the pastor of a multi-site Southern Baptist church in western Kentucky. He was also a denominational leader during his fifteen-year tenure. He presently serves as the leader of one of the denominational entities.

PP3. Pastoral participant 3 has been at his church for twenty-two years. The church has a weekly attendance of 3,000. The church is in California and is nondenominational.

PP4. Pastoral participant 4 is the pastor of a Presbyterian Church (PCA) in central Alabama. The church averages 2,500 in weekly attendance. He is a denominational leader and has pastored this church for the past twenty-nine years.

PP5. Pastoral participant 5 is the pastor of a multi-site Southern Baptist church in central Georgia. He is a denominational leader and has been the pastor for the past seventeen years. The church averages over 3,000 in weekly attendance.

PP6. Pastoral participant 6 is the pastor of a Southern Baptist Church in west Florida. He is a denominational leader and has been in his role of pastor for over twenty-seven years. The church averages 3,000 in weekly attendance.

PP7. Pastoral participant 7 is the founder and pastor of a multi-site Southern Baptist church in Kansas and is a denominational leader. He has been the pastor for the past twenty-five years and the church averages 6,000 in weekly attendance.

PP8. Pastoral participant 8 is the pastor of a large multi-site Southern Baptist church in Arkansas. He has been the pastor of this church for the past thirty-one years and is a denominational leader. The church averages over 9,000 in weekly attendance.

PP9. Pastoral participant 9 is the pastor of a multi-site Southern Baptist church in north Florida. He has been the pastor of the church for fifteen years and is also a denominational leader. The church averages over 4,500 in weekly attendance.

PP10. Pastoral participant 10 is the pastor of a Southern Baptist Church in north Florida. He has been the pastor for the past twenty-two years and is a denominational leader on the state level. The church averages over 1,000 in weekly attendance.

PP11. Pastoral participant 11 is the pastor of a Southern Baptist Church in central Florida. He has been the pastor for the past twenty-six years and is a denominational leader. The church averages 7,500 in weekly attendance.

PP12. Pastoral participant 12 is the pastor of a Southern Baptist church in north Alabama. He has been the pastor for the past forty years and is also a denominational leader. The church averages 2,500 in weekly attendance.

PP13. Pastoral participant 13 is a retired pastor. Prior to retiring he was a denominational leader and the pastor of a Southern Baptist church in north Texas for sixteen years. The church averaged 3,000 in weekly attendance.

PP14. Pastoral participant 14 is the pastor of an Assemblies of God church in south Alabama. He is a denominational leader both at the state and national level. His church averages 1,200 in weekly attendance and he has been the pastor for the past twenty-three years.

PP15. Pastoral participant 15 is the pastor of a United Methodist church in south Alabama. He started the church and has been its pastor for the past thirty-seven

years. The church averages over 2,000 in weekly attendance.

PP16. Pastoral participant 16 is the pastor of a Southern Baptist church in central Alabama. He has been the pastor for the past sixteen years and is also a denominational leader. The church averages 2,500 in weekly attendance.

PP17. Pastoral participant 17 is the pastor of a Southern Baptist church in rural north Florida. He has been the pastor of this church for the past twenty-three years and is also a denominational leader. His church averages over 700 in weekly attendance in a city that only has a population of 1,200 people.

PP18. Pastoral participant 18 is the founding/lead pastor of a Southern Baptist church in southern Louisiana. He has been the pastor of this multi-site church for twenty-eight years and is also a denominational leader. The church averages 5,600 in weekly attendance.

PP19. Pastoral participant 19 is the pastor of a Southern Baptist church in central Alabama. He has been the pastor for the past thirty-one years and is also a denominational leader. The church averages 3,000 in weekly attendance.

PP20. Pastoral participant 20 is the pastor of a Southern Baptist church in east Alabama. He has been the pastor for the past thirty-eight years and is also a denominational leader. The church averages 1,500 in weekly attendance.

As a whole, this group of participants are overwhelmingly qualified for this study according to the stated criteria. Not only do each one of them meet at least one of the standards set forth in the methodology of this project, but when examining the group as a whole, four individuals have served as president of the Southern Baptist Convention during their tenure, fifteen have served as the president of their state conventions, and nine have served as president over the pastor's conference of the Southern Baptist Convention. Also represented are seven church planters, and thirteen who oversee some extended ministry of the church (such as a radio program, or a school or leadership entity of the church).

Findings and Displays

In the process of gathering the data from these pastoral leaders, much wisdom and insight surfaced. Through the process of content analysis and with respect to the precedent literature, four themes emerged from the study. The themes and related quotes are presented in this section.

Theme 1: Stressors

The first theme is “stressors,” and within this first major theme were four subcategories of major stressors: the organization, the job, church members/expectations, and preaching/sermons.

Organizational

The first subcategory is organizational—this involved the structural, logistical, and administrative aspects of running that church, which induced stress in the participants. Overall, 11 participants said that organizational aspects of the church created stress; of those, 6 cited the staff, 2 cited financial concerns, 2 cited changing organizational roles, and 1 cited the number of church members. Figure 1 demonstrates the categorization of this subtheme.

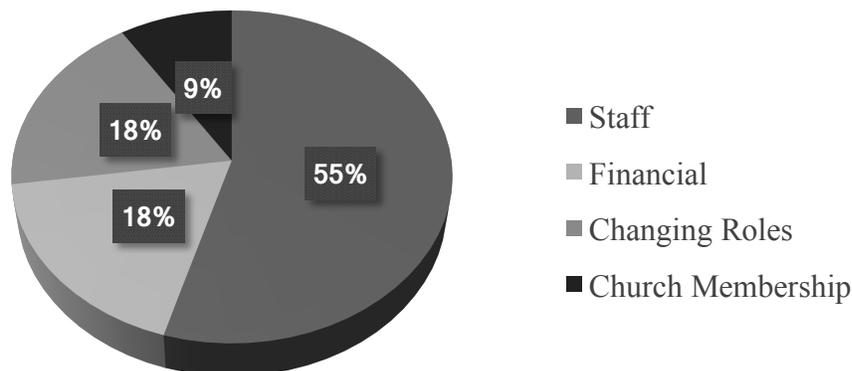


Figure 1. Organizational stressors

Organizational stressors relating to staff took various forms. Two of the 4 noted the stress of communication between staff members. PP17 noted that miscommunication was at the root of nearly all problems with staff:

I've had difficulties dealing with a staff member, dealing with a conflict with deacons at the church. We had our ups and our downs because we're with each other. We're like family. We always get on each other's nerves. . . . In all the years that I've been pastor, whether it's a staff member or church member, most of the time when people don't get along, it's because of miscommunication.⁵

PP9 agreed, noting that, frequently, the technology that is available to aid in communication can actually complicate or hinder understanding between him and the staff:

Communication is always, um, it's stressful. Whether you under-communicate or over-communicate, it can be stressful. You must find "where's the balance in here?" It's always difficult. You always have to be asking, "Am I being understood correctly?" I think email and text messaging have exacerbated the stress in communication. We think it's made it easier. I think it makes it a little more stressful in a lot of different ways. But I think communication between staff and church and all, that's where a lot of stress comes in. So you do have to kind of organize and plan and do some things administratively to alleviate a lot of the stress that goes along with that.

PP14 described staff-related stress as a matter of training: "Stress comes from not taking the time to properly train people and to understand that they need to understand and know. Again, I'm better at that now than I used to be, but that's been a big one." PP12 framed the staff stressor as a concern of fulfilling job duties, noting that slacking staff members add stress to his own job:

If I have staff members who are not producing like they should, and I do not mean that they have got to win a certain number of people every week, but I mean, if they are not carrying their part of the load, whether it is music, or education, or whatever, that puts stress on me because I am going to have to pump that up somehow or other . . . the worst problems we ever had were staff disease.

PP6 noted tension between himself and staff members because they were hired by a previous pastor; because of that, there were stresses about differing work ethics, team

⁵All of the quotes from the interviews are direct quotes from informal conversations. Grammatical errors are to be expected. Any changes made to assist the reader or to protect the identity of the participant have been bracketed.

ethos, and compatibility:

There's stress from having to deal with staff that are not as "go get them" as I find myself being. Some of the staff, early on, I inherited. I didn't hire them, and they weren't sure they wanted me, so early on, there were some real stress points about staff. There have been one or two that I've brought in here, that I've had to deal with. You just want them to be on the team. And you feel like when they're not, then it, kind of, reflects on you, so that brings stress to me.

For PP4, however, the only stress related to staff is "when I think one of them needs to go." He continued, "Those have been the hardest decisions, most stressful decisions of my ministry life," in part because he worries that "I have no right to ask someone to move on, and if you do this, you're, on some level of thinking, you're better than they are, and then God's going to get you."

Two other participants said that financial concerns related to the organization of the church was a major stressor. PP15 explained, "Pressure is having to have \$100,000 every Sunday to operate the ministry. If I felt pressure and stress, it was usually because of the financial demands. Not personally, but of the organization of the church." For PP18, the financial problems arose out of trying to give the youth pastor a raise, which ended in conflict with a major church donor:

I ran afoul of the church boss, who was the largest giver in the congregation. He gave 20 percent of the church income, and I led his brother to the Lord, and helped his son come back to the Lord. We had a good relationship, and I wanted to give our youth pastor an 800 dollar a year raise. He didn't think that was the right thing to do. So we actually had an open conflict on the church floor, in a business meeting, where he stood up and said, you're going to suffer, this church is not going to suffer.

Two other participants explained the stress of their changing organizational role. For PP15, this change had to do with the growing number of church members; his stress was related to the lack of personal relationship he could attain with those members. Instead, PP15 had to hire someone to do outreach, which changed the nature of his job as pastor:

I remember specifically at the 10-year mark, everyone for the first 10 years, which is about 2,000 people, that had come into the life of the church, I had sat in their living rooms, and I could call them by name when they walked down the aisle to join the church. If the church was to continue to grow with that mark, I would have to give that up. I paid a price to turn that over to a full-time staff person who did nothing but reach out to new people, and try to assimilate them into the body of

Christ. The price I paid for that was significant for me, because it now meant that I would not know everyone who became part of the congregation. I had no choice. . . . I was having to give up something that I really loved, and to this day for me, church is still about relationships and getting to know the families who become a part of your church family.

PP10 also had stress from an organizational and role-related position; his concern stemmed from if and when he was needed:

I think, probably the major stresses for me have been number one, just the internal imaging of myself going from a small church, one horse town, one horse pastor kind of role, to a multiplicity of ministries of, we now have 10, 11 full time ministerial staff, another 8 or 10 support staff. We've got a preschool with 50 people employed, so I've moved from a guy that did everything from changing the cartridge in the copy machine to preaching, and now I'm looking around going okay, so what am I supposed to do now? . . . It's just been a change, personally, for me, in how I saw myself as a pastor from where I began.

The Job

The second subcategory was the job of pastor itself. Within this subcategory, 7 participants noted that stress arose from the multiple responsibilities and duties that they had as a pastor; at the same time, 6 participants also noted that such stress was merely a function of their job.

The majority of respondents within the subtheme described the stress of balancing a multitude of responsibilities and the pressure of attempting to prioritize those duties. PP5 likened the stress to being the President of the United States insofar as all of the responsibilities of the church ultimately reside with the pastor, no matter the day or time of day:

You have the pressure of, you know, you've got a staff to lead. There are administrative duties you've got to carry out. That doesn't take into consideration the phone call you get at 3 in the morning because one of your key leaders has been in a car wreck or had an automobile accident or somebody's wife left them or whatever. . . . When you're elected president and you take that oath of office, for the next 4 to 8 years, you are the president not Monday through Friday 9 to 5, you're the president 24/7 every day 365 days a year, and the same thing is true of a pastor. I can go on vacation, but if one of my key leaders or one of my staff people are in a crisis or having an automobile accident or it's a matter of life and death, I've got to go. I'm the pastor. So you're the pastor 24/7, 365 days a year. So, when you put all of those things together, not to mention you've got to be the chief fundraiser, right? You've got to be the chief press spokesman for the church, you know, you add up all those things together, you don't have to go looking for stress, stress comes looking for you.

PP16 described not only the particulars of the multiple duties he has, but also the sense of obligation these duties entail:

I'm very much driven by responsibility and I let Hebrews 12 guide my mantra. My anchor is Hebrews 12. Run the race with endurance. I had a funeral on Tuesday, I had a funeral on Wednesday, I had a funeral on Thursday. I have a wedding tomorrow. I have full out, all services Sunday. . . . I have an immense sense of duty and responsibility to serve the Lord who served me, faithfully and dutifully.

PP8 likened the constant routine to being a football coach:

They have to take an approach like a football team in the heat of August. . . . It's seasonal, it's at a price, and it's a grind, and throughout the season, the longer the season goes, the greater the grind. The grind of Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday, and then it lets off, but you go through the grind for the glory of a Friday night or the glory of a Saturday afternoon or a Saturday night or the glory of a Sunday afternoon. It depends on what your level is. But the glory will never be any greater than the grind, and most ministers don't get 'the grind.'

Two other participants noted that these manifold duties necessitate a prioritization that often means one responsibility gets delegated or abandoned. PP4 explained,

Those are the weeks I get the most stressed, it makes it really hard. I end up having to cut something. When there's a death, or an accident, or tragic news of some kind, that's going to require a lot of time, then basically I tell my assistant you need to cancel everything else.

PP19 added that this prioritization, and subsequent voids of duty, also causes stress:

There are two or three things I should have done and probably four or five people I should have contacted. I can't do it all. I did all I could do today. I did the things I thought were most important and I'll do what I can tomorrow, but I'm asleep because I did all I could do. . . . I average a funeral a week. I have buried 1,500 people since I've been the pastor.

PP13 concurred,

A pastor has to learn to go to bed every night knowing that there are 100 things he didn't get done. Just think about it, and think how many times he has a chance to screw up. I mean, he may, in one single day, preach a sermon, have a baptism, have a wedding, have a funeral.

Two of those previous participants, in addition to 4 other participants, noted that stress was simply a function of their job; it was to be expected. PP18 explained,

I think problems are a part of life, definitely a part of the ministry. We laugh about it here. . . . It's like one time, Saint Patrick was baptizing a king in the river, and he had a stake, and he had a pointy thing, and he went to put it down into the river, but he put it through the king's foot, and he didn't know about it until, after, when the blood came up in the water. He said, "My child, I'm sorry, but I hurt you." And the

king said, “I just thought that was part of the baptism.” We just feel like, dealing with problems and suffering is a part of the baptism.

PP8 explained the way in which he saw the inherent stress of the job:

Well, I think first of all you have to realize that ministry is a calling and you have to constantly keep that in your heart as a pastor, realizing that you’re leading people and you’re leading an organization that supposedly serves those people, and whether it’s the people that work with you, the leaders within your church, or the people in your fellowship, whether they are de-plenishing your life or replenishing your life, that’s a part of life and that’s a part of ministry, and I think you have to accept that, and you have to walk there and not be always thinking of stress.

Other participants acknowledged the near-constant stress of the job. PP19 said, “It’s just part of the job. I don’t expect anything other than the pressure that I feel every night when I go to bed.” PP15 concurred, saying, “I’ve always accepted stress as just a part of what I do. It’s kind of like if you can name the bear, the bear isn’t so big and bad.”

PP5 added,

I’ve been where a lot of guys are, and I sympathize and empathize with guys who are under stress and I feel that there is a lot of unfair and undue stress that is put on too many pastors, and I get that, and it is a stressful job. Under the best of circumstances, it’s a stressful job. A lot of work.

Church Members

The third subcategory within the first major theme of stressors was church members. Within this subcategory, there was one prominent stressor—unhappy church members. Six of the total 10 participants within this category said upset church members were a major stress; in addition, 3 others noted the expectations that church members had of them were stressful, and 2 more participants cited other member concerns. PP20 explicitly stated that the greatest stress is “unhappy church members. It doesn’t take many to create trouble. Adrian used to say [that] a couple bullfrogs in a mill pond on Saturday night croaking will sound like 100 frogs, but it’s only one or two.” He continued by saying it was nearly impossible to make all members happy: “If you’re basing your ministry on the size of your congregation and trying to please them, you’re going to be under a whole lot more stress than just trying to please Jesus.” PP18 agreed, though he noted that this unhappiness was not necessarily a function of the pastor

himself: “Well, I find I experience stress by dealing with people who are disgruntled, or upset, or angry, or hurt. That creates a lot of stress . . . the hurting of broken relationships.” PP12 also cited the stress of church members who are in distress:

I receive the calls like I did this morning of attempted suicide. I get that around 6:15 in the morning, and so I am dealing with the family back and forth. And then another lady called and she is widowed about 6 months now, and she is struggling. . . . And so, I am hands on ministering to these people and helping them, and that can drain you, you know, you can only give out so much.

For PP3, the church member related stress came internally, from tension about the pastor whom he was replacing. In this way, the antagonism was toward the pastor himself:

For example, the first 7 years I was here at [church name], there was a high degree of stress that came from a faction within the congregation. That was high stress because the previous pastor had been terminated for [moral] failure. There were people here that were angry with the elder board for terminating him because he’s such a good preacher, they need to keep him. The elders believed they did the right thing. I believe they did the right thing, which is part of my coming. Nevertheless, the residue of resentment was strong when I came here and I would hear regularly from them that I should do all that I can to bring back the former senior pastor. That’s stressful in terms of just a lot of their writings to me were in strong tones and terms, attitudes. Very heavy, harsh, angry. Processing those almost weekly when I would get them. That’s really a high source of stress.

PP9 saw his stress as a combination of the two, with church members who are upset with and at him, and those who are upset in their own lives:

Just dealing with people is what creates the stress. . . . There are different kinds of stress, and there are different streams of stress that come in. There’s stress from those that are antagonistic toward your ministry. That is one type of stress. Versus another type of stress in a counseling situation when you know, I can help this person but they will not do what I’ve asked them to do. . . . I don’t know that one is easier to handle, but one pulls you and pulls at your heart one way. For example, if I have somebody that comes in, they have an issue, a couple that has an issue, and I know I can help them. I know that the word of God can help them and what they need to do, and it breaks your heart in that sense when they will not do it. And that creates a certain type of stress that is heavy versus someone, and I’ve had this, who is very brutal and antagonistic and is seeking with everything they have to embarrass you, hurt you, smear you, compromise you in the eyes of everybody out there.

Three other participants explained the stress of church members through the frame of expectations. For PP1, these expectations were of church members who failed to live up to his principles:

Every person that's a leader in [church name] are required to be in Sunday school and bible study. My conviction is that if you get the head right, the body is going to follow. My conviction is that if the leaders are spiritual, if they have a relationship with God, then it should be easier for them for one, to get along with each other and, to be able to carry out the great convictions and great commandments that God has given to us. One of my frustrations is that when I appoint people to leadership position or when they're elected to leadership position in the church, they'll do okay for 3, 4, 5 or 6 months and then they get off track. That's the thing I just don't understand. I tell leaders, I say before I was a pastor, just because of my belief in Christ, I felt I needed to be in bible study. I wasn't even a pastor, but I felt I need to grow in God. I need to be in Bible study. I need to grow. I don't understand that. I don't understand how people say they love God and they love Jesus Christ, but don't come to bible study. How do you grow spiritually?

For two other participants, the stress of expectations was on them as pastors, put there by church members. PP7 explained that sometimes the stress was added to by failed expectations set by himself:

I think just creating high expectations that sometimes you're inadequate or unable to accomplish even the goals you set for yourself much less what other goals may have been put on you by other members of the church, leaders in the church, or just parishioners. And so, I think the stress is relative to the fact that people expect a lot from you and I think there is a sense of, maybe inadequacy, because you know, you're aware of yourself and your vulnerabilities and your weaknesses and you feel like, you just can't reach that expected standard. And much of it has to do with the way you're treated by some people.

PP10 agreed, although he viewed the clashing expectations as a function of generational conflict about what the church and its culture should be:

I have to say that if one thing was the most stressful thing, it's the collision of the generational cultures and expectations of what does this, what do the millennial folks want, what do the boomers want, what do the builders want, what do the gen X guys want. And deciding who we're going to cater to, who we're going to kind of play into their expectation versus the other. So, that's stress.

Two other participants cited other church member-related stress. For PP5, it was about accessibility through technology; he felt besieged by church members because of the advent of email:

Believe it or not technology, in my opinion, has really accelerated the stress for the simple reason that technology has made you, made ministers, especially much more accessible. When I first started the ministry, Jackson, I had a system set up that when mail came in it would be color coded. So, if it was in a red folder, it got answered right away if it was in a green folder . . . you know we had different folders. Now, because of email and messaging, people can almost get to you anywhere, anytime, and they can bypass all that. It's amazing to me how little solid mail I get today. I was telling people I don't get a lot of solid mail, it's email, text messaging, because your phone number gets out, your email gets out. So that's one thing that's just

accelerating because now, where you used to funnel everything through your assistant, now you still try to do that, but now people can go around the wall.

PP14 described the stress as being able to relate to and “understand people, their nature, who they are” rather than “looking down my nose at everybody and going to be the savior of the world, going to change it all.”

Preaching/Sermons

The final subcategory within the first major theme was preaching/sermons. Seven participants noted that the constant pressure of preaching and coming up with new weekly sermons was a cause of great stress. As PP20 described, not only is preaching unrelenting, but also technology has allowed church members to constantly compare the sermons and preaching styles of pastors:

Preaching done well is hard work. I teach our interns, preaching is hard work. Sunday comes every 7 days. It's relentless. There's never a leap day. It just comes and comes and comes. . . . We are being compared in ways today that we were not compared with our fellow pastors. Our people are listening to all the finest preachers on the radio and television and want to know why you can't do that. When in fact, some of these radio preachers are having their stuff edited. All their verbal snafus are edited out. I'm not saying they're not great preachers. They are. I listen to many of them and are blessed by them. Some of our folks want you to be like their favorite radio guys or TV guy. We're not all triple threat guys. Just cornbread and peas. They'll nourish you if you'll eat it.

PP4 portrayed the stress as one that is not well known by others in its unrelenting nature, likening the weekly process to childbirth:

There's no question, I don't think people understand preaching, it's always there. As soon as you finish Sunday, maybe I'm unique, you'd know better. . . . I tell people it is like giving birth every week. Now obviously you and I have not had babies, but I've been with my wife, and I tell people you get to see the baby, you don't understand the labor pains to get there. The delivery is the easy part. So clearly for me the greatest stress is preaching week in, week out.

PP5 agreed, noting the need for new and equally relevant sermons every week:

Sunday's always coming. And it doesn't matter how great a message you preached last Sunday, you'd better come back with it next Sunday. They probably filmed what you preached last Sunday, you've got to bring it again. I tell guys all the time, just imagine having to do a term paper every week and stand up there in front of your class delivering, by the way, you'd better get an A or you're going to get blasted for it. So there's the pressure of just sermon prep.

PP16 echoed these sentiments, adding not only to the stress of preparation, but also of performance:

My primary stressors would have to deal with relentless performance. The creative pressure of preaching to the same people for 25 years. The stress that comes in crafting new materials that would be biblically solid, but culturally relevant. It's a lot of pressure. So, you've got to always be coming up with something fresh, and then when you're in a church like this, there's not only the stress of just the people there, we have a large television ministry, so there's a high expectation that the message is going to go out to another 25 to 50 thousand people, so inherently, it's a big spotlight. It's a very bright spotlight. So, there's a bunch of stress. As one pastor said, "the blessed burden of preaching." . . . Final exams coming up, always. And it's relentless. Sunday's always coming, as they say.

PP19 also described his stress related to the performance of his sermon, noting that the expectations for his members were high:

The biggest pressure I feel every week is, this is God's word for God's people today. That's a scary thing for me every week and I never feel prepared. I never feel ready to preach. On Sunday mornings, I am here at the office by 3:30, 3:45 AM. It's all done, but I'm not. I'm not ready to get up and go, this is God's word. That may just be a quirk of my personality, but it's that serious, therefore I feel that pressure to make sure that not only is what I'm preaching theologically correct, but this is God's word for these people today and not just a cute story. People's lives are going to be impacted by God's word and God's Spirit today.

Theme 2: Identifying and Dealing with Stress

Within this second theme, there were two main subcategories—known stress and unexpected stress. Within these subcategory, pastor participants explained how they were able to identify and deal with stresses.

Known Stress

Within the subcategory of known stress, participants explained the ways in which they can recognize when they are under stress. While 2 participants noted a relation between their stress and being short or angry, and 2 noted a disruption in sleep, the other participants had a different manifestation of stress. PP9 described the link between stress and curtness: "Everybody responds and reacts to being tired or stressed a little differently. I begin to get a little short. I begin to maybe get a little short with somebody. And I have to watch myself for that." For PP6, it is a combination of sleep

disruption and anger: “My sleep will get a little restless. I’ll find myself turning angry. I’ll get mad. And I’ll catch myself in that, and then just have to wait a minute. What is that about? It’s just the flesh. That’s what it is.” PP12 also recognized the physical manifestation of stress as a problem with sleep:

When I get really under the pressure, and I am trying to sleep at night, I have a hard time sleeping. I wake up and at times. . . . I begin to feel like I am, my body is just, the outside of my body is just kind of heating up, and I get, I do not get nervous but I get tense. And I can tell, I need to back away, I need to take a deep breath here.

For other participants, clear behavioral and emotional signs point to stress.

PP14 described his marker for stress as aversion:

What I do recognize is when I wake up and don’t want to go to church, then I realize there’s a problem. You know? I don’t want to go preach today. I don’t want to, and that’s the extreme of it, and it’s probably, that’s a bad place to get, but when I finally get there is when I realize, okay, it’s time for some time off or a couch session or something.

PP10, on the other hand, identified stress through micromanaging behavior:

I’m fairly intuitive and I read myself pretty well. I mean I can, I’ll tell you one of the ways that my stress would really amp up. I would start micromanaging everything. The more stressed I would get, even though the staff around here could not read that necessarily, but that’s what’s going on. I would begin to micromanage everything down to what the custodians were doing and how they were dusting and I started realizing that’s a stress reaction.

While a minority of participants had specific indicators about stress, the majority had strategies for dealing with stress. Table 1 demonstrates the categorization of those strategies.

Table 1. Strategies for dealing with stress

	Number of Participants	Percentage of Participants within Subcategory (<i>n</i> =20)
Time off	9	45%
Delegation/Prioritization	6	30%
Talking/Relationship with others	2	10%
Other	3	15%

Nine of the 20 participants noted that time off is the best way to deal with known stress. This included scheduling days during the week to have to themselves and their

families, as well as vacations or sabbaticals during the year. The participants stressed that there are specific seasons to the job and to the church, and part of that allowed for down time, which was essential to maintaining tranquility. As PP20 explained, learning those seasons makes it possible to schedule time off before the stress-filled time:

I learned there's certain rhythms in the life of the church, the life of the community and in my own life. I need to plan for those and plan around those. For those of us at [Name of church], mid-August to end of September are the 6 most stressful weeks of the year for all of us on staff. . . . We learn to get a good rest in July and the first 2 weeks of August. We know that, "okay, we'll survive it." We've survived it for the last so many years. We'll just get in the hot tub and we'll be okay. Recognizing where those stresses are is important. Like, people will drop off right before Christmas. . . . Because, you can't live in that kind of emotional high year-round. Physiologically, you'll kill yourself. You know?

PP19 agreed, also scheduling vacation every six months in order to recharge for the stress of the job:

I take the month of July off every year for the last 20 years. On that month, 30 days or whatever, I think five weeks in a row that I realize man, I really am under a lot of pressure. Then I kind of ease back into it. But the good news for me is that has become a vow, because no matter what's going on, in six months, I'm going to get away from here for a month. When my kids were young, we would go trips out West. We went to Europe one time. I have 3 children. Even now, my sweet wife, this past summer, we went on a cruise for about 4 weeks, and the church gave it to me for my 30th anniversary. We were gone almost a month. I'm saying all that to say, I know that there are release valves for me.

PP9 also schedules time off. He said his wife plans trips quarterly in order to get away and revitalize. PP9 described these getaways as mental incentives when stress is augmented:

She has come to the place where she plans a little getaway about a quarter now. Because it does keep me fresh. It does help me to recover. It does help. Because when you stay under it for so long, you begin to get tired. . . . I have to know, I'm tired right now, but I've got a week coming up, to where I'm going to slip away, and I'll be able to just sit down and read and do that kind of stuff. And I just mentally say, hang on. Don't jump on this person over here. You're going to be too harsh. When you start to correct them, you're going to over correct. So just wait. You're coming up on it.

PP6 described his stress-relieving time off not as a vacation, per se, but as a sabbatical to learn and restore:

Church has been good about, a couple of times, giving me sabbaticals to get away. For my 25th anniversary, we were two weeks in Europe, and they helped us with

that, just to get away. . . . Down time is something you learn from stress, that you have to back away from it.

PP13 also described the sabbatical as a necessary form of stress relief:

One of my dearest friends, he was an active deacon of the church in [City], and came down here and was Chair of the Personnel Committee. They just surprised me and said we want you to take a sabbatical. I had never had a sabbatical, hadn't had much vacation because that just wasn't my thing. So, they gave me a 2-month sabbatical. We spent a month in Hawaii, which was good. I read through the entire Old Testament, didn't get to the New Testament, but just time away. We were there from November 19 to December 19.

Other participants did not specify vacations or sabbaticals, but nonetheless indicated that scheduling days off during the week was imperative to everyday stresses of the job. As PP16 explained:

Well, I've had, developed systems, or tracks, that you run on. My system would be having an allotment, in the sense of, Monday is kind of, in general, a relax day, in the sense of a wonderful weekend, generally, and I take a deep breath. Tuesday is a staff meeting, and try to meet with people in hospitals whenever. Wednesday is preparation day. I set aside Wednesdays for writing a Beacon article, and doing a devotional. I have a sermon outlined that I turn in. So I don't generally have any appointments until about 3:30 on Wednesday. You know, systems. I track.

The same is true for PP2, who schedules time off for himself:

Yeah, sometimes I just try to give myself a break. So what I do now is like, I block like a Friday, every Friday I block, now I still work, but I just block it so I can do what I want to do. So I can have lunch with who I want to have lunch with, breakfast who I want, if I want to take my wife to lunch, or breakfast, I do that, or if I, but I've got my day to catch up, my day. I always encourage guys when I'm trying to speak into their lives, that one of the 5 days that they work, if they could just make it a day they can call "audibles." I think the problem is so often guys just don't. When I found that I didn't give myself a bunch of audible room, wiggle room, then that's what really stressed me out. I know now I can give up a Friday if I want, that's my choice.

PP14 has a day off out of town to refresh and renew:

[My wife] and I will go spend a day somewhere. I love to fish and get on the water, so I'll just, you know, it's a small reprieve. And it's not enough, but at least it helps me be able to clear the cobwebs and somehow put things in their proper place, so I can see a little more clearly. . . . And I never really, for a long time, didn't learn to relax. So, I would just, you know, again, I'd build that into my calendar now, some time to get away. I'm still not as good as I ought to be. But I'm getting there.

PP12 agreed, noting he and his wife would take a night quarterly to get away:

Every quarter we would drive to Nashville, or somewhere, maybe Chattanooga, we would leave on a Friday, and spend Friday evening. We would go out to some nice restaurant. You do not have to spend a hundred-dollars a plate, but a nice place that

we enjoy. And we would spend the night, and we would do this, it was kind of a mini honeymoon just to get together with no distraction.

In addition to time off, 6 participants pointed to the need for delegation and prioritization as a way to manage the stresses that come with the everyday job. For PP17, this means farming out problems and church members to specific people who can help them:

I do try to delegate. I try to fix everything, you know. I don't have to be the one . . . the previous pastor reamed out [one of his] staff members because he got to the hospital before he did . . . my thought is, if you can get to the hospital before me, fantastic, you know, go for it. I don't have to, you know. I think that is it, I don't feel like I have to be the one, but I don't have kind of a spelled-out kind of a process of what I do that or not.

PP16 concurred, noting he delegates by finding the most appropriate person to help with what is needed; this includes a prioritization on what he does as his job:

I am not a pastoral counselor. I do not see people for multiple visits. We've had counselors on our staff before, we don't right now. But I'm quick to say, man, if you've got a marriage problem, I'm like the guy at the car place. You go to the service manager, he listens, and says, you've got a transmission problem. This is our transmission department. I'll do that, but as far as kind of courting ongoing counseling with people, in a church with 6,000 members, you don't do that. . . . I try to know what I'm not, and so, I try to say, you've got [staff member] over here, he's fantastic. You've got an eating disorder, [staff member] is the perfect person for a teenager or whatever. But I do not meet people over and over again. . . . I've always had a real clear understanding that I do basically four things. I do the preaching and teaching, I do leadership, I do all the ministry things, and evangelism. Those are the things. I'll do weddings, funerals, I'll talk with people, but if I sit with those four things, that's pretty much what I do.

PP18 agreed, noting that it would be a near-impossible feat to be able to be everywhere:

"I didn't have to be the Superman pastor for everybody. They want me to do every funeral, every wedding, and respond to every crisis, and I don't." For PP15, the key to stress relief was letting go of control and being able to delegate:

In the beginning, I would have a little more difficulty letting things go because this church was a baby that I had helped birth. Letting go wasn't always easy for me. Besides in my mind, I thought no one did it as well as I did. I had pretty high standards. Some would call that being a perfectionist, being anal, being whatever. I think if you put a high level of excellence into everything, you have to have a little bit of that perfectionism. It became easier as the years went on, out of necessity and out of practical application. To where in my later years of ministry, I was very comfortable in not having to know everything, and be in touch with everything, and trust in good effective staff people, and good effective leadership. Some of them even got to where they thought I didn't even care, but it wasn't that at all. It was

simply an evolution in maturing on my part of where I didn't really have to have my hand on everything.

PP5 noted that delegation is important because pastors have to prioritize preaching:

Preaching the word is always a priority because that's something only I can do. Anybody else can minister. When the chips are down you go to the hospital. When the chips are down you counsel that guy going through a divorce. I'm the only one that's got to get up there and preach. So the preaching of God's word will always take, I mean, you think about what Paul said to Timothy, first thing out of the gate, preach the word.

Finally, 2 participants described their relationships with others, in addition to being able to talk through stress and problems, as crucial to dealing with the worries and anxieties of the job. PP4 specifically noted his relationship with his wife was essential to helping relieve his stress:

I would have to say, I'm a very relationally oriented guy. And relationships, I think that definitely relates to the whole stress thing as well. I think what's kept me from losing it are relationships. I mean, [my wife] and I have our best friends in the world in this church. I mean, I've married people, I've buried people, I've baptized these friend's children, and then married these friend's children, and then baptized these friend's children's children, I've buried their parents. So we really are doing life together, and I think being in a place where you're doing life together, it's a stress reliever. . . . I think I always knew I could be real with her, and she would take on the stress really.

For PP3, he meets with others to talk and offer support:

I and a couple other staff began to meet with 2 or 3 elders. We meet every, what is it? Tuesday morning it was, early. Talking through a process and pray, and consult, and read the book, and dialog about that. They were there just in essence for me, to support me. Having godly people that I respect, that have been through this war that took place prior to my coming, and remained; that meant a lot to me.

Unexpected Stress

The second subcategory was unexpected stress. While the participants were aware of the everyday stresses of the job, and typically had strategies for dealing with such stress, the unexpected stress offered a different sort of pressure. Participants' approach to the unexpected was primarily philosophical; they offered abstract ways of being and understanding as a framework for confronting unknown stress. Eight participants found that having perspective on the problem was essential, while four said it was their faith and God that kept them calm and prepared for whatever stress may occur.

Participants had slightly different understandings of how perspective could help with unexpected stress. For PP2, the perspective was about his role as a humble servant:

That was probably the key thing that I really tried to make sure they understood, and have a good sense of. . . . the proper perspective of it is a sense of humility. . . . I always felt like I was in a position much greater than I had the ability to do, and so because I always felt like I was somewhere where it was above my ability to accomplish, I felt a greater dependence upon God, and it helped me be humble in the fact of jeez, I'm just happy to be here.

For PP7, perspective came with age. He learned that what seems like a huge problem may not always appear that way down the road:

I do think things have gotten less stressful as I've gotten a little older because sometimes I think of things that happened, often things that happened later in my ministry if they would have happened early in my ministry they would have really, really bothered me. And I guess just through some experience of dealing with these things, you process them a little different, you see them through different lenses and you know life goes on and you take on the next challenge. . . . And I've had some mentors in my life along the way that I could share a few things with. And they are the kind of personalities that can put it in perspective maybe better than I could have, in just that this is not a life or death situation.

PP8 had a similar idea, noting that it was important to see the big picture—that there are peaks and valleys to the job and to the stress:

Every job has a season, and many pastors and spiritual leaders whine because they're in a season and they don't see it as a season. They see it as, this will be my life forever and ever and ever. Great leaders have to learn to live with longer seasons, however. And if you're not a great leader, your seasons won't be as long. Because your responsibilities are wider, they're deeper. There are more of them.

For PP6, perspective and stress reduction are about understanding the importance of the issue. As he said it, “Is this a hill really worth dying on?” He goes on to explain that perspective allows one to ask:

Is this just about me wanting to be a winner, or is this, really, a principle of life that's worth fretting over? Some things are worth it. Most things I find I do, there's got to be some stress involved if I'm going to get it done. . . . You get some kingdom perspective. It's just, always, not as important as you thought. I guess that's the thing that gets me through.

PP13 described perspective as understanding what the stress was really about. For him, knowing that often, the negative stress-filled situations were not personal, helped him achieve objectivity and the distance needed to alleviate the pressure:

Opposition is never against you personally. You can't take criticism and opposition personally. If you do, then you're going to be stressed out all the time. And so, if Jesus was a pastor he'd be getting the same criticism. If you value people and realize your job is to minister to them, love them, then you're not going to get all bent out of shape when there's opposition.

Four participants also noted that it was their relationship with God that kept them focused. For PP13, part of the perspective he is able to have is because he always retains the thought that he was called by God:

It's God's call that's going to keep you there. It's knowing you can go back, I can go back and show you the spot in the choir in Jacksonville where I, on one Saturday night, I surrendered to preach. I can go back to that time and it's as vivid as if it happened yesterday, and it's been 66 years, 67 years now. But if I couldn't have gone back to know God called me, I wouldn't have made it.

PP5 echoed those sentiments, noting it was God's call that kept stress at bay:

Calling of God. It was, I mean, there were a lot of times . . . it was absolutely the call of God in my life and one of the things that God taught me was that night when this all came down I really thought I was going to get fired. I honest to God thought I was going to get fired, God reminded me that they didn't hire you, they can fire you but they didn't hire you. I called you. You're not their man, you're my man. No matter what happens, I called you, I'll take care of you. So that's kind of how I deal with it . . . trust God more.

PP9 also described the importance of remembering the call: "What you've got to do, what I do is, you know, am I in God's will? Am I doing what God has called me to do? Not what everybody else wants me to do because I've got 1,000 people out there clamoring for me." PP15 described his faith as important to undercutting the doubt and fear of stress:

I always had this simple faith that because God had done what he had done for me and for our church family in the past, that he would continue to do that in the future. If you don't take yourself too seriously then you don't feel all the sense of responsibility personally.

Theme 3: Personal Life

The third major theme to emerge from the data was personal life. Within this theme, participants described the relationship between stress and four different facets of their personal life: family, health, spirituality, and self.

Family

The first subcategory was family, which included both the pastors' wife and their children. The stressors of pastoral life will inevitably impact the family of the pastor as they can easily become the target of congregants who are upset or have unrealistic expectations. The spouse and children of the pastor can often be unjustly evaluated and held to a different standard than other congregants within the church. These perceptions and expectations can create an added stress for the pastor as he decides how and when to shield his family from as much as possible.

Spouse. In terms of their wife, 15 of the 20 participants said that they shielded and protected their wife, in part by not sharing every aspect of their own stress or problems; however, only 5 participants felt that their wife suffered more stress as a result of being a pastor's wife.

For PP20, he tries to protect his wife from the negative views of the church members:

Well, it was stressful on her. Only in the sense that it's stressful on me, so sometimes she'd notice when I come home and I'm quiet. Typically, in the younger years, I'd tell her very little because I didn't want her to know the bad stuff on people that she highly respected and worshiped with. I tell her more now, but there's less bad stuff to say than there used to be.

PP5 also thought that his wife bore more stress than she needed to because of his job and the demands of it: "Because I traveled too much, looking back on it, I traveled too much, [My wife] carried too much of the burden, she never complained, never cried at all. She's always been my biggest supporter and all. I put more stress on her than I should have."

PP5 also noted that he shields his wife, not for her sake but in order to remain ethical with his parishioners:

I shield her. But not why you may think. She can handle anything. It's more of a, there's a professionalism on my part that I like, for example, a good example, if somebody comes in for counseling, I never tell [My wife] anything like that. It's just best I think, for me, I never hesitate to share anything with her that I feel like I'm not breaking an ethical boundary.

PP15 noted that he added stress to his wife because of his commitment to the church, in trying to recruit new members:

The first couple of years in the life of the church, I was in somebody's house until about 9 o'clock every night. I would go door to door in neighborhoods. If someone would walk slow, I would talk to them about the church. They didn't have to stop. I was anxious and eager to talk to anyone about the church and about Christ and about how it could impact their life. My wife paid a price those first couple of years.

PP18 also felt his wife had a lot of stress; however, he attributed most of it to her personal history, though some was related to him and their life:

My wife's been through a lot of trauma. She was molested as a child. Her dad was a real jerk kind of guy, always running around on her mom, and she felt a lot of rejection from him. Her family didn't go to church, they brought her to church. We got married young, had a child. I came from a drug and alcohol background. So everything I did was spontaneous. And so I think that we went through things where, early 90's, she was in a traffic accident, and 2 boys were killed and she wasn't guilty, but she felt like she was guilty. Our daughter getting pregnant, living with me, and I was always on the go, her brother was killed in an accident, in 2000.

Because of this stress and guilt, PP18 said he tried to protect his wife from the negatives that people say about him in his position as pastor: "I don't tell her half the stuff. I certainly don't tell her the people who are displeased with me. I think I became aware as a pastor that there are many pastor's wives, and pastor's children who are very bitter towards the church."

PP9 tried to shield his wife because they were both attacked by church members in the past:

You know what's going to upset her or not. You know what she's going to be concerned with. And there's no need in putting her through that. We went through, and I don't know how you'd write this up, and I don't really care about it, but we went through a very difficult time where we were very publicly attacked here.

However, while most participants shielded their wife from church business, most also did not believe that their job caused any undue stress. For PP3, this lack of stress was because his wife was raised by a father who was a pastor:

Part of that is rooted in the fact that both my wife and I are PK's. Our dads were pastors. . . . We grew up in healthy churches. Family churches. Not perfect. They had their problems for sure. Normal problems. Every family has their problems. It doesn't mean it is a bad family. But your problems, you manage them well. We grew up in a healthy church community and because of this we saw what benefits a healthy church can provide for people.

Despite this, PP3 still shielded his wife from stressful information: "I think I tend to protect her from information that I know that would cause her to feel stress. . . . I don't

go home and talk about this person and this problem. This person complained to me about this or somebody's after me about that." PP8 said the same, noting that his wife "was raised in a pastor's home. She's done quite well through the years. . . . She loves the church. She's active in the church, leads a Bible study in our community. We don't have any of that junk that some pastors' families have. We never have. And I don't think we ever will."

PP1 also protected his wife, by limiting the obligations and expectations she had toward both the church and as the pastor's wife, which could enhance the stress she may have felt:

At the very beginning, to our congregation I said folks, [My wife] is my wife. She's not your staff member. She's [PP1's] wife. I say, if she doesn't want to come to both services, she doesn't have to come to both services. If she only comes to one service, don't expect her to be in all these ministries or another. If she chooses to, fine. If she doesn't, don't. . . . I try to protect her from what people feel that the pastor's wife should be or should do. By God's grace, she's never had that pressure to be somebody she's not.

Likewise, PP1 protected his wife from some of the details of his work to lessen her stress level: "There's a lot of things in ministry I don't tell her about because my wife, she takes things to heart. There's some things that I've had to deal with in ministry that I just have not told her about the particulars." PP13 echoed those sentiments, saying,

As a young pastor I was so sensitive to my wife and kids that the first 4 churches I went to, I told the committee that my wife is not my associate pastor. You do not get two for the price of one. I said she is not going to do any more than your wives do, but she will be active, she'll be supportive, she'll be involved.

He likewise tried to protect her, noting, "You ought to be free to tell your wife everything, but there's some things she doesn't need to know. She doesn't need to know every time you get a nasty letter or ugly phone call, or every time somebody challenges you about something." While PP17 does want to "be protective of her as her husband," he says she "deals with all of that fine" and does not feel stressed out. The same is true of PP16, who says that he "filters some things, in the sense of, you don't want her to have super negative views of people because they found out something that's really sad about somebody, and they're stepping way out of bounds." However, he says his wife does not

feel stressed as a “very intelligent, very Christ centered person.” Indeed, the majority of respondents felt protective of their wife because they were concerned about her feelings or how she would perceive some of the church members.

Children. In terms of how stress impacted the participants’ children, the pastors were split; 10 believed that their children experienced some stress—whether only a small amount or a great deal—while 9 said their children were not affected by having a father as a pastor. For those who said their children experienced no stress, the participants frequently said it was often an intentional outcome; they attempted to shield their children from undue stress or expectations. As PP20 said,

[My wife] and I tried to be real careful not to put undue pressures on them to do anything because their dad was the pastor. If we did something perhaps above and beyond what others might do, it was because we loved Jesus, not because their dad was pastor. I don’t think it had any stress effect on our girls. They were just thrilled that I was their pastor. . . . We never talked to the children about any problems at church, ever. I don’t think they ever heard us talk negatively about all the backstabbing going on behind the scenes. Just shielded them from that.

PP4 agreed, saying his children felt normal because he tried to make sure they felt that way:

I asked my children repeatedly as they were growing up at [church name], what do you think it’s like being the child of a pastor of a church, positive, negative, neutral? They said we don’t even look at it as you’re the pastor of a church, it just feels normal, that’s huge. I tried, didn’t always succeed, I tried to always let them know, same with [wife’s name], that they were more important than the church. . . . I’m just a pastor like you’re a dentist, I just happen to have a different calling, but I’m just as screwed up as you are, I need the gospel as much as you do, it’s a calling issue folks.

PP5 also constructed a sense of normalcy for his family in order to circumvent any resentment or pressure his kids may have felt:

We had a very normal family life. We took regular vacations. Every Friday night was family night. We swapped everybody, including me, on family night, what you would do, we do, what you would eat, we eat. We had a ton of pizza when the boys had it. We really had a normal family life and my boys don’t have any real negative feelings about the church in the way that some kids do.

For two other participants, their children were not only active in the church as kids, but as adults still are, which indicated a lack of stress. PP8 explained,

Well, my family is all living for God. I had 2 boys that were wonderful growing up. We didn't have any issues with them. For us, it was never an option for them to participate in life and church and ministry. They grew up loving the church, and they still love the church. They're involved. Their families are involved. One of them lives in [city name] now. One lives here. One is a football coach. One is in ministry with me.

PP10 echoed this sentiment:

My daughters married a pastor, so we didn't mess up too bad. . . . My son and his wife are actually on the team of their church, so they're invested. So you know, the family is healthy, they're good, they do not have a bad memory of being mistreated at church. That's never, never been a problem.

For the 10 participants who felt their children were unduly burdened by their role as the pastor's child, it was often a result of either unfair expectations or scapegoating for something their father had done at the church. PP19 discussed the added pressure on his children being in the spotlight:

I think it was probably at times, they felt some stress just because there are a lot of people that are members of our church and a lot of people in the community that they did not know, knew them because of who they were. You know, it was frustrating to them because they never did anything. I always tell them there's about 6,000 eyes, 7,000 eyes watching you, so you better watch out what you're doing.

PP9 also pointed to the disparate expectations placed on his children: "Well, you know, every pastor's child experiences that. There's an expectation placed on them that's not placed on other children. We worked very hard not to expect any more out of our kids than what we would if I were not a pastor." PP1 echoed those sentiments, noting that pastors' children are held to a standard that other children are not:

Preacher's kids get a hard, hard life. They're just like your knuckle head kids. They are going to make mistakes. They're going to mess up. But just let them be kids. Every now and then I just have to remind folks, even here, again, just the expectations that people put on them. When they got to high school, I had to remind people. They are just like your kids. Don't put them on a pedestal.

Two participants noted their children were particularly impacted because they were often gone from home, due to the demand of the job. PP18 explained,

I think for both of them, I was gone so much in the early years, building the church, that it definitely negatively impacted them. I was gone almost every night. Casting visions, starting fresh. You've been there, you know how that is. And I didn't. I tell people my wife, one day, read the book, *Boundaries*, and messed up my life. So, I didn't have any boundaries, really. I was just running and gunning.

PP14 concurred, noting,

They were impacted. I think the impactful thing for them was that dad was just never around. I was the absentee father. And again my thinking was wrong thinking because I was dealing a lot with teenagers and youth and youth ministry and what have you as well. My kids were with me, you know? But I didn't realize, you know, yeah, they're part of the youth group. That's what you're teaching them. But you're not taking the time at home as dad. You're lumping them in with the other group of kids here.

PP3's children had a particularly hard time, caused by the necessity of moving to a new church and being scapegoated by other children. He described the impact on his children as "awful:"

It was awful in the sense that I can still remember the day I told them we were leaving. We used to live in [city]. Near [city]. A little town. Wonderful town. . . . That's all they knew. That's where their friends are. You're going to pull your fifth grader and your eighth grader out of school two months into their school year and they're going to leave all their friends behind to come to a place they don't know anybody. There's not a rational parent in the world that would think that's a great idea or a good thing for them. They hated it from the get go, but then once they're here, they could see there's something wrong. There's something wrong here. As an example of the most extreme wrongness of this whole thing, our oldest daughter was a student at [school name] part of that time. She's one day sitting in the gym at [school name] for something. These 2 guys, I think they're students as well, come up to her. Is your dad the pastor at [church name]? Yeah. Then they just went off on her about, I don't know, what I'm doing or what's going on at the church and this faction. Whatever ugliness, they spewed on her, as if she is somehow responsible for that. That is just over the top. That's what I'm saying. What's wrong with these people? . . . You're going after my kids and really crossed a line. I feel like crossing a line too. That was awful.

PP2 also spoke of the scapegoating his daughter endured because of decisions he had to make:

I was at [church name], I went through change, and we let 23 people go in 24 months, and so when you do that it's a lot of challenge. My second oldest daughter was once not invited to a summer party when she was in the 3rd grade because the girl's parents didn't like me. I remember she went to the little girl and said can I come? I'll sleep on the floor.

Health

The second subcategory of the theme of personal life was health; within this subcategory, participants spoke of two facets: health-related stress, and health-related stress relief. Eight of the 20 participants said that they had experienced physical ailments related to occupational stress. For PP14, it was stomach-related:

Most of my life, I've been very, very healthy. Rarely sick with a doctor kind of thing. The last couple of years, and I think it probably is somewhat church induced, I have

acid reflux pretty bad now. Never had ulcers. Never had any of that stuff. And just discovered this just a couple of years ago. And I don't know if it's just all the coffee but I think some of it probably, was the result of stress.

For PP10, the stress of the church simply exacerbated the health problems he already had:

I have never been an extremely healthy person. I had, when I was very young, I had ulcerative colitis. I expect I became kind of a Type A, highly driven, and probably a little too perfectionistic in a lot of ways. And so I internalized that, I sent it to my colon and got ulcerative colitis when I was 14. It just about killed me. They figured out what it was. It went away until I was 28 and found myself back in ministry again. So, I started dealing then with some major health issues at that point in time. From 28 to probably, I was probably 40, 42 before it kind of got under control again. So, a lot of my stress would go right there, I believe. Yeah, so major, major, major stress, stress driven illness with that.

Moreover, PP10 said the stress of the job also affected him in a different way:

It has hit me. It has hit me, sexually. I know a lot of pastors don't want to talk about that but the bottom line is that stress comes with you in the bedroom and it affects you there. So, I mean I've seen that. It's just part of the, unfortunately, part of being a minister. You're going to have that happen.

PP7 also saw the connection between his pre-existing health conditions and the stresses of the job:

Stress physiologically affects people. I'm a Type 1 diabetic. I have been for 49 years and it just resulted in some coronary problems and I've had five heart interventions and nine stints in my heart. It's hard to sort out what stress did and what Type 1 diabetes did. I do know that it does affect blood sugar. And lack of sleep or stress has a direct effect on those things. I've learned to cope because this is what I know. But I took retirement early because my cardiologist was insistent that while we can work to control your diabetes and we can have you on a good diet and exercise program, you're going to have to give some of the responsibilities away because that's going to be the death of you.

PP18 saw the impact of the stress on his sleep: "I still struggle at times with insomnia, because this morning I woke up at 3:30, thinking about, man, we got this, this, this, this, this, this, this. I typically only sleep about 4 to 5 hours a night." During a particularly stressful time during his tenure, when he was unsure if he would remain at the church,

PP18 had even more severe symptoms:

I started losing my hair, developed a blood pressure problem, was sweating through my suits, couldn't sleep at night, the pressure was just unrelenting to the point that after I'd been there about 6 months, in fact at the 6-month period, the two great leaders of the staff who were against me both resigned, just up and resigned, and they blasted me on the way out.

PP9 also had an extremely serious physical ailment, which—while unproven—he

believes is linked to the stress of the job:

I had a thing called a spontaneous cerebral fluid leak. When a doctor tells you spontaneous (which means they don't have any idea why it happened), I'm convinced that it was just stress related. Stress is a funny thing. Stress will not hit you when you are going through it. It always comes a little after. You can go through a stressful period of time, get over it, and think, "We made it through that, that's good." And about three weeks later, you come down. And you are just [deep sigh] stress is always delayed, the results of it.

Finally, three other participants noted that they often engaged in stress-related eating, affecting their weight in sometimes dramatic ways. According to PP19,

I've always struggled with weight, but food wants nothing from me and I know I'm under a great deal of pressure when I just go, man I'm going to go eat. My idea of a balanced meal is a Big Mac in each hand. You know? I could just eat. That is one of the ways that I have dealt with stress that's not healthy.

PP13 echoed this, saying, "A lot of it is self-imposed. For instance, I struggled with my weight my whole time. I'm 50 pounds less now than I was when I retired. What happens when you have a high stress, high intensity position, most guys respond by being workaholics." PP11 added, "I find myself trying to find pleasure in food. I look at some pictures of myself and think oh, I put on a little weight eating. Eating for comfort. I was burning the candle at both ends and I just wanted to know where you got more wax, I didn't want to really stop."

Even a larger portion of respondents—15 out of 20—said that they engaged in some form of health-related stress relief. Of those 15, 13 said they exercised as a way to relieve stress, while 2 noted getting sleep was essential. PP3 combined exercise with prayer:

I got a mountain bike. I do mountain biking and just getting into the, um, I can still remember riding through [City name]. There's a whole lot of wilderness area out there. . . . As I ride, just thinking, praying as I rode. Praying, reflecting, thinking. Thinking about the message, thinking about the people, and God. So, just that journey of riding and thinking and reflecting.

PP8 also combined the two:

I never sacrificed my time with the Lord, and I never sacrificed exercising 5 or 6 days a week for an hour. I run. I jog. And I work out, condition via weights, and unless I'm with someone, which would be rare, I'm with the Lord. Listening to podcasts, letting people pour into my life, preaching, teaching, talking leadership, or learning about something that's going on in America or the world. So I use it as a

replenishing time back into me, so I don't feel like it's just a bunch of bodily exercise that profits nothing.

PP1 always played sports, and added exercise to his regime to help with stress:

I played football, basketball, ran track from 7th grade to 12th grade and I enjoyed doing it, but I got married. I started having kids. I kind of backed up from those things. . . . I'm disciplining myself to work out every day Monday through Friday for at least a half hour. I hope it will continue because I need to do better in that area.

PP17 said he was "pretty disciplined in some different areas. I try to exercise regularly, which "has helped me kind of stay more even keeled through the stress." PP16 "played racquetball probably 2 or 3 times a week at lunch. I would skip lunch and meet some guys for a de-stressor. Exercise I think is a huge part of it." For PP14, it was running and fishing; he said that being active and athletic "helped me relieve some of the stress, certainly not all of it." PP12 said it did not matter what kind of physical activity, but that "the only way you can replace emotional energy that is being expended, is to do something emotionally positive, and good, makes you feel good." That includes running, boating, or fishing to "minister to your emotional wellbeing, make you feel better." PP7 agreed that exercise was emotionally and physically crucial:

Well honestly, the only anecdote I can think of is exercise pretty much. I've been a runner most of my life and it's kind of a form of escape. And if that would have been taken away from me, it would really hurt. But really look forward to running every day and kind of clear my head, kind of work through some things physically, kind of emotionally helped. So I would say probably the exercise piece was as much of it as anything.

For PP5, exercise is best when it is combined with diet and sleep:

I worked out religiously; ever since I was young I worked out. Try to work out every day. So that, as I've gotten older, I've totally changed my, not a diet, I've changed my lifestyle. Diets don't work, you've got to make a lifestyle change. So I've dropped, in the last year, 25 pounds. So the key is not losing weight, it's keeping it off. So there are just certain things I don't eat anymore. Don't eat bread, I don't eat sweets, I don't eat fried foods, I just kind of watch what I eat. . . . Then I try to get plenty of, I don't need a lot, for me, I need about, if I get about 6 and a half hours of sleep, maybe 7, I'm good. I can't sleep more than that 6 to 7 hours. So I try to get regular sleep.

Two other participants specifically pointed to sleep as a necessary remedy for stress. As PP13 explained,

There have been times, but I think most of the times with pastors, burnout doesn't come because you get kidney problems, or heart problems, or high blood pressure, it comes because you're tired and fatigued. That's why I tell pastors sometimes the most spiritual thing you can do is take a nap, just rest. You know when Elijah was running from Jezebel, what's the first thing that God did? He brought in some food and told him get some sleep and eat. You know, he had to get a little rest and get a little nourishment.

PP18 also cited the same biblical story in relation to the need for sleep, saying:

A long time ago, I was studying the story of Elijah, 1 Kings 19. Where, one day, he was calling down fire from Heaven, next day, he was running from Jezebel, praying to God to die. What I learned from that story, one, is that God took care of his physical needs before he addressed Elijah's emotional and spiritual needs. . . . I make sure I go to bed at night before I make a decision, try to reconcile a broken relationship. It's amazing, when I get a little bit of rest how much more proficient I am.

Spirituality

The third subtheme from the major theme of personal life is spirituality, in which participants discussed the ways in which stress affects their spirituality. The distribution of answers can be seen in figure 2.

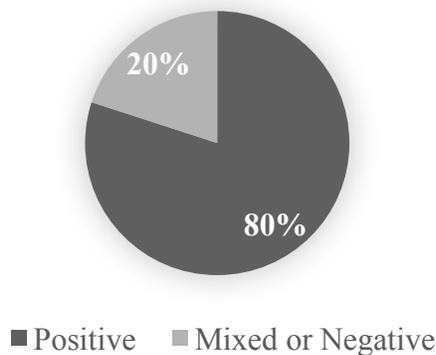


Figure 2. Effect of stress on spirituality

The majority of participants believed that stress positively affected their spirituality, leading them to deeper walk with God and reminding them of their lack of control. PP20 explained,

Well, to me, that's a positive. It drives me to Jesus. The more stressed I am, the more time I spend in the prayer closet. You know, when the bills are paid and the dogs aren't barking in the neighborhood in the middle of the night and the deacons

are happy, I'm less inclined to earnestly seek the Lord than when I'm in crisis mode. Anything that drives me to Jesus is good for me and stress is the kind of thing that drives me closer and closer to the Lord. I cast myself on his mercy.

PP19 agreed, noting, "They're almost two sides of the same coin. I guess it just depends on how it flips in my life because sometimes when I feel a great deal of stress, it makes me run to the Lord. God, I can't do this. I'm in over my head." PP15 added, "I thrive on being with God's people in worship. So worship has been primary for me in helping me through my stress." For PP8, making time for God—and for reading the Bible—is essential in dealing with stress:

I take very seriously my time with God. . . . That's where God brings me order. I pray through my day. I pray through my life, and I let God speak to me. Every year, I read through the Bible at least once. I've done that since 1990. That discipline, along with the discipline of journaling a prayer to God every day at the end of my time with the Lord. I've done that since 1990. Prioritizing that in my life, giving my mornings to God, to me, has been the game changer in my life dealing with the whole stress thing.

PP6 agreed, adding, "I think my devotional time probably became better, just reading through the Bible, not to get a sermon. Just let the word of God speak into my heart. I think that helped." PP10 explained, "Part of my stress management system is I do meditation, scripture, and focus on prayer is pivotal to that." PP17 discussed the link between prayer and the idea that one is not in control; for him, those two concepts help alleviate stress:

It drives you to prayer. If everything was a mountaintop all the time, we'd get pretty comfortable. And so it does keep us needy and dependent, which is a good thing. And so, you know, yeah, stress and continuing. I think it keeps you humble and how the Lord does come through and help you, help you work through, and what successes you've seen, it's been his grace in your life.

This spiritual impact was echoed by PP16, who highlighted how stress links to a need-based relationship with God:

Oh, it's fabulous, the stress? The fabulous deal about stress is it disabuses you of the notion that you're in control. It drives you to intimacy with God, and depending on Him. That's a very, very huge positive. It puts you in the Word, and makes you utterly dependent on God's grace to get you through it. So, yeah, stress is very positive. You know, if it doesn't kill you, it makes you stronger. The Lord and his work sustain you when you feel disappointed, or drained, or just wiped out. All those things come your way, you engage the Word. The Word of God is a creative force like none other. So you know, hardships, struggles, challenges, all those things. Stress drives you deeper into the word and your walk with God.

Three participants, however, felt that the stress of their job was, if not negative, then at least the impetus for some tension or struggle with and in their spirituality. PP4 described it as evoking more questions and living with tension:

I longed to know God, and my mind was asking questions about does he exist? Wanted to walk with Christ, simultaneously how do I know Jesus was historical, how do I know he rose from the dead? Wanted to minister, and disciple using God's word, at the same time how do I know this is God's word? And I was in ministry living in that tension, and I'll never forget that. I talk about [my wife], the kind of woman she is, I looked at her one day, I said sweetheart, I'm afraid I'm going to end up in a rubber room.

PP3 faced the same challenge of questioning because of stress:

I would try to regularly, of course, be in God's word regularly and in prayer. For me, that's kind of a lifetime journey. But generally that's a commitment that I have and then I would journal. . . . Stacks of those things where I would just kind of write out how I felt, what I thought, what God was telling me. Why do people act this way? Why do they treat people this way? Why do people who proudly tell me how important the teaching of God's word is and then behave in a way as if even a nonbeliever or Atheist would treat people that way? Trying to understand this struggle, the Corinthian thing, you know?

For PP7, there was no link between stress and an increase in spirituality:

I don't think it was every time I went through a trial I necessarily got more spiritual. Sometimes I just got mad. Just totally frustrated. But I would say just in general observation, I think I learned a lot of life lessons through the trials that they were stressful at the time and they were painful at the time.

Self

The fourth and final subcategory was self, which looks at the ways in which stress impacted the pastors themselves, including their perceptions of themselves. There was a nearly even split in how participants saw the relationship between self and stress—5 characterized it as negative, while 5 saw it as positive.

Those who believed stress affected them negatively generally understood it as a malaise of character. PP3 explained that the stress was internalized, leading to a sense of melancholy:

Well, a lot of it I probably didn't deal with well. I began to internalize. I think an illustration that I would have used in those days and still do on occasion is the Winnie the Pooh and his Eeyore. I am like Eeyore and I just, one step in front of another step, pull the wagon, get in the wagon, and let's get there . . . and I will get there.

PP20 more overtly discussed the depression he dealt with as a consequence of stress:

I talked about the summer of 1990. I fell into a depression. . . . I was just down on myself. In fact, I sat down and I wrote out all the reasons why I was no longer qualified to be pastor at [church name]. I came up with seven very compelling reasons why God should release me from this assignment.

For other participants, stress affected their self-image in other ways. PP11 described, “Stress affects me in a way that I get quiet. I get contemplative. I become maybe even critical of my own heart. I just lose that strength, that confidence. It’s like it’s holding on and just kind of losing grip in some ways.” PP9 saw the stress manifest as battling the darkness within: “When somebody is antagonistic toward you, they bring out the flesh in your own life that you have to battle with. So that it really is not, it’s not really them that’s the issue, it’s your own dark side. It’s your own flesh. It’s your own anger and bitterness and things like that.” PP6, on the other hand, felt that stress and pressure was self-induced:

I would say I probably put more stress on myself than anything else puts on me. I’m an achiever. I’m a doer. I come out of an athletic background, where winning is very important, and losing is just not something that I really want to have a part of. With that, when you come to ministry, then having to change your template of, what is a win, and what is a loss? For me to die is gain. And I’m like, no. So, learning the Christ life and experiencing that, for me, personally, has been where I’ve had to deal with stress that I put on myself.

Four participants, however, believed stress actually helped to bring out the positive in themselves. Three out of the four who saw stress as positive associated it with the drive and incentive to be and work better. PP19 explained, “Well, I have a tendency to do my best work under pressure. Just because I know it’s coming, I’ve got to do it. Yeah, I think there’s pressure because what we do is so serious.” PP17 concurred, providing a sports metaphor:

I mean, the first good thing, we see it all with sports, the championship on the line, you reach down and, yeah, you know, the pressure, the stress to do your best, you want to do the best for you, you want to do best for the Lord, you want to do the best in ministry, and making an impact. So yeah, there’s certainly a positive to it as well.

PP10 echoed these sentiments, noting that stress

has a positive potential in terms of just energizing, driving. I did not have a level of stress I could easily gravitate to being a lazy person. You know, so I have to have a

little bit of that drive, that push, that kind of a motivation. That's an internal clock that keeps going.

PP5, the final participant in this subcategory, felt that the stress he had experienced had made him a stronger person:

No question, I would not be the man I am today, I wouldn't be the leader I am today. I wouldn't have the confidence I have today, and I don't have all the confidence in the world but I wouldn't even have the confidence. It's really great to know, it's kind of like a soldier whose been to war and you've been shot at, but you made it and you didn't cut and run. And you did what a soldier ought to do, that's the experience that I had.

Theme 4: Advice for Young Pastors

The final theme was advice for young pastors, in which participants offered their most important words of advice. There were four subcategories within this theme: problems and perspective, preach the Word, relationship with God, and relationship with congregants. Figure 3 demonstrates the distribution of those responses.

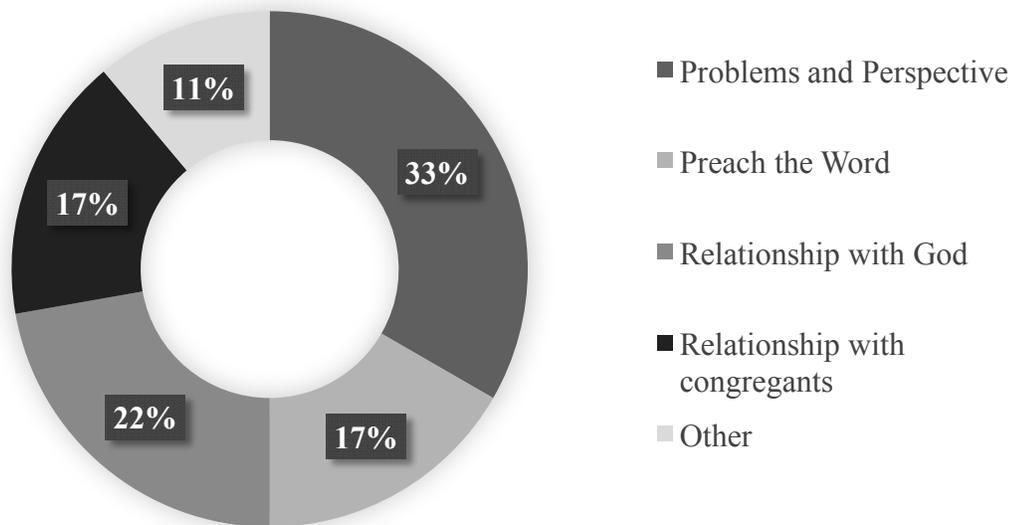


Figure 3. Words of advice

Six participants said the best advice they could offer is that there will always be problems and stress, but they will always pass. In this way, the participants hoped to

ready young pastors for the challenges they face and offer perspective on those challenges. PP3 explained,

Wherever you go . . . you're going to have problems. You're going to have people that are going to be a headache. You're going to have staff that is a headache because people are just crazy sometimes. . . . It just takes time, patience to be called by God and build, through patience, the congregation that will love you and follow you. You've got to work through the problems. You don't divorce your wife when you have a fight.

PP17 agreed, noting that stress is always there: "The reality is stressful times do come, so don't be surprised. God has called you and God will equip you. . . . The stressful times are going to come, they are. Just remember where your strength comes from and keep your eyes on him." PP15 added, "It's not a matter of if you're going to avoid stress, you're not going to avoid stress. It's just a matter of if you're going to overcome it or not, manage it or not, give into it or not." PP9 and PP7 offered perspective on those stressful times. PP9 said, "In 50 years, what you think is the major issue right now won't even be a blip on your radar screen. It'll pass." PP7 gave similar advice, saying, "There's a phrase in the Bible that comes to mind, it says, 'this too will pass,' and it's in there a lot, 'This too will pass.' And often what we're making such a big issue about in a stressful situation and saying it's water down the stream in due time. And we need to realize that."

In addition, four participants advised focusing on a young pastor's relationship with God. PP1 described it as "faithfulness": "Be faithful to God. Be faithful to God's word. God's the one who called you. Be faithful to God. Be faithful to God's word. Preach it, teach it, and live it." PP16 specifically noted that pastors should cultivate their relationship with Christ: "Have a deep love for Jesus, have a deep love for His word, have a deep love for His people. And if you're a Jesus person, that's the pull, that's the log and chain attached to a bulldozer that pulls you up the hard hills of ministry." PP14 also advised nurturing a relationship with God:

Rise early, and I think scripturally if you look you can see there's a lot of guys that did that. And develop that relationship with your Father, your Heavenly Father,

more than just Father, Dad. And he really becomes your Dad, and that he really will listen, and he really will speak, you know? Not all of it's telling you what you want to hear. But there is a relationship.

PP8 also recommended rising early to foster a relationship with God: "Prioritize your daily walk with God. Make it in the morning, as early as you can possibly do it. And you take everything in your life to the Lord in prayer." PP10 echoed this sentiment, saying,

Well, I would circle back around to keep yourself alive spiritually. Keep your personal walk with God alive. Because a lot of us are, we're a tin can, and we can really look good on the outside and can just be foam inside, easy to crush. When the pressure comes, we just collapse. If we don't keep that internal pressure in place, that internal fullness in place that helps us resist that external pressure. Just keep the can full.

Three participants advised to preach the Word, making that the focus of a young pastor's energy. PP4 explained, "When you preach, you're not only feeding the flock, you're creating a culture. Obviously our first aim is to feed the flock, so do your yourself and your church a favor and preach Jesus, preach the word of God accurately, preach it boldly."

PP5 concurred, adding, "I would say preach the word. . . . If you're preaching the word that means you're in the word. If you're in the word, that means you're growing in the word and if you're growing in the word that means your strength is increasing."

PP19 simply added, "Stay close to God. Preach the gospel. Don't get involved in entertainment. Be sure it's all about Jesus."

Finally, three other participants advised to form and attend to relationships with congregants. PP13 said,

There is one word that is basic to all pastoral leadership in ministry, and that's the word "relationships." You don't exist in isolation. You live with people, you're among people, and the secret to ministry, the secret to leadership is building strong relationships. And you need to make it your goal in life to build strong relationships with the people you serve, with your friends.

PP2 added, "I would just say you fall in love with those people, fall in love with the Lord, but you work at genuinely loving those people, start with their leadership, and their wives, and their kids, knowing their names, and just pouring yourself into those people, loving

those people.” PP12 also advised deepening the relationship with church members:

I would tell him to get a list of all the people in his church. Get a new one, if your church is growing, get a new one every month. Pray for every one of them by name, every week. Pray for them whether you like them or not, whether they like you or not, pray for them, pray for them, pray for them. I have been doing that now for 38 years. I had people that I prayed out of the church, I had people that were on the edge and they became my closest friends. But when I walk down the street, and I meet somebody, whether they are, I mean, just a regular church member, I can say, I am praying for you and I love you.

Summary of Research Findings

In sum the results of this study found four major themes: stressors, identification and dealing with stress, personal life, and advice for young pastors. Within the first major theme were four subcategories of major stressors: organizational, the job, church members/expectations, and preaching/sermons. In the subcategory of organizational, 11 participants said that organizational aspects of the church were stressors; of those, 6 cited the staff, 2 cited financial concerns, 2 cited changing organizational roles, and 1 cited the number of church members. The second subcategory was the job. Within this subcategory, 7 participants noted that stress arose from the multiple responsibilities and duties that they had as a pastor; at the same time, 6 participants also noted that such stress was merely a function of their job. The third subcategory within the first major theme of stressors was church members. Within this subcategory, there was one prominent stressor—unhappy church members. Six of the total 10 participants within this category said upset church members were a major stress; in addition, however, 3 others noted expectations that church members had of them were stressful, and 2 more participants cited other member concerns. The final subcategory within the first major theme was preaching/sermons. Seven participants noted that the constant pressure of preaching and coming up with new weekly sermons was a cause of great stress.

The second theme that emerged from the findings was identifying and dealing with stress, which had two main subcategories: known stress and unexpected stress.

Within these subcategories, pastor participants explained how they were able to identify and deal with stressors.

Within the subcategory of known stress, participants explained the ways in which they can recognize when they are under stress. While 2 participants noted a relation of their stress to being short or angry, and 2 noted a disruption in sleep, each of the other participants had a different manifestation of stress. While a minority of participants had specific indicators about stress, the majority had strategies for dealing with stress. Nine of the 20 participants noted that time off is the best way to deal with known stress, while 6 cited delegation/prioritization, 2 said talking and relationships with others, and 2 had other ways of dealing with known stress. The second subcategory was unexpected stress. While the participants were aware of the everyday stresses of the job, and typically had strategies for dealing with such stress, the unexpected stresses offered a different sort of pressure. Participants' approach to the unexpected was primarily philosophical; they offered abstract ways of being and understanding as a framework for confronting the unknown stress. Eight participants found that having perspective on the problem was essential, while 4 said it was their faith and God that kept them calm and prepared for whatever stress may occur.

The third major theme to emerge from the data is personal life. Within this theme, participants described the relationship between stress and four different facets of their personal life: family, health, spirituality, and self. In the first subcategory was family, which included both the pastors' wives and their children. In terms of their wife, 15 of the 20 participants said that they shielded and protected their wives; however, only 5 participants felt that their wife suffered more stress by being a pastor's wife. In terms of how stress impacted the participants' children, the pastors were split; 10 believed that their children experienced some stress—whether only a small amount or a great deal—while 9 said their children were not affected by having a father as a pastor. The second

subcategory of the theme of personal life was health. Within this subcategory, participants spoke of two facets: health related stress and health related stress relief. In the first, 8 of the 20 participants said that they had experienced physical ailments related to stress during their time in ministry. Even a larger portion of respondents—15 out of 20—said that they engaged in some form of health-related stress relief. In the third subcategory of spirituality, the majority of participants believed that stress positively affected their spirituality, leading them to Jesus and to God, and reminding them of their lack of control. Three participants, however, felt that the stress of their job caused tension with their spirituality. The fourth and final subcategory is self, which looks at the ways in which stress impacted the pastors themselves, including their perceptions of themselves. There was a nearly even split in how participants saw the relationship between self and stress; 5 characterized it as negative, while 4 saw it as positive.

The final theme was advice for young pastors, in which participants offered their most important words of advice. There were four subcategories within this theme: problems and perspective, preach the Word, relationship with God, and relationship with congregants. Six participants said the best advice they could offer is that there will always be problems and stresses, but that it will always pass. In addition, 4 participants advised focusing on young pastor's relationship with God, while 3 participants advised to preach the Word. Finally, 3 other participants advised to form and attend to relationships with congregants. Table 2 provides a visual for the summary of the data.

Evaluation of the Research Design

This study used a phenomenological approach to the research, employing in-depth interviews to explore the perceptions of pastors regarding their longevity in ministry and their responses to occupational stress. The research within this study fit well into Husserl's criteria because the purpose was to understand how some pastors are able to avoid the detrimental effects of occupational stress and burnout, the same phenomenon

that overwhelmingly has a negative impact in other pastors' lives and ministry experiences.

Table 2. Summary of data

Stressors			
Organizational (12)	Occupational (13)	Church Members (10)	Sermon Preparation (7)
Staff (6)	Number of Responsibilities (7)	Unhappy members (6)	Relentless Approach of Sunday (7)
Financial Concerns (2)	Job stress is expected and unavoidable (6)	Unrealistic Expectations (3)	
Organizational Changes (2)		Other Member Concerns (2)	
Growing Number of Members (1)			
Identifying and Dealing with Stress			
Expected		Unexpected	
Identifying the Stress	Dealing with Stress	Dealing with Stress	
Short or Angry (2)	Time off (9)	Recognize it is temporary (8)	
Disruption of Sleep (2)	Delegate/Prioritize (6)	Lean More Heavily on God/Faith (6)	
Other (16)	Significant Relationships (2)		
	Other (2)		
Personal Life			
Family	Health	Spirituality	Self
Protect Their Wives (15)	Stress Related Illnesses (8)	Positive Impact on Spirituality (17)	Negative (5)
Greater stress as a pastor's wife (5)	Participated in some form of stress relief (15)	Negative Impact on Spirituality (3)	Positive (4)
Children experienced stress because of pastor/father (10)			
Not affect by having a pastor/father (10)			
Advice for New Pastors			
Inevitability and Temporality of Stress (6)	Preach the Word (3)	Relationship with God (4)	Relationships with Congregants (3)

This research design also provided the best framework for interpreting pastoral burnout from the stakeholders' perspective. My role as a pastor in a local congregation with fourteen years of experience in the same church afforded beneficial insights into the

conversations and resulting information from other pastors. In addition, my own experience with burnout and occupational stress resulting from the role of a pastor gave me the ability to empathize with participants. Furthermore, my role spurred a desire not only to understand how occupational stress leads to burnout in ministry, but also to understand how those who have overcome these feelings reflect on their ministries, their response to stress, and their approach to burnout. However, at the same time, in the processes of conducting, analyzing, and evaluating the research, I was aware that the similar experiences and empathy could possibly form a bias in the interpretation and understanding of this phenomenon. Also, the qualitative research methodology itself presents potential limitations, rooted in the process of analysis, which ultimately rests with my thinking and decision-making. This decision-making process opens the door for limitation based on my assumptions, interest, perceptions, and general biases. For these reasons, a strict research protocol that affirms the trustworthiness of the findings was developed to minimize these factors and to assure reliability.

In conclusion, the interviews that formed the foundation for the data collection stage of this project provided rich, thick data that gives insight into successful pastors' perceptions on how they dealt with stress and experienced longevity. The data provided several categories that emerged from the research. The similarities and connection in the data have now been highlighted and contrasted. Thus, many possibilities of applicability and conclusions have emerged. In the next chapter those conclusions are delineated and expounded upon providing direct answers to the research questions which drive this study.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

The concept of burnout entered the professional lexicon more than forty years ago when Herbert Freudenberger used the term to describe feelings of being emotionally drained and exhausted, loss of commitment and motivation, and increasingly cynical attitudes that he and his colleagues experienced in working with clients at an alternative health care center.¹ At the same time, Christina Maslach was exploring emotional stress in a wide range of human service professionals.² The overarching theme uniting these parallel channels of research is that burnout is a common phenomenon among individuals who have chosen as their life's work professions built on helping, healing, and caring for others. Ironically, those who are most idealistic and intrinsically motivated to serve may be the most vulnerable to disillusionment.

Emotional exhaustion, the most palpable manifestation of burnout, is the central facet of burnout.³ Feeling overwhelmed and exhausted leads to attempts to distance oneself emotionally and cognitively from the demands of the job, leading to depersonalization or cynical attitudes toward clients, patients, students, or in the case of religious clergy, parishioners and staff. Indeed, religious clergy rank among the most susceptible groups to burnout. High rates of stress and burnout among clergy members

¹Herbert Freudenberger, "Staff Burnout," *Journal of Social Issues* 30 (1974): 159-65; Christina Maslach, Wilmar B. Schaufeli, and Michael P. Leiter, "Job Burnout," *Annual Review of Psychology* 52, no. 1 (2001): 397.

²Maslach, Schaufeli, and Leiter, "Job Burnout," 397.

³Ibid.

have generated increasing research attention.⁴ However, a gap in the literature on clergy burnout remains apparent. While many studies have looked at the phenomenon of burnout, none have examined this phenomenon from the perspective of longevity with this narrow focus. Specifically, by focusing on the experiences and perceptions of pastors who have demonstrated resilience in ministry despite occupational stressors that have defeated so many others, it was theorized that significant connections and similarities would be uncovered, as well as effective practices and perspectives for managing stress. This project investigated pastors who have experienced longevity and success in ministry to determine if they have similar ways of experiencing, identifying, and responding to stress.

While the peer-reviewed literature has addressed burnout and possible remedies centered on behavior modification, few researchers have looked at this phenomenon from the perspective of pastors who have successfully navigated the minefields of stress and its potential personal and professional consequences.⁵ This study was designed to address the question of why some pastors are able to manage, and even benefit from, factors that lead others to occupational burnout. The purpose of this qualitative, phenomenological study was to explore the perceptions of a select group of pastors to discover how they have effectively managed stress and continued to spiritually mature over a long period while serving in the same ministry context.

The knowledge generated from this inquiry provides new insight into the mitigation of harmful stressors and will help inform the professional and personal practices of younger pastors coping with stress. A pastor's spiritual health and well-being is highly influential, thus when the spiritual life becomes unhealthy it often becomes an issue with far-reaching impact. Through a better understanding of long-tenured pastors' approaches

⁴Stephen Muse, Milton Love, and Kyle Christensen, "Intensive Outpatient Therapy for Clergy Burnout: How Much Difference Can a Week Make," *Journal of Religion and Health* 55, no. 1 (2016): 147-58.

⁵Ruth Haley Barton, *Sacred Rhythms* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2006). See also Ruth Barton, *Strengthening the Soul of Your Leadership* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2008).

to handling personal and professional factors of stress, and of their perceptions of both the spiritual and professional maturation process, a more informed approach to spiritual and professional development can be understood and applied by new or younger pastors, thereby minimizing the more drastic impact that other pastors have experienced.

This study sought to discover why some pastors are able to overcome the detrimental effects of stress and burnout and continue to flourish and grow in the face of adversity. These pastors have demonstrated growth and longevity in a constant ministry context. They have seemingly developed and matured through difficult experiences that have left many of their colleagues defeated. A conspicuous void in the literature is the absence of observations and self-perceptions of pastors who have demonstrated this resilience. No prior empirical studies have been conducted from a qualitative research perspective that allow these pastors to freely discuss their perceptions of how they developed perseverance, how they have grown spiritually and physically, and how they have approached occupational stressors.

This study describes the experiences of twenty pastors who have experienced longevity despite occupational and personal stressors, with the goal of understanding how they have been able to achieve success over an extended period of time in a constant ministry context. This research used qualitative methods to examine the meanings, or “essence,” of this phenomenon. The research was limited to pastors who have served in one church with definable growth within one locale for at least fifteen years, which established consistency within the research and abated variances within the population sample.

The data for this project was collected through in-depth personal interviews, loosely structured with open-ended questions that allowed interviewees to speak freely about their self-perceptions related to the phenomenon. A journal was kept throughout the project detailing processes, background information, and any other relevant details. Following data analysis, major themes and emergent patterns were identified. NVivo

content analysis software was used to analyze the content of the interview for similarities in themes and/or patterns. Interpretations were made from the major themes and descriptions that emerged from the data.

Research Questions

The central question driving this research project was: How do tenured, successful pastors perceive their experiences in managing the common factors of occupational stress and burnout? This question was addressed by four underlying facets or sub-questions:

1. What statements describe their experiences?
2. What themes emerge from these experiences?
3. What are the observable common patterns, if any, in the life of these pastors that exhibit stages of growth, modification, and/or adaptation in their experiences?
4. What is the overall essence of their experiences?

Interpretation of Findings

The literature on burnout, a concept developed by earlier researchers such as Freudenberg and Maslach as well as previous theoretical work on stress, self-care, and coping by Selye and Lazarus and Folkman, provides important context for this study.⁶ The findings confirm existing knowledge of the efficacy of burnout and stress management theories in analyzing burnout and stress management in relation to clergy and others in caring professions. This study's findings extend knowledge in the research area of clergy burnout by focusing on successful pastors' perceptions of which factors helped them cope with stressors and avoid burnout. Conducting and closely analyzing in-depth interviews of successful pastors addresses a gap in the literature and provides important insights into

⁶Freudenberg, "Staff Burnout," 159-65; Christina Maslach, "Burned-Out," *Human Behavior* 9 (1976): 16-22. Hans Selye, "Forty Years of Stress Research: Principal Remaining Problems and Misconceptions," *Canadian Medical Association Journal* 115, no. 1 (1976): 53-56; Richard S. Lazarus and Susan Folkman, *Stress, Appraisal, and Coping* (New York: Springer, 1984).

pastors' stressors and ways they have successfully coped and thrive. The insights derived from this study can prove valuable in helping younger clergy in danger of burning out.

The findings were analyzed and interpreted within the theoretical framework of burnout in the caring professions. The pastors sampled faced the same stressors as other pastors and could have burned out, in keeping with the burnout model, but found strategies that helped them cope and succeed. The socioecological framework, which takes self-care into consideration, is also theoretically significant for this study. A holistic model of health for religious clergy encompasses physical, psychological, and spiritual health and is influenced by stress, self-care, and coping.⁷ An ecological framework for developing a model of holistic health for religious clergy can be a valuable tool for understanding stress and burnout and designing appropriate interventions that can be adapted to fit any faith or denomination. The findings from this study are discussed and interpreted in relation to the four facets or sub-questions of the central research question. The themes that arose from the interviews are elaborated and discussed in detail.

Description Statements

The tenured, successful pastors stated that they kept things in perspective and found healthy ways to cope with stress, always remembering the big picture, their core religious beliefs, and devotion to ministry. Selye proposes a code of behavior he called *altruistic egoism* as the optimum approach to managing stress.⁸ At the heart of altruistic egoism is recognition that taking care of one's needs allows the individual to devote energy to activities that give life meaning and purpose and to work for the good of the self and others. Acutely cognizant of the damaging impact of stress on the human organism, Selye was an early advocate of self-compassion and self-care.

⁷Rae Jean Proeschold-Bell et al., "A Theoretical Model of the Holistic Health of United Methodist Clergy," *Journal of Religion and Health* 50, no. 3 (2011): 700.

⁸Selye, "Forty Years of Stress Research," 53.

Self-care emerged as a prominent theme in the work of Burns, Chapman, and Guthrie on pastoral resilience.⁹ Burns, Chapman, and Guthrie noted that self-care is often mistaken for selfishness.¹⁰ However, it is precisely this misguided interpretation that predisposes caring professionals to burnout. Implicitly (and in some cases, explicitly), the pastors recognized that effectively coping with stress, including practicing self-care, enabled them to better serve their ministry. Religious clergy are distinguished from other human service professionals by a calling to serve God and a sense that through their ministry they are doing God's work.¹¹ A common perception among the pastors was that their faith in God and their calling to their vocation was what kept them focused on the big picture at times when stress was threatening to overwhelm them.

Major Themes

Four major themes arose from the interviews: stressors, identifying and dealing with stress, personal life, and advice for young pastors. These themes are discussed in relation to the relevant literature.

Stressors

Four subcategories of stressors were identified, including organizational stressors, job stressors, church members/expectations, and preaching/sermons. Cited by eleven participants, organizational stressors included problems and miscommunication

⁹Bob Burns, Tasha D. Chapman, and Donald C. Guthrie, *Resilient Ministry: What Pastors Told Us about Surviving and Thriving* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2013), 61-63.

¹⁰Ibid., 21.

¹¹See *ibid.*, 63; John M. Faucett, Robert F. Corwyn, and Tom H. Poling, "Clergy Role Stress: Interactive Effects of Role Ambiguity and Role Conflict on Intrinsic Job Satisfaction," *Pastoral Psychology* 62, no. 3 (2012): 291-304; Shaun Joynt and Yolanda Dreyer, "Exodus of Clergy: A Practical Theological Grounded Theory Exploration of Hatfield Training Centre Trained Pastors," *HTS Theological Studies* 69, no. 1 (2013): 1-9; Rae Proeschold-Bell et al., "Closeness to God among Those Doing God's Work: A Spiritual Well-Being Measure for Clergy," *Journal of Religious Health* 53 (2014): 878-94; Siang-Yang Tan and Melissa Castillo, "Self-Care and Beyond: A Brief Literature Review from a Christian Perspective," *Journal of Psychology and Christianity* 33, no. 1 (2014): 3.

with staff members, financial concerns, changing organizational roles, and the number of church members. Job stressors, cited by six participants, included balancing a multitude of responsibilities and the pressure of attempting to prioritize those duties. Unhappy church members were also cited as a key stressor by six participants. In addition, three pastors reported that the expectations church members held for them were stressful, and two more pastors cited other concerns, such as counseling members who were unhappy in their own lives. Preaching and sermon development also emerged as stressful, with seven participants reporting that the constant pressure of preaching and coming up with new weekly sermons was a cause of great stress.

This last category, preaching and sermon development, provides unique insight into the stressors confronted and overcome by pastors with many years of experience. This issue does not appear to have been previously discussed in the literature on pastoral burnout. The powerful impact of organizational and job factors on stress and burnout have been recognized since the inception of this line of research.¹² Role conflicts and interpersonal conflicts are common sources of stress in the ministry.¹³ Excessive or unrealistic expectations on the part of parishioners often exacerbate unduly high expectations that pastors impose on themselves.¹⁴ In fact, recognizing the adverse effects of perfectionism could be a major step forward to managing stress. As one pastor noted in the context of delegation, “I didn’t have to be the Superman pastor for everybody.” Typically, this realization comes with experience. Many pastors today, however, succumb

¹²Richard Lazarus, “Psychological Stress in the Workplace,” in *Occupational Stress: A Handbook*, ed. Rick Crandall and Pamela Perrewe (Washington, DC: Taylor & Francis, 1995), 141. See also Maslach, Schaufeli, and Leiter, “Job Burnout,” 397-422.

¹³Faucett, Corwyn, and Poling, “Clergy Role Stress,” 291-304; Edward R. Kemery, “Clergy Role Stress and Satisfaction: Role Ambiguity Isn’t Always Bad,” *Pastoral Psychology* 54, no. 6 (2006): 561.

¹⁴Laura K. Barnard and John F. Curry, “The Relationship of Clergy Burnout to Self-Compassion and Other Personality Dimensions,” *Pastoral Psychology* 61, no. 2 (2012): 149.

to burnout and leave the ministry before they gain this experience.¹⁵ Knowledge of the factors that allow experienced, successful pastors to thrive in the face of stress may help to reverse this unfortunate trend.

Organizational and job factors. It is not surprising that a majority of respondents should cite organizational factors as major stressors. Awareness of the role of organizational factors in burnout was a pivotal factor in the expansion of burnout research beyond the human service professions.¹⁶ However, of the themes of resilient ministry that Burns, Chapman, and Guthrie observed in their research, they noted that management and leadership—a dominant topic throughout the organizational literature—is severely neglected in the context of ministry. According to Burns, Chapman, and Guthrie, many pastors are daunted by this facet of ministry. From the perspective of their vocation, they see themselves as spiritual leaders, not organizational managers, despite the reality that church ministry entails the performance of managerial and leadership tasks.¹⁷ New pastors are often shocked by the extent of managerial and leadership duties their vocation demands, and by how poorly their training prepared them for these aspects of ministry.¹⁸

In terms of organizational and job stressors, the pastors discussed the difficulties of financial constraints, striving to grow the congregation, and balancing multiple responsibilities and prioritizing duties. These themes are reflected in earlier research on organizational and job stressors and clergy burnout. Francis, Robbins, and Wulff found

¹⁵J. Louis Spencer, Bruce E. Winston, and Mihai C. Bocarnea, “Predicting the Level of Pastors at Risk of Termination/Exit from the Church,” *Pastoral Psychology* 61, no. 1 (2012): 95; Lance Witt, *Replenish* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011), 18.

¹⁶Maslach, Schaufeli, and Leiter, “Job Burnout,” 403.

¹⁷Burns, Chapman, and Guthrie, *Resilient Ministry*, 199-200.

¹⁸*Ibid.*, 200.

that a convergence of several factors, including growing secularization, decreasing interest in ministry, declining church memberships, and increasing financial constraints, add to the pressures of ministry, often forcing clergy to take on more responsibilities with fewer external resources and supports.¹⁹ Similarly, Grosch and Olsen proposed a model of clergy burnout that synthesizes the focus on personality characteristics with the systems perspective that implicates external factors, such as bureaucracy, inadequate management and coworker support, and difficult workplace conditions as the main causes of burnout.²⁰ Pastors in other studies were shown to have difficulties keeping up with the excessive demands and multiple roles of the contemporary ministry. Moreover, external pressures for congregational growth or internal pressures to meet impossibly high standards could be equally detrimental.

Problems with staff emerged as a stressor for several participants. Inadequate staff training, specifically not devoting sufficient time to training staff members and ensuring they understood what was expected of them, was cited by one participant as a key source of staff-related stress. Although he added that he had become more adept at dealing with this issue, it remained an important problem. Two participants attributed most staff-related problems to miscommunication. One pastor commented, “In all the years I’ve been a pastor, whether it’s a staff member or a church member most of the time when people don’t get along it’s because of miscommunication.” Communication is a key issue in the smooth operations of any organization, regardless of occupational sector.

Several authors recommend training in various aspects of management, such as conflict management, collaborative decision making, problem development, and agenda

¹⁹Leslie J. Francis, Mandy Robbins, and Keith Wulff, “Are Clergy Serving Yoked Congregations More Vulnerable to Burnout? A Study among Clergy Serving in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.),” *Stress Health* 29, no. 2 (April 2013): 113-16.

²⁰William Grosch and David Olsen, “Clergy Burnout: An Integrative Approach,” *Journal of Clinical Psychology* 56 (2000): 620, 625.

setting as potentially valuable for enhancing ministers' interpersonal and conflict resolution skills, as well as broadly preparing them for the enterprise of leading an organization.²¹ Based on the responses of the participants in this study, as well as the observations of Burns, Chapman, and Guthrie, these skills would be useful for aspiring and practicing ministers.²²

Two participants cited financial concerns as a major source of stress for their church organization. Chandler recognized external pressures for congregational growth as an important source of stress.²³ The pastors interviewed for this study are all affiliated with ministries that have large congregations. While indisputably successful, the cost of operating a large organization can impose a financial burden on the leader, who must assure that all expenses are met on a regular basis. As described by one pastor, "If I felt pressure and stress, it was usually because of the financial demands. Not personally but of the organization of the church."

Paradoxically, the successful growth of the organization can be stressful as it entails adapting to changing organizational roles. One pastor lamented the fact that his burgeoning church membership meant he could no longer have the personal relationships with his parishioners that he had enjoyed. As a result of the growth he had to hire someone to do outreach, which changed the nature of his role as pastor. Although the church was thriving, from his perspective,

the price I paid for that was significant for me because it now meant that I would not know everyone who became part of the congregation. . . . I was having to give up something that I really loved, and to this day for me, church is still about relationships and getting to know the families who become part of your church family.

²¹Faucett, Corwyn, and Poling, "Clergy Role Stress," 291-304; Randy Garner, "Interpersonal Criticism and the Clergy," *Journal of Pastoral Care and Counseling* 67, no. 1 (2013): 2; Kemery, "Clergy Role Stress and Satisfaction," 561.

²²Bob Burns, Tasha D. Chapman, and Donald C. Guthrie, *Resilient Ministry: What Pastors Told Us about Surviving and Thriving* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2013), 199-200.

²³Chandler, "Pastoral Burnout," 278.

Another pastor related that a major source of stress was “just the internal imaging of myself going from a small church, one horse town, one horse pastor kind of role, to a multiplicity of ministries.” From being the “guy that did everything from changing the cartridge in the copy machine to preaching,” he was entrusted with operating ten ministries with eleven full-time ministerial staff, additional support staff, and a preschool employing fifty people. A transition of that magnitude carries with it personal as well as professional changes, of which he was acutely aware. He explained, “It’s just been a change, personally, for me, in how I saw myself as a pastor from where I began.”

Role stress, especially role conflict and role ambiguity, has been studied extensively in the organizational literature. Many pastors struggle with unclear roles and undefined expectations. This lack of clarity was particularly evident in the experience of the pastor who found himself heading multiple ministries, and explicitly stated, “Now I’m looking around going, okay, so what am I supposed to do now?” Although most empirical research supports the assumption that role conflict and role ambiguity have a negative impact on work attitudes, such as job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and job engagement, others have questioned whether that might not always be the case.²⁴

Kemery notes that many clergy practice in churches with few formal policies and protocols for decision-making, thereby leaving them “free to creatively proclaim the word of God in a variety of ways” and “free to serve God’s calling to them.”²⁵ From this perspective, role ambiguity could actually enhance clergy job satisfaction. Burns, Chapman, and Guthrie appear to hold a similar view, implying that role ambiguity might have a positive effect in that it allows pastors to develop the artistic facet of leadership.²⁶

²⁴Kemery, “Clergy Role Stress and Satisfaction,” 561.

²⁵Ibid., 563.

²⁶Burns, Chapman, and Guthrie, *Resilient Ministry*, 201.

Research with pastors suggests a nuanced perspective on the effects of role conflict and role ambiguity. Analyzed independently, each one tends to exert a negative impact on job satisfaction; however, the interactions between the two are more complex.²⁷ Low levels of both role conflict and role ambiguity may in fact be energizing and help to generate new and creative approaches to solving problems. Balancing multiple responsibilities, with the consequent need to establish priorities, is a common stressor for ministers leading churches.²⁸ A common belief among the pastors in this study is that stress is simply part of the job. As one participant commented, “I’ve always accepted stress as just a part of what I do. It’s kind of like if you can name the bear, the bear isn’t so big and bad.”

Church members and expectations. Pastors interviewed for this study cited parishioners’ unhappiness with their ministry, as well as counseling parishioners who were unhappy in their own lives, as sources of stress. This theme is in agreement with earlier studies on the role of church members in contributing to pastors’ stress. Excessively high ideals, unrealistic expectations of what they can accomplish, and a strong desire to please parishioners can lead to disillusionment and burnout in church pastors. This effect is further complicated by parishioners whose own expectations mirror such impossibly high ideals. According to Doolittle, burnout is particularly high among pastors who serve a “traumatic church,” marked by high levels of stress and conflict.²⁹ Some pastors are forced out, driven by relentless psychological abuse from parishioners.³⁰

²⁷Faucett, Corwyn, and Poling, “Clergy Role Stress,” 293.

²⁸Diane J. Chandler, “The Impact of Pastors’ Spiritual Practices on Burnout,” *Journal of Pastoral Care & Counseling* 64, no. 2 (2010): 6.

²⁹Benjamin R. Doolittle, “The Impact of Behaviors upon Burnout among Parish-Based Clergy,” *Journal of Religion and Health* 49, no. 1 (2010): 93.

³⁰Marcus N. Tanner and Anisa M. Zvonkovic, “Forced to Leave: Forced Termination Experiences of Assemblies of God Clergy and Its Connection to Stress and Well-Being Outcomes,” *Pastoral Psychology* 60, no. 5 (2011): 716.

One pastor interviewed for this study spoke for several by explicitly stating that “unhappy church members” present the greatest source of stress. Moreover, “It doesn’t take many to create trouble”; the complaints of a few members are amplified, making it seem as if there was widespread discontent. At the same time, this pastor had a realistic attitude, noting that it was virtually impossible to make all members happy. From his perspective, “If you’re basing your ministry on the size of your congregation and trying to please them, you’re going to be under a whole lot more stress than just trying to please Jesus.” Lazarus and Folkman would probably classify this attitude as an adaptive cognitive coping strategy.³¹

Another pastor agreed, but pointed out that this unhappiness was not necessarily a reflection of the minister, but rather a projection of their own feelings of being “disgruntled, or upset, or angry, or hurt,” which in turn created stress for others around them. Two pastors cited counseling church members in distress as a significant source of stress. In view of the vulnerability of religious clergy to compassion fatigue, it may seem surprising that this was mentioned by only two participants.³² However, as with the pastors who described their changing roles as they took over large or multiple congregations, many participants were no longer directly involved in counseling members. Compassion fatigue is likely to be more of a hazard for new or younger ministers. Even apart from the specific issue of counseling, across occupational sectors, younger workers are the most vulnerable to burnout.³³

³¹Richard S. Lazarus and Susan Folkman, “Transactional Theory and Research on Emotions and Coping,” *European Journal of Personality* 1, no. 3 (1987): 141.

³²Kathleen Galek et al., “Burnout, Secondary Traumatic Stress, and Social Support,” *Pastoral Psychology* 60, no. 5 (2011): 633-49. Galek et al. identify counseling as one of the major stressors for clergy/chaplains. See also 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 (2012): 221-24; Gary Harbaugh and Even Rogers, “Pastoral Burnout: A View from the Seminary,” *The Journal of Pastoral Care* 38, no. 2 (1984): 104.

³³Kelvin Randall, “Examining Thoughts about Leaving the Ministry among Anglican Clergy in England and Wales: Demographic, Churchmanship, Personality and Work-Related Psychological Health

Grosch and Olsen describe a Savior Complex, originating from Carl Jung, which can heighten susceptibility to stress and compassion fatigue.³⁴ A central facet of the Savior Complex is imposing impossibly high expectations on oneself. Unrealistic expectations on the part of the parishioners and the pastor feed on each other to create an escalating cycle of stress that can lead to burnout.³⁵ One pastor explicitly described this type of situation where his own expectations, combined with those of parishioners, could induce feelings “that sometimes you’re inadequate or unable to accomplish even what goals you set for yourself much less what other goals may have been put on other members of the church, leaders of the church, or just parishioners.” Perhaps what distinguishes this pastor, who has successfully overcome such stress, from others who have succumbed to it, is his self-awareness of how his own feelings interact with pressures imposed on him by others. One pastor managed to cope with stress related to dealing with church members by attempting to relate to and “understand people, their nature, who they are,” rather than “looking down my nose at everybody and going to be the savior of the world, going to change it all.” In essence, he recognized the danger to himself and his ministry of a Savior Complex.

Preaching and sermon development. The final category of stressors is related to preaching and sermon development. This particular theme appears to be conspicuously absent from the literature on pastoral burnout. For seven participants, the constant pressure of preaching and having to create new, interesting, and relevant sermons each

Factors,” *Practical Theology* 6 (2013): 186-87; Carl R. Wells, “The Effects of Work-Related and Boundary-Related Stress on the Emotional and Physical Health Status of Ordained Clergy,” *Pastoral Psychology* 62, no. 1 (2013): 101; Carl R. Wells, “The Moderating Effects of Congregational and Denominational Support on the Impact of Stress on Clerical Emotional and Physical Health Status,” *Pastoral Psychology* 62, no. 6 (2013): 873.

³⁴Grosch and Olsen, “Clergy Burnout,” 622.

³⁵Barnard and Curry, “The Relationship of Clergy Burnout,” 149. See also Doolittle, “The Impact of Behaviors,” 93.

week was a prominent cause of stress. According to one pastor, not only is preaching unrelenting, but technology gives church members the power to constantly compare the sermons and preaching styles of various pastors. As he described it, “There’s never a leap day. . . . We are being compared in ways today that we were not compared with our fellow pastors. Our people are listening to all the finest preachers on the radio and television and want to know why you can’t do that.” This pastor pointed out that the people listening at home do not realize that the sermons they hear have been carefully edited for the public. Such comparisons represent another manifestation of parishioners setting unduly high expectations for pastors, which adds to the stress of having to constantly create new sermons.

One pastor described the stress of “crafting new materials that would be biblically solid but culturally relevant, or always “coming up with something fresh.” This minister also pointed out that he had been preaching to this congregation for 25 years. Perhaps the longevity of these ministers in the same pastoral context is one reason that preaching and creating new sermons was such a prevalent theme. One pastor vividly summarized how stressful this issue can be by comparing it to “having to do a term paper every week and stand up there in front of your class delivering,” and “by the way, you’d better get an ‘A’ or you’re going to get blasted for it.”

Identifying and Dealing with Stress

In terms of identifying and dealing with stress, known and unexpected stress were discussed, with participants citing time off, delegation, and relationships with others as strategies for alleviating stress. The participants discussed the impact of stress on their personal lives in relation to family, health, spirituality, and perceptions of self.

Known and unexpected stress. The comments that arose in the context of known stress fall under the heading of self-awareness; that is, the pastors described how they are able to recognize when they are under stress. For the most part, the pastors

described signs and symptoms of stress that are amply documented in the literature on stress and coping,³⁶ including anger, irritability, sleep disturbances, and tendencies toward social withdrawal. For example, regarding this last manifestation of stress, one pastor related, “What I do recognize is when I wake up and I don’t want to go to church. Then I realize there’s a problem . . . but when I finally get there is when I realize, okay, it’s time for some time off or a couch session or something.”

Another pastor, who stated, “I’m fairly intuitive and I read myself pretty well,” described a tendency to micromanage “the more stressed I would get.” This behavior extended to all aspects of staff activities: “I would begin to micromanage everything down to what the custodians were doing and how they were dusting . . . and I started realizing that’s a stress reaction.”

Although only a few of the pastors described specific indicators of stress, most had adopted strategies for dealing with stress. The most prevalent tactic for managing stress was taking time off, reported by nine participants (45 percent). Additional strategies included delegating and prioritizing, cited by six pastors (30 percent) and seeking out social support, cited by two pastors (10 percent). Three pastors described other strategies (15 percent). On the whole, the strategies used by the participants to manage stress reflect adaptive coping strategies described in the literature.³⁷ These strategies will be elaborated subsequently.

While the participants were aware of the everyday stresses their job entailed, and typically had specific strategies for managing them, unexpected stresses carried a different type of pressure. The pastors were more philosophical and abstract in dealing with these types of stresses, with comments reflecting their spirituality and sense of calling to serve God. In fact, four participants explicitly stated that their faith and God

³⁶Lazarus and Folkman, *Stress, Appraisal, and Coping*.

³⁷Susan Folkman and Judith Tedlie Moskowitz, “Coping: Pitfalls and Promise,” *Annual Review of Psychology* 55, no. 2 (2004): 745-74.

kept them strong and prepared for dealing with the unknown. One pastor described a “sense of humility” as the “proper perspective” and reported feeling “a greater dependence on God.”

Another pastor felt that the ability to keep stress in perspective was something that came with age, once again reflecting the impact of age and burnout. Of all demographic characteristics, age is the only one consistently linked with burnout, with older age being protective.³⁸ Of course, age and experience are often related and both are protective of burnout. Notably, this pastor ascribed being able to deal with stress to both age and experience, noting, “Sometimes I think of things that happened later in my ministry if they happened early in my ministry, they would have really, really bothered me.” With experience “you see them through different lenses and you know life goes on and take on the next challenge.”

This same pastor also credited having mentors that he could discuss problems with who were “the kind of personalities that can put it in perspective . . . that this is not a life or death situation.” Doolittle and Wells both strongly recommend mentorship for reducing ministers’ stress, both in terms of being a protégé and of being a mentor to less experienced clergy.³⁹ For veteran clergy, mentoring others may be a source of renewal that prevents stagnation or burnout. In Doolittle’s research, having a mentor effectively reduced emotional exhaustion in ministers.⁴⁰

Overall, most of the comments centered on faith in God and religious calling. One pastor summarized this theme by commenting, “I always had this simple faith that because God had done what he had for me and for our church family in the past, that he

³⁸Randall, “Examining Thoughts,” 182.

³⁹Doolittle, “The Impact of Behaviors,” 93-94; Wells, “The Effects of Work-Related and Boundary-Related Stress,” 101; Wells, “Moderating Effects,” 873.

⁴⁰Doolittle, “The Impact of Behaviors,” 93-94.

would continue to do that in the future. You don't take yourself too seriously and you don't feel all the sense of responsibility personally." These seasoned pastors recognized the detrimental effects of a Savior Complex.⁴¹ Their confidence to deal with unexpected sources of stress grew out of their experience in dealing with stress in the past and their religious faith, rather than from a false or inflated sense of self.

Strategies for managing stress. Tan and Castillo frame self-care within a biblical perspective, noting that Jesus routinely devoted time to solitude and prayer.⁴² Spiritual practices such as Bible study, meditation, and prayer promote physical and psychological renewal as well as spiritual renewal and growth. Simply taking time off gives opportunities to rest, relax, and reflect. The participants expressed a variety of ways in which they took time off from their work. One pastor identified "certain rhythms in the life of the church, the life of the community and in my own life" and planned his time off accordingly. Others scheduled vacations at different intervals. Some had no specific schedule but nonetheless ensured that they took some time off.

Two participants specifically cited sabbaticals as important for stress relief, renewal, and restoration. In both cases, they were offered sabbaticals by church leaders. Ironically, in their ongoing research with Presbyterian clergy, Francis, Robbins, and Wulff found that none of the five support strategies they investigated, specifically taking a sabbatical, taking study leave, having a mentor, belonging to a minister support group, or having a spiritual director, significantly reduced emotional exhaustion.⁴³ Nevertheless, having taken study leave within the past five years (which the overwhelming majority had

⁴¹Grosch and Olsen, "Clergy Burnout," 622.

⁴²Tan and Castillo, "Self-Care and Beyond," 3.

⁴³Leslie J. Francis, Mandy Robbins, and Keith Wulff, "Assessing the Effectiveness of Support Strategies in Reducing Professional Burnout among Clergy Serving in the Presbyterian Church (USA)," *Practical Theology* 6 (2013): 327-28.

done) and having a mentor both enhanced satisfaction with ministry. Ministry involvement that precludes rest has been found to contribute to emotional exhaustion, while feeling rested and renewed inversely predicted emotional exhaustion.⁴⁴ In fact, Galek and colleagues observed that feeling rested and renewed had the most powerful impact on all three dimensions of burnout.⁴⁵

As previously noted, balancing multiple roles and prioritizing multiple roles emerged as major sources of stress for the participants in this study. In parallel fashion, delegation and prioritization were cited as essential strategies for dealing with occupational stress. The pastors recognized that it was impossible for them to perform all the roles and tasks that are requisite for running a ministry and knew that they had to establish boundaries for what they would (or could) do and not do. One minister, for example, was very specific in describing the roles he performed and the roles he delegated to others. As one participant stated, “Preaching the word is always priority”; other ministerial tasks could be delegated to others.

Doolittle proposed that the benefits of specific activities in buffering against burnout could be summarized by the balance and variety they bring to pastors’ everyday lives. He suggested that resilient pastors may be adept at setting healthy boundaries and dedicating time to beneficial activities, and may also possess the ability to disengage emotionally as well as physically from the demands of their ministry thereby rejuvenating themselves.⁴⁶ Doolittle’s description seems apt for capturing the stress management strategies used by the participants in this study. In Doolittle’s research, satisfaction with one’s spiritual life proved to be a powerful force in protecting against all three dimensions

⁴⁴Galek et al., “Burnout, Secondary Traumatic Stress, and Social Support,” 635.

⁴⁵Ibid.

⁴⁶Doolittle, “The Impact of Behaviors,” 93.

of burnout: emotional exhaustion, cynicism, and diminished personal accomplishment. Going on retreat also protected against cynicism, as did regular Bible study.⁴⁷

Folkman and Moskowitz noted that seeking out social support, originally conceived as a type of emotion-oriented coping, is accepted as a distinct coping strategy (social support coping) with practical and emotional dimensions.⁴⁸ In the meta-analysis presented by Shin and colleagues, social support was negatively related to depersonalization and diminished personal accomplishment.⁴⁹ Moreover, social support can protect against compassion fatigue.⁵⁰ Doolittle found that having a rich social network beyond the ministerial role seemed to reduce vulnerability to exhaustion.⁵¹ Galek et al. found that family support reduced ministers' sense of inefficacy.⁵²

Two participants cited discussing problems with others and seeking support in relationships as essential for managing stress. Describing himself as “a very relationally oriented guy,” one pastor credited his relationship and especially his relationship with his wife, with helping him manage stress. For another pastor, meeting with colleagues he respected and could talk and pray with was essential to managing stress. Through daily meetings they would help and support each other. Positive collegial relationships are recognized as an important source of social support.⁵³ According to Staley et al. building and sustaining close and supportive relationships with others serves as an important

⁴⁷Doolittle, “The Impact of Behaviors,” 93-94.

⁴⁸Folkman and Moskowitz, “Coping,” 758.

⁴⁹Hyojung Shin et al., “Relationships between Coping Strategies and Burnout Symptoms: A Meta-Analytic Approach,” *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice* 45, no. 1 (2014): 44.

⁵⁰Galek et al., “Burnout, Secondary Traumatic Stress, and Social Support,” 633.

⁵¹Doolittle, “The Impact of Behaviors,” 93-94.

⁵²Galek et al., “Burnout, Secondary Traumatic Stress, and Social Support,” 285.

⁵³Folkman and Moskowitz, “Coping,” 758.

resilience factor for clergy, who often experience feelings of isolation and loneliness due to the unique demands of ministerial work.⁵⁴

Personal Life

Within the theme of personal life, the participants described the relationship between stress and four specific facets of their personal lives: family, health, spirituality, and self.

Family. The participants were acutely aware of the impact that their work-related stress could have on their wives and children. An interesting finding was that fifteen of the twenty participants reported that they tried to shield and protect their wives from stress, in part by not sharing their own stress or problems. Five participants felt that their spouses experienced specific stress as a result of being a pastor's wife. Role stress can occur when job stress spills over into one's personal life. This awareness seemed to be at the heart of the pastors' attempts to protect their spouses from their own professional stress. Furthermore, balancing work and family roles can be a significant source of role conflict and stress.⁵⁵

In exploring the relationship of occupational stress to the physical and emotional health of religious clergy, Wells observed a gap in research related to the impact of work-to-family conflict on job satisfaction and health.⁵⁶ His study of 883 sole or senior pastors disclosed that work stress and boundary stress each had a negative impact on physical and emotional health.⁵⁷ Although the pastors made it clear that they wanted to spare their

⁵⁴Ryan C. Staley et al., "Strategies Employed by Clergy to Prevent and Cope with Interpersonal Isolation," *Pastoral Psychology* 62, no. 6 (2013): 843.

⁵⁵Maslach, Schaufeli, and Leiter, "Job Burnout," 397-422.

⁵⁶Wells, "The Effects of Work-Related and Boundary-Related Stress," 103.

⁵⁷*Ibid.*, 104.

spouses from the negative aspects of their work, separating their personal and professional lives would not only benefit their families but should reduce their own boundary stress. Furthermore, keeping work stress separate from family life can also be construed as a type of psychological disengagement. Psychological detachment from work during off-hours buffers against the negative effects of high job demands.⁵⁸ Conversely, lack of psychological detachment, or preoccupation with work, heightens the risk of emotional exhaustion regardless of the degree of job demands.

Burns, Chapman, and Guthrie discovered in their research that a common complaint among pastors' spouses was that emotionally, the church takes precedence.⁵⁹ One pastor recounted that, early in his career, he was so committed to his church that he was constantly trying to recruit new members even after his regular work hours. He recognized that this caused stress for his wife. His experience suggests that this dedication, combined with external pressure, may be a hazard for new pastors and their families.

The participants were divided on whether their vocation caused stress for their children. Ten pastors felt their children experienced some degree of stress, while nine said their children were not affected by having a father who was a pastor. Those who said their children did not experience stress deliberately strived to protect their children from excessive stress or unduly high expectations. Those who felt their children did experience stress attributed it either to unfair expectations or to scapegoating for something their father had done at the church. According to one pastor, "Preacher's kids get a hard, hard life" because they are held to unfairly high, unrealistic standards compared to their peers. Decrying the "expectations that people put on them," he stated, "When they got to high

⁵⁸Sabine Sonnentag, Iris Kuttler, and Charlotte Fritz, "Job Stressors, Emotional Exhaustion, and Need for Recovery: A Multi-Source Study on the Benefits of Psychological Detachment," *Journal of Vocational Behavior* 76, no. 3 (2010): 355.

⁵⁹Burns, Chapman, and Guthrie, *Resilient Ministry*, 178.

school, I had to remind people. These are just like your kids. Don't put them on a pedestal.”

Self-care practices include activities such as family vacations and enjoyable recreational activities.⁶⁰ Burns, Chapman, and Guthrie emphasize the importance of maintaining healthy, supportive marital and family relationships that promote strong relational bonds and emotional intimacy.⁶¹

Health. Nearly half a century of research attests to the detrimental impact of stress on physical and psychological health.⁶² Two aspects of the relationship between stress and health emerged under this theme: health-related stress and health-related stress relief. Eight of the participants disclosed having physical ailments associated with stress. Digestive problems, insomnia, high blood pressure, and sexual problems were all mentioned as consequences of excessive stress. Three participants reported constantly struggling with weight as a result of stress-induced overeating, an extremely common form of emotion-focused coping.⁶³ One participant, who had type 1 diabetes for most of his life, recognized how occupational stress exacerbated his pre-existing condition, resulting in severe coronary problems. This pastor took early retirement at the insistence of his cardiologist, who concluded that even with good glucose management, diet, and exercise, his health (if not his life) was in serious jeopardy if he did not relinquish some of his responsibilities.

⁶⁰Charlton et al., “Clergy Work-Related Psychological Health,” 133.

⁶¹Burns, Chapman, and Guthrie, *Resilient Ministry*, 186.

⁶²Folkman and Moskowitz, “Coping”; David S. Goldstein and Irwin J. Kopin, “Evolution of Concepts of Stress,” *Stress* 10, no. 2 (2007): 109; Gregg D. Jacobs, “The Physiology of Mind-Body Interactions: The Stress Response and the Relaxation Response,” *The Journal of Alternative & Complementary Medicine* 7, no. 1 (2001): 83; Lazarus and Folkman, *Stress, Appraisal, and Coping*, 141; Maslach, Schaufeli, and Leiter, “Job Burnout”; Selye, “Forty Years of Stress Research,” 53.

⁶³Folkman and Moskowitz, “Coping,” 745.

Studies confirm that health problems which have been linked with stress are rampant among religious clergy. A survey of United Methodist clergy in North Carolina disclosed an excessively high prevalence of obesity, diabetes, asthma, arthritis, and hypertension.⁶⁴ Interestingly, the ministers subjectively rated their health higher than indicated by their objective health status. Proeschold-Bell and LeGrand suggest that this discrepancy might reflect self-sacrifice; indeed, avoiding self-care while giving precedence to the needs of others could be a cause of their health conditions.⁶⁵ Furthermore, stress typically plays a role in the development of obesity and high blood pressure.⁶⁶

On the positive side, the majority of participants (75 percent) reported engaging in some form of health-related stress relief. Most engaged in regular physical exercise and two pastors deemed getting sufficient sleep as essential for health. One participant combined physical exercise with prayer, and explained that he would ride his mountain bike through wilderness “praying, thinking, thinking about the message, thinking about the people, and God . . . riding and thinking and reflecting.” The participants described a variety of athletic and sports activities, including running, biking, boating, and fishing. As one participant commented, it does not matter what the particular activity is, but “the only way you can replace emotional energy that is being expended is to do something emotionally positive and good,” that “makes you feel good.”

Proeschold-Bell et al. proposed several strategies for helping clergy members reduce stress and enhance physical, psychological, and spiritual health including peer support marked by confidentiality and trust, training for pastors in conflict resolution and boundary setting, institutional support for strategies to improve health, and a compensation

⁶⁴Rae Jean Proeschold-Bell and Susan LeGrand, “Physical Health Functioning among United Methodist Clergy,” *Journal of Religious Health* 51, no. 3 (2012): 740.

⁶⁵Ibid.

⁶⁶Jacobs, “The Physiology of Mind-Body Interactions,” 83.

structure based on experience.⁶⁷ Wells found that congregational and denominational support worked to decrease the negative effects of both work stress and boundary stress on physical and emotional health.⁶⁸ Younger clergy tend to be most aware of the importance of maintaining physical and psychological health and therefore most inclined to incorporate healthy eating and physical exercise into their daily lives and welcome support from peers.⁶⁹ For the pastors in this study who represent a less health-conscience generation, awareness of the importance of maintaining a healthy lifestyle was in some cases a response to experiencing negative consequences of stress. Some pastors, however, had been athletic since youth and recognized the emotional as well as physical benefits of exercise.

Spirituality. Although this feeling was not universal, the majority of participants believed that stress had a positive effect on their spirituality, leading them to a deeper relationship with God and instilling in them a sense of humility. This finding is not surprising, as they dealt with stress by devoting more time to prayer, meditation, Bible reading, and worship. With respect to humility, one participant described stress as “fabulous,” elaborating, “The fabulous deal about stress is that it disabuses you of the notion that you’re in control. . . . Stress drives you deeper into the word and your walk with God.”

In contrast to these positive statements, three participants viewed their job stress less favorably, either causing at least some degree of tension, or having no effect on their spirituality. Nevertheless, the two pastors who struggled ultimately overcame their stress and came out stronger.

⁶⁷Proeschold-Bell et al., “A Theoretical Model,” 714-16.

⁶⁸Wells, “Moderating Effects,” 873.

⁶⁹Sara LeGrand et al., “Healthy Leaders: Multilevel Health Promotion Considerations for Diverse United Methodist Church Pastors,” *Journal of Community Psychology* 41, no. 3 (2013): 303.

It may be that for the pastors in this study, grappling with stress generated a type of spiritual renewal, which protects not only against emotional exhaustion, but against spiritual dryness, or a “depletion of spiritual vitality.”⁷⁰ Notably, the pastors in this study participated in many of the activities that promote spiritual renewal and personal well-being, including prayer, worship, Bible reading or study, meditation, journaling, physical exercise, and enjoyable leisure and recreational activities with family and friends.⁷¹ Through these practices, the ministers in Chandler’s research felt rested, renewed, and closer to God.

Self. This final subtheme of “self” assessed the ways in which stress affected the pastors personally, including their sense of self and self-image. Ten participants elaborated on this theme, with an even divide between those who viewed the relationship between stress and self positively and those who viewed it negatively.

On the negative side, three pastors described depressive feelings, with one explicitly indicating how he fell into a deep state of depression for an extended period. Burnout may lead to depression. Depressive symptoms are included in the MBI and in the SEEM, which was specifically designed to capture signs of burnout in clergy.⁷² One participant described a loss of self-confidence, which is associated with inefficacy or sense of diminished personal accomplishment.⁷³ Another participant felt that stress and

⁷⁰Chandler, “Pastoral Burnout,” 283.

⁷¹Ibid., 273-87; Chandler, “The Impact of Pastors’ Spiritual Practices,” 1-9.

⁷²Maslach, Schaufeli, and Leiter, “Job Burnout”; Leslie J. Francis et al., “Work-Related Psychological Health among Clergy Serving in the Presbyterian Church (USA): Testing the Idea of Balanced Affect,” *Review of Religious Research* 53, no. 1 (2011): 9-22. The MBI is the Maslach Burnout Inventory and the SEEM is the Scale of Emotional Exhaustion in Ministry.

⁷³Maslach, Schaufeli, and Leiter, “Job Burnout,” 397.

pressure were self-induced, which invokes the unduly high self-expectations that can lead to burnout.⁷⁴

Among the participants who viewed stress in a positive light, a common perception was that stress generated drive and incentive. One participant explicitly stated, “I have a tendency to do my best work under pressure.” Another pastor described stress as energizing and motivational. One pastor felt that dealing with stress made him a stronger person.

Selye used the term *eustress* to denote stress that is psychological healthy.⁷⁵ As opposed to situations perceived as threatening (which provoke *distress*), challenging situations such as work assignments that call for innovation and creativity can induce eustress, with potentially positive effects on health, well-being, and productivity. Several ministers in the study of Charlton et al. believed that a certain degree of stress could be energizing, and in fact, is essential for optimum everyday functioning.⁷⁶ The same was true for several participants in this study.

Advice for Young Ministers

Across occupations, younger workers are the most susceptible to burnout.⁷⁷ Among religious clergy, younger clergy are most likely to leave, and are therefore most in need of support.⁷⁸ Four subthemes arose under this final theme of advice for young

⁷⁴Barnard and Curry, “The Relationship of Clergy Burnout,” 149.

⁷⁵Selye, “Forty Years of Stress Research,” 56.

⁷⁶Charlton et al., “Clergy Work-Related Psychological Health,” 133.

⁷⁷Maslach, Schaufeli, and Leiter state that “of all the demographic variables that have been studied, age is the one that has been most consistently related to burnout. . . . Among younger employees the level of burnout is reported to be higher than it is among those over 30 or 40 years old.” Maslach, Schaufeli, and Leiter, “Job Burnout,” 409.

⁷⁸Wells, “The Moderating Effects,” 873. Wells states, “Younger clergy are more prone to emotional burnout and exhaustion. . . . Younger clergy could benefit from mentoring relationships with older clergy.” Ibid., 886.

pastors: problems and perspectives (33 percent), relationship with God (22 percent), preach the Word (17 percent), and relationship with congregants (17 percent).

A common perspective was that the best advice for young pastors is that there will always be problems and stress, but ultimately they will pass. In effect, they were telling young ministers to be realistic. There are challenges in any endeavor, and as the large body of research on burnout attests, there will always be stress in vocations that are built on interpersonal relationships.⁷⁹ For ministers, faith and belief in God is a valuable resource that will help them to overcome the inevitable challenges. Faith in God was mentioned explicitly by all participants who elaborated on the subtheme of problems and perspectives.

Three participants recommended that young pastors center their energy on preaching the Word. Broadly, this falls under the heading of prioritizing, which is a common stressor for ministers.⁸⁰ While novice clergy are unlikely to have the myriad responsibilities of the veteran pastors in this study, focusing on their religious mission may be a particular source of strength for those who might question their choice of vocation.

Three participants emphasized the importance of cultivating strong relationships with parishioners. One pastor astutely commented, “You don’t exist in isolation. You live with people, you’re among people, and the secret to ministry, the secret to leadership is building strong relationships.” Following this advice could help novice ministers avoid the conflicts and toxic relationships that exacerbate stress, and in some cases, lead to

⁷⁹Maslach, Schaufeli, and Leiter, “Job Burnout,” 419.

⁸⁰Chandler, “Pastoral Burnout,” 283.

ministers leaving their church.⁸¹ Furthermore, positive relationships and social support protect against stress and burnout.⁸²

Implications of Findings

From the perspective of burnout, this study is unique in that it focuses on individuals who have overcome challenges that cause many pastors to burnout or leave the ministry and instead have thrived to achieve success and longevity. A common pattern among these veteran pastors is that over time they gained new perspective and became more effective at coping with stress. They modified and adapted their behaviors, adopting a number of practices that are recommended in the broader literature on stress and burnout and the specific literature on religious clergy. These practices include delegating and prioritizing responsibilities, seeking social support, taking time off, and engaging in regular physical exercise, family vacations and recreational activities, and in spiritual practices such as prayer, meditation, and worship.

The overall essence of the pastors' experience is that despite numerous stressors, they were ultimately able to see things in perspective and always remember their calling, in addition to finding effective stress management strategies that enabled them to continue successfully in ministry.

The findings from this study can potentially promote positive change at the individual and organizational levels. Roughly one-third of pastors will leave the ministry within five years.⁸³ Determining and adopting effective strategies to help pastors recognize and adapt to occupational stressors may help to stem this trend and help pastors

⁸¹Doolittle, "The Impact of Behaviors," 93; Tanner and Zvonkovic, "Forced to Leave," 713; Marcus Tanner, Jeffrey Wherry, and Anisa Zvonkovic, "Clergy Who Experience Trauma as a Result of Forced Termination," *Journal of Religious Health* 52, no. 4 (2013): 1281.

⁸²Chandler, "Pastoral Burnout," 5-6; Folkman and Moskowitz, "Coping," 758; Sonnentag, Kuttler, and Fritz, "Job Stressors, Emotional Exhaustion, and Need for Recovery," 355.

⁸³Witt, *Replenish*, 18-19.

at all stages of ministry to have a long and satisfying career. Virtually all participants in this study acknowledged that at some points of their lives they felt frustrated, unduly stressed, and perhaps stalled at some stage of spiritual or professional development. They might have contemplated abandoning their ministry calling altogether. Despite this, several participants viewed stress in a positive light, and as a force that deepened their spirituality and enhanced incentive and motivation. This perspective, reflecting eustress, is not unique to the ministers in this study.⁸⁴ Transforming stress into a positive force may be construed as a type of cognitive reframing that could prove helpful for pastors in danger of succumbing to stress.

The aforementioned strategies that the participants adopted to manage stress appear throughout the literature on stress and burnout. The pastors in this study appear to have discovered them on their own. However, pastors would benefit greatly from organizational and denominational support for stress management practices. Time off, prayer support groups, and pastoral retreats have proved particularly popular, but they are not always available, especially for rural pastors who suffer most from the effects of isolation.⁸⁵ Additionally, self-sacrificing attitudes that inhibit clergy from taking advantage of self-care practices must be addressed.⁸⁶ Ideally, stress management strategies should be implemented for seminarians as well as available for practicing clergy.

Increased understanding of the developmental processes that underpinned the success of these tenured pastors and facilitated their development of the skills needed to adapt to and learn from stressors within ministry may not only reduce the number of pastors that experience burnout, but may also increase the potential for greater numbers

⁸⁴Chandler, "Pastoral Burnout," 278; Chandler, "The Impact of Pastors' Spiritual Practices," 5-6.

⁸⁵Greg Scott and Rachel Lovell, "The Rural Pastors Initiative: Addressing Isolation and Burnout in Rural Ministry," *Pastoral Psychology* 64, no. 1 (2015): 71.

⁸⁶Proeschold-Bell and LeGrand, "Physical Health Functioning," 740; Scott and Lovell, "The Rural Pastors Initiative," 93.

of pastors to experience successful and fulfilled ministry work. The development of these skills in younger pastors may not only provide for a more rewarding professional and personal experience, but could potentially serve to benefit their families and the church culture in which they serve.

The methodological implications of the present study include increasing the use of qualitative research, particularly in-depth interviews, in research on successful, resilient clergy who have thrived in ministry. This study helped advance the qualitative research methodology by uncovering, through interviews and close analysis, pastors' perspectives on coping with occupational stressors, which can lead to burnout if not managed effectively. This is the first study to do so. As to the theoretical implications of this study, the burnout and stress management models continue to be a useful theoretical and interpretive framework, as the pastors sampled in this study faced occupational stressors that could lead to burnout in a caring profession where burnout is highly prevalent. The socioecological framework, with its emphasis on self-care, is also significant. Thus, the study's findings were consistent with the theoretical framework and with current theories in the field.

In terms of practice, these findings should be of interest to all seminarians, active ministers, and theology professors and therapists involved with teaching and helping seminarians and clergy. Learning about the stressors faced by clergy and preparing seminarians for coping effectively with these stressors by using the practices and perspectives of resilient clergy can help them thrive in ministry.

Limitations of the Study

Though above average for a phenomenological study, this study was limited by the small sample size of twenty participants, all of whom were resilient pastors with quantifiable measures of success, which may affect the generalizability of the study. The study may also be limited by the participants' memories, which might interfere with their ability to reflect accurately on prior experiences. Basic assumptions were made in the

research. It was assumed that the research questions would illuminate the lived experiences of resilient clergy and that participants would answer interview questions openly and accurately. Idealistic responses or inaccurate, incomplete information would limit the study.

Transferability

The limited size of participants could be seen as a constraint on the possibility of generalizing the findings to other pastors and/or contexts. However, transferability, not generalizability, is the intended goal of phenomenological research and this study in particular.⁸⁷ Transferability is the way in which a reader determines whether, and to what extent, this particular phenomenon in this particular context can be transferred to a different context. Patton calls this “context bound extrapolations,” which he defines as “speculations on the likely applicability of findings to other situations under similar, but not identical, conditions.”⁸⁸ With this perspective in mind, it was the intention of this project to focus on the transferability of the findings, allowing the rich, thick, and descriptive language that emerged from the interview process to create a relatable picture of the participants and their context. This depth and richness provides a viability of the discoveries within this qualitative account to a broader context and application by allowing the readers to relate the information to their own contexts in ways they deem appropriate.⁸⁹ In particular, the results of this study are highly transferable to pastors of all church sizes in that even though the specific manifestation of stress may be different, the stressors is often the same.⁹⁰

⁸⁷Smith, Flowers, and Larkin, *Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis*, 51.

⁸⁸Patton, *Qualitative Research and Evaluation Methods*, 489.

⁸⁹Thomas H. Schram, *Conceptualizing Qualitative Inquiry* (Columbus, OH: Merrill Prentice Hall, 2003).

⁹⁰A pastor in a large church may deal with a power struggle originating from a group of deacons or staff members while a pastor in a smaller rural setting may experience a power struggle from a

Despite the bounded nature of this study, many of the findings will still be applicable to the reader because “the general lies in the particular.”⁹¹ Readers can learn vicariously when a relevant narrative demonstrates a model they can relate to or can follow.⁹²

Recommendations for Future Research

This study has important implications and can be used to study other populations. First, while this study was primarily focused on pastors serving churches in the southern United States, other studies could be carried out on clergy in other regions to determine if they coped differently or if aspects of the regional culture contributed to or reduced their stress. Also, in expanding upon the foundation of this study, future studies could provide more specific details about the parishioners to see how the specific congregational culture added to or reduced the levels of occupational stress. Moreover, active parishioners could be given in-depth interviews for their perspectives about what made their minister successful or unsuccessful. In the same vein, pastors’ spouses and children could also be interviewed for their perspectives.

Yet another suggestion would be a comparative study that looks at pastors who have experienced success and longevity in ministry within different size congregations. A study with this focus may provide valuable insight into the possible differences or nuances of stress in relation to church size.

Also, in an effort to further the results of this research, it would be beneficial to have a follow up study done from a quantitative perspective that reaches a much larger group of participants. The study could seek to determine if the results of this project are

prominent family within the church. The stressors are similar while the manner of stress may be contextual.

⁹¹Fredrick Erikson, “Qualitative Methods of Research on Teaching,” in *Handbook of Research on Teaching*, ed. Martin C. Whittrock (Old Tappan, NJ: MacMillan, 1986), 152.

⁹²Elliot Eisner, *The Enlightened Eye: Qualitative Inquiry and the Enhancement of Educational Practice* (Old Tappan, NJ: MacMillan, 1991), 199.

more generalizable to a larger population.

Lastly, there should be further research done on pastors in appointed assignments/congregations. Although this study contained only one United Methodist pastor, his situation was unique because he remained at the church that he started for thirty-six years. Most UMC pastors are moved by their denominational leaders on an average of every three years. It would seem that the stress level added to these pastors and their families would be significant, beyond the rigors and stressors of day to day ministry.

Summary and Conclusions

An accumulating body of theoretical and empirical literature documents and describes excessively high levels of stress and burnout in religious clergy. To a significant degree, this occurrence is not unusual among caring professionals.⁹³ As knowledge of the burnout phenomenon expanded, it became evident that it was not limited to people-oriented professions and typically involves an interaction of personal and organizational characteristics. In the case of religious clergy, predisposition to burnout is heightened by factors such as unrealistic expectations (on the part of congregation members as well as self-imposed) and prioritizing the needs of others to the neglect of self-care.⁹⁴ In light of this developing research, it was the goal of this study to add to the growing body of literature focused on this epidemic of stress and burnout in the pastorate. Twenty pastors were interviewed who had been able to remain in one location for fifteen years or more while maintaining an effective ministry. The interviews allowed the pastors to speak freely about their own perceptions of how they encountered, dealt with, and even learned from the stressors of ministry. It is hoped that these insights will benefit younger clergy and allow them to grow and thrive in ministry.

⁹³Maslach, Schaufeli, and Leiter, "Job Burnout," 397.

⁹⁴Burns, Chapman, and Guthrie, *Resilient Ministry*, 61-63; Scott and Lovell, "The Rural Pastors Initiative," 71.

APPENDIX 1
INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

In what ways have you experienced stress in your ministry?

POSSIBLE PROMPTS:

How much of your overall stress comes from the following areas and in what ways?

- Parishioners
- Staff or coworkers
- Community
- Personal Issues
- Organizational structures (i.e., church organization and/or denominational organization)

How has stress impacted your personal life?

POSSIBLE PROMPTS:

- Do you ever perceive stress as a good/beneficial element?
- How did you learn to recognize the stress?
- How did you deal with it?
- What have you learned from it or how have you grown from it?

How has stress impacted your family?

POSSIBLE PROMPTS:

- Do you think ministry stress has more negatively impacted you or your family most, and why?
- How did you learn to recognize this?
- What did you do to protect your family from the stress of ministry?

How has stress impacted your physical health?

POSSIBLE PROMPTS:

- Did you have any illnesses that you perceive may have been stress related?
- How have you learned to deal with the negative impact of stress?
- How has the stress of ministry impacted you in a positive way, if any?

How has stress impacted your spiritual health?

POSSIBLE PROMPTS:

- How do you perceive other people's problems that have been brought to you for answers?
- Have you always perceived them that way or did you grow to that perspective over time? If so, how do you perceive that process of growth?

How much of your ministerial stress comes from the following:

POSSIBLE PROMPTS:

- Parishioners
- Staff or coworkers
- Community
- Personal Issues
- Organizational structures (i.e. Church organization and/or denominational organization)

Wrap Up

What are the most effective ways you have learned to mitigate the negative aspects of stress? *(The purpose of this question is to make sure all vital perceptions were covered in the interview and to test the consistency of their responses.)*

POSSIBLE PROMPTS *(If not yet mentioned):*

- Spiritual Disciplines?
- Physical Disciplines?
- Organizational Structure/Strategy?

FROM YOUR EXPERIENCE, what do you perceive is the most important thing young/new pastors need to know about dealing with stress. What is one piece of advice you would share from your own experience?

APPENDIX 2

INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTIONS

PP1

Speaker 1: Stress has a huge impact on many of our coworkers and our coworkers in the faith. What I'm interested in talking to you today about is, how have you experienced stress in ministry and how have you been able to overcome a lot of these statistics and be able to have longevity and success in this location where you've been serving for so long? I think I want to start with, what ways do you experience stress the most? What direction does it come at you from? Is it more from congregants? Is it more from staff? Is it something that you really place on yourself? Is it something internally? Where do you feel that stress comes at you?

Speaker 2: One of the things that God has blessed me with is I don't let a lot of things bother me. I never have.

Speaker 1: That's good.

Speaker 2: That's one of the things that have really, really, really helped me out. The last time I went to the doctor and he said my blood pressure was high, I said, uh-oh. Doc, check that out again. I don't let things bother me. I never have. I grew up in a very difficult situation. My mom and dad were divorced when I was 6 years old. I grew up on the rough side of the track in the [location in city]. I had some difficult times in life. When God saved me in 1977 and I got to ministry in 1986, I had been through so much in my life that this thing called ministry, to me, was easy and I never let it bother me. I even grew up in a church that had so much I saw as a kid, had so much strife in the church that when I got to be pastor and had to deal with some of the stuff I had to deal with, I said man, this is easy compared to some of the stuff I grew up with. It just has never, I've never let stuff in the ministry bother me. I get it like everybody else. I get it from the staff. I get it from members. I get it from the congregation, but I have never let it get to me to the point where I feel like I'm talking through a tower. I think God has blessed me with that gift to not be able to let people or pressure bother me.

Speaker 1: How do you deal with that? Let's say somebody brings to you a very heavy situation? What, mentally, do you go through when obviously, something very heavy, maybe it's a conflict within the church, a very emotional, heated situation? How do you process that?

Speaker 2: It happens to all of us. I've had situations here at the church, like most pastors have had. I've had difficulties dealing with a staff member, dealing with a conflict with deacons at the church. My way of handling that has always been, by God's grace, always follow the Mathew 18 principle. I've been at this church for 30 years. Everybody I came here with, 50 members. Everybody that's come to this church have come under my leadership. I've taught them in new member's class. Some of them I got to get to know really well. I've been on vacation with some of them. When conflict comes up between that individual against me, the first thing I do is I set up a meeting. I try coffee, breakfast and I say, before we deal with the conflict, my concern is I thought our relationship, just

our friendship would supersede any conflict. If you got a problem with a sermon or preacher or decision I've made, I don't have a problem with that, but I would have thought before you shared it with everybody else in the church, that you'd have come to me and said hey [self-reference], can we talk? Can we just sit down? I just thought that our friendship meant more than a decision that I made. That's the thing I've always, the struggle that I've had with people is that we allow things in the ministry to affect us to the part that it affects the relationship and I've got problems with that. I would think that our relationship was more secure than that. Even if you disagree with a sermon I preach or a decision I made, our relationship was such that you would have called me on the side, say hey man, can I talk to you? I heard this. Did you really say this? Did you really make that decision? Instead of just hearing it and running with it and just making conclusions, not even getting my side of the story. I've always struggled with that, so I've always tried to deal with the Mathew 18 principle. Go to that person first. If you and I can work it out, I've won my brother. If we can't work it out, then I'm going to bring somebody else in because my ultimate goal is reconciliation. That's my ultimate goal because man, we're supposed to be brothers in faith. We're supposed to be sisters and brothers in the faith. If we can't get along or we both say we love Jesus. I love Jesus. You love Jesus. We can't get along. One of us is lying.

Speaker 1: That's good.

Speaker 2: Because if both of us loves Jesus, we should be able to work this out. That's just how I've handled things before, and I've been in a situation where it's obvious the other person was lying. We've butted heads. I said we're just going to have to agree to disagree. I never allow, by God's grace, I'm still in this thing. I've never allowed a conflict that I've had with somebody in the church or somebody on staff or somebody in ministry to allow me to get to the point where I literally just can't stand being in that person's presence. God has just given me grace in that area.

Speaker 1: That is grace.

Speaker 2: It is. That's grace and a lot of that has to do, I have no doubt, it's just me. It's not everybody. A lot of it has to do with how I feel with my relationship with God because I tell you, when I was out in the world, I gave the Devil 103 percent. I mean, I gave it all to the Devil. Now that I got saved and give my life to the Lord, shame on me to be saved, feel God's Holy Spirit and yet allow the enemy to come between me and another brother or me and another sister. I think a lot of it has to do with my relationship with God. I know I've got to answer to God for everything I say and everything I do and particularly how I treat somebody else. That has kept me brother.

Speaker 1: That's amazing.

Speaker 2: It is amazing. People don't understand it. They don't understand it. They can't figure it out. They can't figure it out. They have people who have left this church man, because they didn't like a decision I made, they don't like a choice I've made or they didn't like a sermon I preached. I mean, have left this church. Years later, those same people will call me and say, [self-reference] I need to apologize.

Speaker 1: Wow.

Speaker 2: You made it look too easy or too good. I jumped to conclusions. Now that I'm not there and I see all the stuff that, I did need to call and apologize to you. God is good. By the grace of God. Even my wife gets upset with me sometimes because I don't get upset. I mean, she's mad and I'm just, it's going to be all right. No, don't just tell me it's going to be all right. I need you to get mad. Get upset. You know? That's why I lean on the Spirit. He's given me that love, joy and that peace I need.

Speaker 1: That's powerful.

Speaker 2: He's given it to me man. It's again, a lot of it has to go back to my relationship with God. That relationship with God has kept me in areas of relationship with other people.

Speaker 1: Has there ever been a time where you've lost that perspective for a moment?

Speaker 2: I have.

Speaker 1: How do you get back on track? How do you recognize it and then get back on track?

Speaker 2: There are times I have to go back and apologize to somebody. I mean, I've just, you know I remember one time my ministers made me so upset and they weren't coming to Sunday school. They weren't coming to worship. These are requirements for people on staff. You know? And leaders. If you say you're a leader, you need to be in bible study. Get to church. They would not show up. They wouldn't call. I said, this is crazy. I got on the phone one time, we used to have in the old building, and we used to have pictures of different staff. I went there one day and just took them all down. What's wrong with pastor? I was like a madman. I was so upset. That night I got home and God said, boy what are you doing? I was convicted by that and I had to go and apologize to each of those individuals. I said man, I allowed my flesh to take over. It shouldn't have happened, but it did. I'm not perfect. God talked to me about it. Again, because my relationship with God, God will convict me of it before somebody else will. I've had to go and apologize and ask people's forgiveness, which I never have a problem with. I never have a problem with asking for people's forgiveness if I know I've done them wrong.

Speaker 1: Then I'm interested really, real interested in, if that's the foundation of what really keeps you from experiencing that stress, what are your spiritual disciplines that keep that close connectivity with God at all times? What is it that you do to make sure?

Speaker 2: Jackson, I'm convinced that in order for a person to have a growing intimate relationship with God, you've got to spend time with God. I'm convinced of that. Right now, this is day 1 of a 21 day fast that we're on as a church. Every year at the beginning of the year, we go on a 21 day fast. One of the things that I put in my journal for this 21 days is on the top of the list of spiritual growth, I always want to be better than I was last month or last year. In order for that to happen, I need to spend time in God's word. I need to spend time in prayer. I'm doing the fast. I've given up some things that is weakness of the flesh, like Krispy Kreme doughnuts. My weakness is Krispy Kreme doughnuts and homemade blueberry vanilla ice cream. Those 2 things. But I am convinced that my relationship with God, that vertical relationship with God helps me to deal with the horizontal relationship with other people. Even I was telling the people of the church this past week, last night's service. One of the things that my wife and I have just made a commitment to do, starting with what we did last year, is that we agree that we would read the scripture together and pray every day. I told the church and I noticed that the more we do that, the less I get in trouble. I told them, I said, I have not been on the sofa in 12 months man. I've been in my bed. The church just cracked up. I said, because I'm known to be on the sofa sometimes, but I have not been on the sofa for 12 months. I said hey, and I have no doubt it had to do with us praying together and reading the scripture together. That relationship with God. We've noticed that when we get slacking or when we get busy in it, you're caught up with my travel schedule or her travel schedule, I notice we get on each other's nerves a little bit more. But when we get together, we need to get back to it. We need to get back to it. To answer your question, that time with God, that intimate time with God. That's what has kept me through the years.

Speaker 1: Is that something you do first thing in the morning?

Speaker 2: No. I'm a night person. My wife is a morning person. She gets up every morning at 5 o'clock, prays for me. Now, this is a difficult time because one of my commitments during the 21 days is to pray every morning at 6 o'clock. That's tough for me. I'm not a morning person. As a congregation, we pray at 6 o'clock, 12 noon and 6 PM as congregation at some time during those 3 hours. Then throughout the day. My quiet time is at night. When I get home, fixing to eat dinner with my wife and watch the news. Then I go into my office and that's my time. She's out by 10:30. She's knocked out and that's the time I spend with the, after I do our quiet time and then we'll read together and pray together. Then I'll go into my office and spend that time. That has been what's helped and sustained me through the years.

Speaker 1: Do you have any physiological disciplines that go along with that? Walking or anything, relaxing?

Speaker 2: We have a walking track at church. We have a fitness center. That has been, I grew up and I was an athlete. Junior high through high school. I played football, basketball, ran track from 7th grade to 12th grade and I enjoyed doing it, but I got married. I started having kids. I kind of backed up from those things. One of my problems is that I tell too much from the pulpit. I told them a few weeks ago. I said when I first met my wife, because we met in 8th grade. I said when I first met [wife's name], I had abs. I said now I've got flabs. When I first met her, I had a 6 pack. Now I'm a 1 pack. I need to do more physically and that's one of the things in my journal for these 21 days. I'm disciplining myself to work out every day Monday through Friday for at least a half hour. I hope it will continue because I need to do better in that area.

Speaker 1: Is there any hobbies that you participate in?

Speaker 2: I love basketball. I love playing basketball.

Speaker 1: So, you do that often?

Speaker 2: Yeah. I love playing. We have a gym here. Every now and then, I get to go. I love playing basketball. But I don't get to often. Not that I can't. I just don't have the time. I don't play golf. I tried golf 3 times. I stunk at it. Once I got on the green, I was good. Mentally, I said this is going to be a cake walk. The reason I thought that and people laugh when I say this, because I'm very good at putt-putt. I love putt-putt. Love it. I'm really good. I figured, man this is easy, but man, getting from that tee box to the green. Oh, Lord. I didn't cuss, but I wanted to write it down like a brother would say. I just got frustrated by it man.

Speaker 1: You don't need any extra frustrations.

Speaker 2: I don't need the extra frustration.

Speaker 1: Let's go back to your wife for a moment.

Speaker 2: Okay.

Speaker 1: Obviously ministry creates stress on our families as well as us.

Speaker 2: Yes.

Speaker 1: What is your perspective when something comes up about how much you let her in on it? Is it something that you all handle together no matter what or is there certain things that you feel like you have to protect her from?

Speaker 2: One of the great things about starting off small, I'm sure you can identify with that, is that you can kind of set some boundaries early on and one of the boundaries I set at the very beginning in our congregation is I said folks, [wife's name] is my wife. She's not your staff member. She's [self-reference]'s wife. I say if she doesn't want to come to both services, she doesn't have to come to both services. If she only comes to one service, don't expect her to be in all these ministries or another. If she chooses to, fine. If she doesn't, don't. Don't put undue pressure on her. I tell the church, don't bother my kids growing up. Preacher's kids get a hard, hard life. I said they're just like your knuckle head kids. They are going to make mistakes. They're going to mess up. I said, but just let them be kids. I try to set some standards and boundaries when we first started out. Every now and then I just have to remind folks even here. I try to protect her from what people feel that the pastor's wife should be or should do. By God's grace, she's never had that pressure to be somebody she's not. She's always allowed herself to be, of course there's a lot of things in ministry I don't tell her about because my wife, she takes things to heart. There's some things that I've had to deal with in ministry that I just have not told her about the particulars. I just say hey baby, because she's a prayer warrior, I say hey, pray about this. Pray about this. Pray for this person, pray for that person, and she understands it when I say I can't go into details. She never, ever asks me, no, I need to know more. She respects the fact that as a pastor, there are just some things that I cannot share with her because of the fact that there's some personal issues either with people or with things that just would not be good for her because she takes it to heart. We've been very, very fortunate with that. People don't come to her to tell her things to tell me. She'll say no, you need to talk to [self-reference] yourself. People will do that. But we've been very, very fortunate that we have been able to maintain a great relationship with our congregation, with the members of our congregation without having any, all pastors have problems, but we never had any drag out, cussing, fussing situations with anybody where we can't stand to be in their presence. There have been some people who have left our church, whatever the reason, but we'll see them at the mall. We'll give them a hug. Hey, how are you? It blows them away. They don't expect that. We just believe that we should treat people like we want to be treated. As much as possible, try to be peaceful. Some people are hard to get along with, but you need to try to do your part. She and I have the conviction that we need to take the high road. Other people may not. We need to take the high road because we need to answer to God for everything we do and how we treat people.

Speaker 1: You mentioned your kids. How have you helped them or even protected them from the stress of ministry? Like you said, they live in a glass house. Those expectations.

Speaker 2: That's my daughter [name] right next to my wife. Next to me is my wife [name]. That's my daughter [name]. She's 34 now and that's our son [name]. He's 32. She is a school teacher in [location]. My son is a pastor in [location]. She was 4 when I came to this church. He was 2.

Speaker 1: Wow. So they literally grew up here.

Speaker 2: In this church.

Speaker 1: What were some of the most difficult things to help them through?

Speaker 2: Again, just the expectations that people put on them. Because they're the pastor's kids, there were always expectations that just, dot every I, cross every T, do everything right. That was the biggest thing for them and again, I would get in the pulpit and I would say, listen. My kids are just like your kids. They're going to make mistakes. They're going to do things you may not approve of, but I promise if you come to me about it or even come to them about it, they don't mind being corrected. They don't mind being reprimanded, but just do it in love. That's all I ask. Don't talk down to them. Don't

belittle them. They can be corrected as long as you do it in love. I have no problems with it at all. By God's grace, both of them had, they both came back this past third Sunday in October last year. I made 30 years as pastor and both of them came home to be a part of that. My son came to preach both services and I let both of them have a word before the congregation. Both my daughter and my son just talked about the joy that they had of growing up in the church.

Speaker 1: Really?

Speaker 2: Yeah. I mean, the church just allowed them to be themselves.

Speaker 1: So they had good experiences.

Speaker 2: They had very good experiences. I can't say that about a lot of my pastor friends and their kids because a lot of them, some of them don't go to church today.

Speaker 1: Do you think it was because of how you started out and you set up those boundaries and that's what protected them over the years?

Speaker 2: No doubt about it. Not only did I start out and set it up, but every now and then I would have to remind people. I had to remind people. When they got to middle school, I would remind people. When they got to high school, I had to remind people. They are just like your kids. Don't put them on a pedestal. I know they understand their position as being a role model, but they're still kids and they need to respect that. And they did.

Speaker 1: That paid off.

Speaker 2: It did. Both of them have really great experiences at the church.

Speaker 1: What about, a couple more things just to talk about and then I'm going to wrap up today with a summary question.

Speaker 2: No problem.

Speaker 1: What about your staff and your community. How much, would you say your staff creates stress for you or alleviates stress more for you? I know it's a balance of both, but which one do you find yourself in more of?

Speaker 2: Both. A lot of them, we have staff prayer every morning at 10:30. We just had it just now and one of the things I mentioned in staff prayer this morning, we all just meet in the sanctuary and get in a circle, take prayer requests and spiritual needs and stuff like that. One of the things that I mentioned, that I thank God for every last one of you. We had our ups and our downs because we're with each other. We're like family. We always get on each other's nerves. But I just pray that this year, again on my journal for my fast is spiritual growth and closeness for our church staff. That's one of the things I have on my journal for this 21 day fast and in my prayer to them, I told them that we would grow closer together as a staff and that we would really, really be sensitive to the fact that we need each other because we're around each other so much. Meaning that if we've got a problem, just try to work it out. I always mention the Matthew Principle. There have been times in the 30 years I've been here that they've driven me up the wall. Not all of them, but some of them because some of them you just don't see why you can't do the right thing, why you can't beat this person? Why can't you respect this person? A lot of the stress that I've received through the years have been working with the staff and it is not all of them. Normally most of them want to do the right thing, but every now and then, you get some Judases to cry out. That's another thing Jack. I've always been comforted by the fact whenever I have issues with people in the staff or people in the church, the

leaders in the church. What comforts me is the fact when I think about, man why is this person doing this? I can't believe that. What comforts me is that when I think about the fact that Jesus handpicked 12, Peter follow me, Andrew follow me. Handpicked. Out of those 12, Judas betrayed him. Peter denied him and Thomas doubted. That gave me comfort. If it happened to Jesus, well who am I? Like it can't happen to me. The stress that I get from the staff, again I use the same principle. I call them in and I sit down with them and say, what's the deal? In all the years that I've been pastor, whether it's a staff member or church member, most of the time when people don't get along, it's because of miscommunication. Somebody heard something. Because you heard it instead of going to that person, you just ran with the story. It stresses you out when people that you work with, people that you pray with, people that want to do better, they just don't get it man. What's it going to take? It's the same thing with staff. It's the same thing with membership. One of my struggles is with consistent leadership. Every person that's a leader in [Name of Church] are required to be in Sunday school and bible study. My conviction is that if you get the head right, the body is going to follow. My conviction is that if the leaders are spiritual, if they have a relationship with God, then it should be easier for them for one, to get along with each other and two, to be able to carry out the great commission and great commandment that God has given to us. One of my frustrations is that when I appoint people to leadership position or when they're elected to leadership position in the church, they'll do okay for 3, 4, 5 or 6 months and then they get off track. That's the thing I just don't understand. I tell leaders, I say before I was a pastor, just because of my belief in Christ, I felt I needed to be in bible study. I wasn't even a pastor, but I felt I need to grow in God. I need to be in bible study. I need to grow. I don't understand that. I don't understand how people say they love God and they love Jesus Christ, but don't come to bible study. How do you grow spiritually? You're not doing it at home. Why are you not? We have all these resources and everything like that for you to take advantage of and you still don't do it. And particularly, you're a leader?!? How do you expect to lead somebody else? You don't do what the word of God says yourself. I believe it all goes back to that relationship. If people would just live what they say they are. I mean, that's going to eliminate a whole lot of stuff in our church.

Speaker 1: How about the community that you serve. What kind of stress does it cause?

Speaker 2: One of the things that stresses this community out and I've been working on it for years, they love us for what we've done. We've been in this community, I've been here 30 years since 1986. Right behind you, there's a small picture with the columns.

Speaker 1: Right here?

Speaker 2: That's the church we started out at. That's where we started 30 years ago.

Speaker 1: Is it still there?

Speaker 2: No. This building is where that building was at. We started out with 50 members. I had no idea this church was going to grow like it did. No idea. Before [local catastrophe] hit, we were up to almost 8,000 with 3 Sunday morning worship services. You've been around here?

Speaker 1: I had to walk through here. I've just been right there.

Speaker 2: I'm talking about, you drove here from the interstate?

Speaker 1: Yes. Come down this little road here.

Speaker 2: There's not a lot of parking.

Speaker 1: Not a lot of parking. Not at all.

Speaker 2: People love what we do in this community. We do a lot of things. We have community meetings. We have activities here at the church. We have food giveaways. We have social ministries. We have organized recreation at this park. Before I got here, there were drug dealers. Got rid of the drug dealers right across the street. There were crack houses. Tore down the crack houses. People are now able to come and sit on their front porch. Kids are able to go and play. They love us. They just don't like us on Sunday morning.

Speaker 1: Because you park everywhere.

Speaker 2: We are parking everywhere. I even read a letter from one of the neighbors right around the corner here on [street name] and I read it in the pulpit purposely. It said [self-reference], I love what you guys have done to this community. I've transformed this community for the better. She said but I'm not a member of [name of church]. If I wanted to have something at my house for my grandkids, I can't do it until after 3 o'clock because we're literally taking up the neighborhood from 6:30 in the morning. We have a 7:30, 10:30 and our last service started at 12:30 and go to 2 o'clock. She said that. What we started doing Jack, we started buying these orange cones to give to any neighbor in the neighborhood to put in front of their house to reserve parking spaces for them and their families. The members would move the cones. This is a public street. I said, come on you all. Come on. Some of these people are lost. You're moving the cones. The stress that I have is just trying to maintain a positive relationship because the church should have a positive. God said we are the livelihood of the world.

Speaker 1: That's right.

Speaker 2: We're the lights of society, the light of the world and we should do all we can to let our light shine because everybody in the neighborhood don't go, frankly don't have a relationship with Jesus Christ and so, part of the stress is just trying to maintain some type of relationship with the people. That they know that we're just not here to come here on Sundays and leave out and abandon the neighborhood. We're every day of the week and we want to be good neighbors, but sometimes it's a struggle. Because, oh yeah, you are that big church down the street. We go out of our way to show our neighbors that we care. Sometimes it's difficult when we get a note saying somebody blocking the driveway. This person. That person. It messes up our witness and a lot of times, it's not even members of the church. It is guests. It's a constant struggle. It really is.

Speaker 1: That's amazing.

Speaker 2: It's amazing. We are in the process and you'll probably see it on your way back if you remember. As you go back to Mobile, just before you get to the [street name] exit, right on your right-hand side, we bought that building.

Speaker 1: Oh really?

Speaker 2: Yeah. Groundbreaking. You'll see the sign to your right. Your tithes and offerings at work. The thing I love is it is going to have 1,200 parking spaces. We never needed parking spaces before. This is my first church.

Speaker 1: Really? This is it?

Speaker 2: I was a street preacher. I was a street preacher man. I was just glad that a church wanted a pastor, not knowing that one day we would grow the way we've done. Lead our association of baptism, and lead our state in baptism and become the largest Southern Baptist church in the state.

Speaker 1: Praise God for that. Isn't that amazing?

Speaker 2: On this side of the track. Indeed.

Speaker 1: That's awesome.

Speaker 2: But God did it. That's been the frustration. Now, the neighbors get a lot of benefit. We do a lot of things in the neighborhood and when we move, we still will invest in this community.

Speaker 1: You will? Okay. Will you keep this property?

Speaker 2: We will not abandon this neighborhood because we've been here so long. Our plans are to maintain this property and keep it unless somebody wants to come and purchase it. Another church or school or something like that, but we will still maintain the relationships that we have and still do things in the neighborhood.

Speaker 1: Wow. That's awesome. Last question and this is really just a summary thing.

Speaker 2: No problem.

Speaker 1: Of all the things that we've talked about, you're speaking to a man who is in your position 30 years ago. He's about to walk into his first church and you can give him one piece of advice and that's it. We're assuming that he has a relationship with the Lord. He has a prayer life already. What would you say would be the one thing that you would tell him? "Make sure you do this or stress is going to eat you up?"

Speaker 2: Great question. I've done this across the country and just based on what I've seen, I would tell that pastor to maintain what God wants to do in your life, to maintain as stress free ministry as you can, it comes down to faithfulness. Faithfulness. Be faithful to God. Be faithful to God's word. God's the one who called you. Be faithful to God. Be faithful to God's word. Preach it, teach it, and live it. Be faithful to your wife and family and be faithful to the church that God has you at. I promise you if you're faithful in all those areas, I promise, I assure you, God will be faithful to you because God is always faithful.

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Speaker 1: I'm interested with how you deal with stress. I'll start with this, as you reflect back on your ministry, where do you see stress coming at you the most? Was it from people, yourself, was it from the organizational structure of the church, where do you perceive that most of the stress was coming from?

Speaker 2: At first it came from me, my own expectations. If I am preaching and no one's walking out. I felt stressed if nobody was walking the aisle, like I didn't do very good, that was the indicator: good, bad, no response. So, I remember that was the internal part, and then people. I'm sure that every pastor was different, like a different flavor. I always had, certain people, because of the nature of the way I would lead, I'd change things, and I like to fix things, and so every situation I went into was kind of a bad situation, like if you were in real estate, every church I went to was one you needed to flip, like really bad disarray. I typically got my pastorates because nobody else wanted them, I mean I'm being serious, and so you had to make some pretty critical decisions, and that caused some stress with leaders, and it was the reason the church was in the condition it was anyway, and many people, and those were because of the way I led trying to be a change agent so to speak, it just became that.

Speaker 1: Yeah, how did you deal with it as it began to show itself early on in ministry, how did you learn to cope with it?

Speaker 2: Yeah, well some, you know, I mean spiritually I had to come to the reality that I'm not the holy spirit, I can't coerce people down the aisle, some people are really gifted to manipulate it, but I'm not that, that's not even the right thing to do, it's time to put things in proper perspective for one. Two, I put myself in a proper perspective of not taking myself too seriously. That was probably the key thing that I really tried to make sure they understood, and have a good sense of, always hate to say have them try, the proper perspective of it is sense of humility of I always felt like I was in a position much greater than I had the ability to do, and so because I always felt like I was somewhere where it was above my ability to accomplish, I felt a greater dependence upon God, and it helped me be humble in the fact of jeez, I'm just happy to be here. So I learned, there may be, I don't know if it's a good thing or not, but my coping mechanism was I lowered my expectations of people, not of myself. So when you go in a relationship not expecting people to be loyal, just not expecting someone to do the right thing, and then when they do, it's all the better, but I try to protect myself on the downside of just, I don't know if this is a good thing or not, I'm not a very trusting person because of it, so I start off not trusting, and then you do something to mess me over, well I didn't trust you anyway. So, it's my way of coping with it, which I don't know is a healthy way to necessarily live, although it's served me, I wouldn't do any different, I like doing it that way now. I also hate to be disappointed in people, people will disappoint you, you go into a meeting and they don't back you up, or they just disappoint you. So, my wife often says I have more mercy than anyone she knows, simply because I've never used any of it. I think that may be because I'm soft to that, I just don't trust people, I just don't.

Speaker 1: Does that ever, in ministry, do you think it ever made you cynical?

Speaker 2: Yeah, I'd say cynical, see, when you say cynical, I would say discern, I'm not cynical, I'm just realistic about you do that, and that's where I have to catch myself sometimes. Now other entity leaders would say what do you think about this, what do you think about that, and I'm probably a little singed on some things, and so I'll say do that if you want, if I were you I'd guard my backside on this, and this, and this. So that helps me sleep at night, just knowing okay, I'm pretty protected, pretty locked down, but again, somebody hears that and goes well that's not a very fun way to live, and there are simpler ways to live if you're going to lead in a church, and the bigger the church you get

the more that you have. Then you go to an entity, and it's even harder because you don't get a sense of the temperature. I mean you can live up in a corner office and not have much sense of how the wind is blowing unless you're really constantly connecting with people, and that's why I'm constantly connecting with people. Not just to get a read, but so that I feel like I'm more connected, more effective.

Speaker 1: Have you ever felt in your years of ministry that you gave so much that you were depleted, and I guess in turn how did that affect your view of people in ministry?

Speaker 2: I think you have to realize if you're going to keep score, ministry is not the place to go. I did more for them than they did for me, that isn't ministry, Jesus obviously best example out there. Some people they want to be in a relationship like, he's all take and no give, and then look at people, and I just never, I got in a habit of just not expecting. Again, it goes by my expectations, I'm never trying to be a friend so I can get something, or do something for someone so they would do something back. I just anticipate they're probably not going to, and so that helped me balance it, I don't know if that's like counseling or what, but it just helped me balance it. I've just found in relations people always feel like I do two things for you, you do two things for me, it's relational poker, and I just never played that. I just assumed I always have a two of clubs, and I'll just help them. Then I'll just help them, and it makes it nice because you're really, again, you're not disappointed, you weren't expecting anything. If they do somehow come back to bless you in some way down the road, great, but I just like to no strings attached.

Speaker 1: Yeah, that's interesting. To give you a little bit of background on the process of burn out specifically, this is a researcher named Christina Maslach who came up with this, but emotional exhaustion is the first part of it, and that's when you've given so much that you're depleted. That leads to what they call depersonalization, where you begin to isolate yourself, and you in turn have kind of a negative view of the people that you're leading, or serving, and that leads to a lack of personal accomplishment, which is the end result, that's when you burned out. That's when you get to the point of nothing's ever going to change, always going to be like this, I'm a rat in a wheel. I'm curious because you talked about some of the churches that you went to and how they were difficult. Would you say that you ever experienced that cycle there? If so was there a time in those churches that you felt things changed? In other words a significant event where once you got past that you knew you could make it... Anything like that that you can reflect back on and say they were significant times?

Speaker 2: Yeah, I mean there are times where I felt it coming on in a little bit of an overload emotionally, or just need to get away, get a break. So, I got pretty good at doing that, but kids help keep it in perspective. So, I would budget time, I'm pretty proactive in my schedule, so when kids came along that helped me more than anything, I would proactively schedule nights, and slots for them, and then people call, I'd just say I'm booked, I was pretty proactive in that, and always kept a pretty good balance on that.

Speaker 1: You did that from the beginning?

Speaker 2: From the beginning, yes. My thing with all our staff is that if you work 6 days you get 2 days off, and they're like do what? The reason for that is, like today I get up 5, 5:30, and will start work, I start the day about 6:30, well most people only go to work, they'll go to work at 8:30. If you ask anybody, or especially I taught a class about practical ministry... here's how you actually do this. I said what's the average time a pastor goes into work? No one is 8:30 to 9. I go in at 6:30, they go in at 8:30, so I beat them at 2 hours on Monday, 2 hours Tuesday, 2 hours Wednesday, 2 hours Thursday, my point was if you get in the habit of going in early, your family, they're not wanting family time at 6:30, there's no time your wife is needing you just to talk at 6:30, everybody is just trying to get, I gained 8 hours, a whole day, and I can take Friday off, and Saturday

off without any type of guilt at all because I have worked 6 days, and if you get in the habit of doing that, I count Sunday as a work day. You get in the habit of working Sunday through Thursday, but doing it from 6:30 to 5 or whatever, and you're knocking it out. That helped me balance things, I have always done that.

Speaker 1: That's good. Any other spiritual disciplines that you've found, either that you already had in place before you ever even got into the stress of pastoring, or ones that you developed, or maybe developed more deeply because of the stress of the pastor?

Speaker 2: No, I mean the pastorate seemed to be a pull away from the disciplines for me, it did not help them, I had to work even harder, because you're in the Word, you're praying with people all the time, you're doing some of those disciplines, and it was a good bit harder to make sense.

Speaker 1: It does, what about physically? Did you have any physical disciplines, hobbies, things that you used as stress relievers?

Speaker 2: I play golf, and tennis a bit, but I was one that didn't mind having friends, so I would have 2 or 3 friends that I really enjoyed, and some pastors don't do that, they're pretty alone. Although that friendship would go to a certain line, but I mean that and pastor friends, the internet has helped with being able to connect with guys, or by phone, connect with people regardless of if they live there or not, so that helped.

Speaker 1: So you're saying that when you go on something stressful, your outlet, other pastor friends, what about staff that you had, did you kind of keep a distance emotionally from them because of working with them so closely, and you were never outside of that, or did you feel like you had a good relationship?

Speaker 2: No, I always had a really good relationship with staff, and very transparent, that helped reduce the stress too, when you don't have all the drama going on. We were all real good, real tight, did staff retreats stayed connected really tight. So that was all really, really helpful, so that really helped because you didn't have that typically. You occasionally you have one that you have to deal with an issue, but depending on the size of the staff, but we just didn't. So that was really, really helpful, and a lot of it too, again, I never took myself too seriously. Part of it is because I couldn't. I was always around people who were much smarter than me, and I'm not trying to be really humble, I was. They were at [institution], I mean [notable name] and they had [notable name] was a member of the church, [notable name], all of those guys were members of our church, well my Lord, I'm not even, I had all these clydesdales, I'm lucky to service the barn, you know? So you're no risk at all of being too puffed up.

Speaker 1: What about the elders, or deacons, whatever you had there, were they helpful, and helping you to deal with things, or did they cause the stress?

Speaker 2: At the end they were helpful. At first it was a challenge at [church name], the last church, but my deacons have always, and a part of that, I think the blessing is, I think personality wise I'm just not very pretentious, I'm just not good at that, I'm don't put on a good, I'm not very presidential honestly, I'm trying to think of the word. Typically, a plumber would hang out, would be glad to go to the ball game with me, or you know.

Speaker 1: Down to earth?

Speaker 2: Down to earth, yeah that's it... just like hey, it's the, that helped. I think when guys try to do a persona, guys used to preach like Adrian Rogers, or try to, they had to dress the part, I just never did that. That really helps, and you can just be yourself, and that helps, that takes a lot of stress out when you're just yourself. I'm telling you in ministry, one of the more obnoxious, or disheartening things, and in what I do now, is the

pretentiousness, so it just wears me out, of just being in meetings where guys are pretending like they're halfway your friends, and on your side, and then in time, they're knifing you somewhere. That's not internally, we don't have it internally, but externally.

Speaker 1: Right, you're always dealing with that element.

Speaker 2: Yeah, or it's just funny when people come in, they were just, they're taken back by us sometimes when you're not as impressive as they thought you would be. It doesn't bother me, I don't want to be a poor reflection on the entity I represent, but the old school, they had certain standards of what it would look like, come in an office and it would be cherry wood, and the stately furniture.

Speaker 1: How did you recognize that you were being stressed? Were there any signs that you would say I'm stressed out, or I'm getting stressed out, is there anything?

Speaker 2: Yeah.

Speaker 1: What was it typically?

Speaker 2: I think typically it was a tension with people, or I'd say with, I'd probably be a little short.

Speaker 1: Short, or quiet, or something like that?

Speaker 2: Short, mind drift, not focus on what I'm doing.

Speaker 1: Then when you're going through that stressful time, is there anything that you would tell yourself to persevere through it?

Speaker 2: Yeah, sometimes I just try to give myself a break. So what I do now is like, I block like a Friday, every Friday I block, now I still work, but I just block it so I can do what I want to do. So I can have lunch with who I want to have lunch with, breakfast who I want, if I want to take my wife to lunch, or breakfast, I do that, or if I, but I've got my day to catch up, my day. I always encourage guys when I'm trying to speak it their life, or whatever, one of the 5 days that they work, if they could just make it a day they can call audibles. I think the problem is so often guys just don't. When I found that I didn't give myself a bunch of audible room, wiggle room, then that's what really stressed me out. I know now I can give up a Friday if I want, that's my choice. She knows not to book Friday, and that's like no, he's absolutely not available on Friday.

Speaker 1: What about your family, children?

Speaker 2: 6.

Speaker 1: 6 children?

Speaker 2: Yes.

Speaker 1: While you're pastoring, do you feel like that they ever experience the negativity of ministry that impacted their view of it?

Speaker 2: Yeah, probably so, I know so.

Speaker 1: Tell me about it.

Speaker 2: Well I was at [name of church], I went through change, and we let 23 people go in 24 months, and so when you do that it's a lot of challenge. My second oldest daughter [name] was once not invited to a summer party when she was in the 3rd grade

because the girl's parents didn't like me. I remember she went to the little girl and said can I come? I'll sleep on the floor. Of course I mean [daughter's name] a mom now of one, and one on the way, and I still remember that when she was in 3rd grade. So, I never mind, I can take heat in a meeting, or people mad at me, but when they take it out on your wife, or your kids, and there's several specific instances like that where I would make a point to go and try to straighten it out. I'll say look, you want to be mad at me, be mad at me, but do not take that out on my kids, some people still did. I was very protective; my wife didn't become another staff member. The kids, for the most part now, they've got a good reflection of ministry. My son is in college, I don't know if I overdosed him so much on ministry that he's.... you know, he's a good kid, but he keeps ministry at arm's length, and is not as engaged as I would prefer. He goes to church, he does the thing, but he's just not as engaged as I would like.

Speaker 1: Do you think that it was what they experienced, or maybe what they saw church doing to you that impacted them the most?

Speaker 2: Yeah, most of my really bad days, this is the blessing of it, my really bad days, my oldest daughter was in the 1st grade, my 2nd daughter was in kindergarten, and [child's name] was 1, so they don't remember.

Speaker 1: That's good.

Speaker 2: All their memories of ministry are great, they always were well taken care of. We didn't have a lot, but I didn't have bad church experiences, I really didn't, my bad is nothing compared to what some guys go through. So people get mad about this or that, but never some full on assault, and so they've all ended up real..., our youngest 3 were adopted and from different countries, so they come into it late, and most of their, I've been here 6 years, so [child's name], we got him when he was 12, he's 17, and [child's name] is 12, [child's name] is 3, so we moved here, she was in 1st grade, [child's name] in 2nd grade, so they really only know, they don't really know me as pastor, the other 3 knew me, I was the only pastor they ever had.

Speaker 1: What about your wife? Going through this, would you say that you have some kind of process, or something that you think through of what you tell her and what you don't?

Speaker 2: Absolutely. Yeah, she definitely, she takes it a lot harder than I would, she doesn't forget and move on. Guys by nature, like okay we fight, then we go get some barbecue wings together. She couldn't, so I would rarely tell her, and I know some people have theories you need to tell everything, my theory was I just did not want to go back through it again, and when I told her about a challenge I had with somebody, it would be much harder for her to move on than for me, and so I just didn't. Now anything I thought she needed to know for her own protection, yes, but other than that, no, and I would do that again in a heartbeat, that worked real well for us. People try to drill her for information, she didn't know anything, so it didn't hurt her, she couldn't tell what she didn't know. There may have been 1 or 2 times where I made a misjudgment and she should have known something that would have helped her, but still for those 1 or 2 times I still do it again that way.

Speaker 1: Was there any time that you had to help her through a negative perception of the church she was having?

Speaker 2: Yeah, just absolutely, yeah.

Speaker 1: Just kind of talking her through it, or how did you approach that?

Speaker 2: Yeah, try and keep a bigger perspective here, of hey look, we're talking about

a church of 3,000, you're talking about 3 families here, it's just not that big of a deal on a big scale thing, plus they're goofballs anyway, that kind of thing. Just to kind of keep it in perspective, because I'm seeing the whole picture, and she's just seeing the part she's focused on. It's hard to sometimes, our challenge we have school at the church, about 800 students. So, our kids went there, so if there's a problem at school, then there's a problem at church, 6 days a week. The best part about leaving there, I miss it terribly and love it, I loved being there. The best, the part I enjoyed the most about leaving was not having a school. 6 days a week, it's not fun... too much, too much.

Speaker 1: A couple things, one, I want to ask you the question, there's not a right or wrong answer to this, you're answering this, but why did you stay at one church so long, why do you think you stayed there?

Speaker 2: It's so much easier, once you go over the hump, and you earn the right to be the pastor, that 3 to 5 year span, it takes 3 to 5 in my opinion, once you do that, that's when my real fruitful ministry really took place. I wasn't fighting battles, nobody would, they trusted my heart. When they got the point where they, they may not always agree with what I did, but he means well, and he's trying, he didn't mean to do the wrong thing, or he did something stupid, he didn't mean to. So they, that's what's hard coming even here, you flush all that. I mean what I do, when I left and I was flushing that 15 years knowing that I'll never pastor anywhere else again where I've been there 15 years again, ever, in my life, I'll never get to do that again, that's giving up a lot of chips. So, man, the blessing of, once you make it past 3, my first 2 or 3 years were really tough, but that 3 and 4 were transitional years, that 5th year we were kicking in, and then the next 10 were great.

Speaker 1: Why do you think that is, your perceptions there? Why 3 to 5 years, what do you think is the dynamic of that?

Speaker 2: Well you have to earn people's trust, they get to where they believe you. Yeah, you have to earn that trust, you can't just say well your my pastor, I trust you, they may say that, but they don't.

Speaker 1: You think there's an expectation there that you're not going to stay around?

Speaker 2: Maybe in some settings, maybe, but I think you do enough burying and marrying, you married their kids, you buried their mom, you're my pastor, and they've seen you cry, they've seen you celebrate, the seasons go through, and I think just going through the seasons once or twice, 2 years make a major change here or there, and they see that you're tough enough to last it. I think the one thing, I went through some stuff I had seven lawsuits, my first 2 years I let 23 people go in 24 months, I had 7 lawsuits. I mean all kinds of messed up, but I come out of it with the blessing of after the 2 years, is I gained a lot of the people's trust, because they thought my gosh, the guy is made of teflon, not the brightest guy in the world, but he'll make it through. So, I think I gained a lot of respect there, then I was able to ride that wave for a long time. Plus, I mean if you're not doing, if you're honest, and you really love people, that's what tell my classes, hey look, if you're honest, and you love people, and you work hard, people will put up with a lot of other, like bad preaching, or whatever it might be if you just work hard, and you don't cynically love them. That takes a lot of the stress away too, if you really love them, and you work hard, and you enjoy what you're doing, that helps take a lot of the stress out. You're having to work hard with people you don't really like, or love, it's hard, and some of them are harder to love than others, but every job is that way.

Speaker 1: Yeah, that's true. I have one question left, and this is really kind of a summary question, you can think about it for a minute before you answer, but the scenario would be a young man comes in here, he's just finished seminary, degree in hand, he's about to

take his first church, and he wants to talk to you. He's asking you what do I need to know? If you could only give him one piece of advice, assuming that he has a quiet time, a prayer life, those kinds of things, we're assuming those things, so one piece of practical advice from your experience, what would you tell him, make sure you do this?

Speaker 2: Well honestly, I would just say you fall in love with those people, quiet time fall in love with the lord, but you work at genuinely loving those people, You start with their leadership, and their wives, and their kids, knowing their names, and just authentically pouring yourself into those people, loving those people. You do that, and work hard, and you work at it, you're not lazy, you're busting it, but you're loving them, there is no end to what you can do there, and what they'll do to defend you. Even the naysayers, I mean they'll say, "the guy's loving and works hard," which way you going to go? You can still gripe but, typically it falls on deaf ears. So authentically love people, and again, that's what when Jesus was asked, hey what's the greatest commandment? He said love the lord your God with all your heart, mind, and soul, you said that was taken care of, and then the love your neighbor as yourself. We love ourselves, but we don't often love our neighbor as yourself, so that's the point.

Speaker 1: All right, well thank you, that concludes the interview.

PP3

Speaker 1: In what ways do you see or experience stress at most?

Speaker 1: I think it's been, it depends on what era of my stay here at [name of church] you're talking about. For example, the first 7 years I was here at [name of church], there was a high degree of stress that came from a faction within the congregation. That was high stress because the previous pastor had been terminated for immoral failure. There were people here that were angry with the elder board for terminating him because he's such a good preacher, they need to keep him. The elders believed they did the right thing. I believe they did the right thing, which is part of my coming. Nevertheless, the residue of resentment was strong when I came here and I would hear regularly from them that I should do all that I can to bring back the former senior pastor. That's stressful in terms of just a lot of their writings to me were in strong tones and terms, attitudes. Very heavy, harsh, angry. Processing those almost weekly when I would get them. That's really a high source of stress. Then, do I respond to all of them or not? Coupled with that in the first 7 years, there was a faction of people that while the prior pastor was pastoring, he was negligent in his overall care for the church. They wanted to hear the big celebrity preacher. He's a celebrity preacher. Radio, big name, travels, everybody knew him back in that period of time. He was the draw, so he didn't care about a group of 500, 600 people that were gathered around another teacher who was a good teacher. He taught us the word and was an effective teacher at that time. They had grown up and become a church within a church. That church within a church then still existed when I came on board. They, many of them, I would say their leadership, I would put it this way: Their leadership never came under the current elder board or my leadership. Their leaders saw themselves as independent and there was a spirit of somewhat resentment that their bible teacher did not get the role I had. In fact, some had suggested at that point that we should have a preach off, where he would preach and I would preach back to back Sundays and we vote who we think is better. Just decide that way. That is just illustrative of some of the attitude of we're an independent group. We do our own thing. There's a lot of hate mail, if it is the right term. To me, it felt like hate mail. It felt like disregarding me. It felt like disrespect. Not to make it about me, but if that's what you're asking.

Speaker 1: It is what I'm asking.

Speaker 2: That's how it felt. I felt total rejection and total anger. So, I'm thinking to myself, well why am I even here? I came here to help and it seems like a third of the church hates me. Why am I even here? There were days or weeks and I actually wrote my letter of resignation because I said, you know what? I don't need to be here. I can still go back to the church that loved me and I hadn't filled the position that I left. I could just go back and be as happy as I could be. There were those periods of time, so if you're asking where did the stress come from. It was the circumstances of the residue of the prior administration as well as the formulating of a church within a church that the prior pastor had never cared about because he was the big man on campus and everybody simply came to hear him. He is not going to worry about 400 or 500 over here. Let them do their own thing. I'm fine. The church was highly dysfunctional as I understand the way a church should be. It was just a gathering of people to hear people they like to hear teach, but it wasn't a community of a church of an Acts 2 model, where there was integrated folks. When the prior pastor who was the big celebrity pastor preached, they would come when he wasn't here and when he was terminated, I don't know, 1,000 or 2,000 people just left.

Speaker 1: How big was the church at that time?

Speaker 2: I think at the max that day, at his max, when everybody, when he really got to talking and nobody knew of any problems, it was probably close to 5,000. When he left,

it shrunk down real fast to maybe a couple thousand left over. Then maybe 500, 600 were part of this, what I would call faction, called a church within a church. It was often called the church within a church. Like, some of them would go to that church, as they would call it and they would see this building that we're in, the worship center and I had people tell me oh, I didn't think that was the worship center. I thought it was a gymnasium. They didn't even know that this is the primary worship place. They would go there because of the chapel that the church used to be in, so it looks like a church. It looks like a church building. They wouldn't know the difference because a lot of them were new believers. They didn't know. I don't blame them. No one is leading them. No one is telling them the difference.

Speaker 1: How did you deal with those feelings that you were having, first of all? That would be my first question. I'll follow it up with another. How did you, when you're having that email and having those feelings that I could go back, how did you deal with them?

Speaker 2: Yeah. Well, a lot of it I probably didn't deal with well. I began to internalize. I think an illustration that I would have used in those days and still do on occasion is the Winnie the Pooh and his Eeyore. I am like Eeyore and I just one step in front of another step, pull the wagon, get in the wagon, and let's get there and I will get there. Some of the things we did do that gives some insight as to how I processed those things. I and a couple other staff began to meet with 2 or 3 elders. We meet every, what is it? Tuesday morning it was, early. Talking through a process and pray and consult and read the book and dialog about that. They were there just in essence for me, to support me. Having godly people that I respect that have been through this war that took place prior to my coming and remained meant a lot to me because there was people bailing and jumping ship. You know, I don't need to do this you know, there are greener grass churches out there somewhere else. Spending time with them. I think I felt a lot of anger, but I'm not highly emotionally expressive, so I didn't impulsively react. It's kind of my makeup, but I think God made me the way I am to come to churches the way this church was. The 3 churches I've pastored since I came out of seminary in 77, all 3 of them are different sized versions of what I experienced here. Part of what kept me here and not submitting my letter of resignation is that I really have a sense of God's call to go to fix it up churches. You know, it's all these HGTV shows, Flip or Flop, Fixer Upper. This is a fixer upper and they take old homes and fix them up. They don't build new homes. As a pastor, I would be like them in a church. I go to old churches that are broken. My first church was about 100 people. They'd fired the previous pastor and the church had split and started another church in the community. I went there and ministered to bring them to health for 10 years. The second church I went to is about 600, 700 people. They had fired the previous pastor who actually went to the same seminary I did, [seminary name]. The church had split. So, I came to them, a fixer upper. [Church name] just happens to be a larger version of the same problem. Fired the previous pastor. The church split. Here I come. Helping me to score high and I score high in perseverance. The sense of God's call that this is the kind of church that I'm built for kept me here. Part of that is rooted in the fact that both my wife and I are PK's. Our dads were pastors. My dad pastored in [city name] and her dad pastored in another community here in [community]. We grew up in healthy churches. Family churches. Churches that did a lot of what Acts 2 describes a church doing. Not perfect. They had their problems for sure. Normal problems. Every family has their problems. It doesn't mean it is a bad family. But your problems, you manage them well. We grew up in a healthy church community and because we saw what benefits a healthy church can provide for people, I felt if we could get this church to a healthy place, I know it will be worth the effort. I'm nothing but a servant. I said that many years. I'm nothing but a servant. Jesus said he came to serve, not to be served. I thought, I'm going to be like Jesus. I'm going to have that kind of maturity. It's not about take care of me and my feelings about this. I need to come and take care of the people and their needs. When Jesus looked over at Jerusalem and he said he looked down and

they looked like sheep without a shepherd, he said. That's how he looked at Jerusalem and the Jews in Jerusalem. There's a sense that when I was here, I felt I'm looking at something similar in the sense that these people had not had a shepherd that's actually loved them, pastored them, was with them at their funeral, their death at the hospital and things like that. We're so large, it's hard for me to be at everything, but to have that kind of an attitude and that demeanor of saying I'm here to care for you. For me, it was processing in my brain and my heart. Why has God called me here? I knew it was going to be a tough assignment. I need to get it together. Some of the things that happened in the course of that to help beyond just persevering was meeting with these men. Secondly, as this thing was winding down and the faction of about 600 people, they finally left and started their own church. We blessed them and it was like this new peace came on our campus. The elders, two things they did. Number 1, we went to a seminar, a week long seminar, a week long study time called Lead. Dallas Seminary puts it on. We spent a week at a bed and breakfast with 3 or 4 other professors that would walk us through sort of the counseling track, the preaching track, a leadership track and it was just really healing to go to that site where we're fairly anonymous, say whatever we want to say, feel whatever we want to feel and process with these 3 tracks that they had us on. We were a little leery going as you go into these things and you find out they're not very good. Sometimes you get that fear factor. These people are going to analyze your preaching, analyze your leadership style, but it was really affirming. That setting away from us at Dallas, actually I think it was Natchitoches, Texas. That setting was very affirming and healing and then the elders also sent us on a trip to Hawaii. So, I spent a week in Hawaii. The elders, I can't speak highly enough about the importance of having a unified elder board. I think if the elder board was 60/40 on me staying or firing me and moving on to someone who maybe could do it better. I would have been gone, but because the elders to a man 100 percent was united behind me, united behind the way we wanted to go, they wanted to rush and get rid of this. Get rid of that. I said no, let's work with him longer. Part of it was extended. I wanted more time working with the people that were factions against me and against them. I said, I think God can change hearts. I think God can work through this time. I want to spend more time talking to him, the leader, so they could come on board, but he never did. It never paid off. It was 2 years' worth of effort that was just no fruit. He finally left. Okay. But those kind of, unified elder board, retreat opportunity to grow, vacation time where there's no stress, no expectation and anything, and weekly gatherings with other godly leaders that really care about us and about this church and allows us this sort of processing of the problem.

Speaker 1: When you talk about that being away, vacation or sabbatical or anything like that, is that something that you put into it or your elders put into it as a regular thing? I am assuming that it is a regular thing you try to do on an annual basis or biannual or something?

Speaker 2: At that time, no. That was kind of a one off. We didn't have a sort of built in, the idea of a sabbatical. That was never even a thought on anybody's mind. I think they recognized the ravages of the times.

Speaker 1: What was going on, okay?

Speaker 2: And because they had, I think their hearts for me and were appreciative of what my wife and I were trying to help with. They saw this as a good avenue, a good outlet. So hey, we want you to go there. So, we went there and it turned out to be a good thing for us. That's where they did these personality tests. I scored very high in perseverance and that sort of a thing.

Speaker 1: Did you continue to form a sabbatical or a getaway on any sort of basis from that point forward?

Speaker 2: Years after that, we actually instituted a sabbatical policy. So, we have a sabbatical policy in place now. I guess 3 years now and we have a policy. It is 7 years and you're at certain levels of responsibility of pastoring here. Then you can put in for sabbatical and let us approve or disapprove. They've got to write up, here's what the plan is. Yeah. All the areas we want them to address. Their personal development, if they're married, their marriage, their growth opportunities, rest, quiet time, reflection, books you're going to read, so there's an assortment of things we want them to work on.

Speaker 1: Nice. That's good.

Speaker 2: It's been good. So, we've had probably 5 or 6 folks go through the sabbatical thing as you're winding up and want to go. Someone is going this summer. You know, we all need it. We all recognize we need it. I say that hesitantly because I don't always recognize the need for it. I just keep on working hard. If I work hard, it will work out. That's kind of a fault in thinking.

Speaker 1: When you're talking about all that stuff that's happening, even the part where you're talking about you felt that maybe I should just go back to my other church, how many years had you been here at that point? Roughly.

Speaker 2: That would have been about 3 or 4 years.

Speaker 1: Okay. How long after that do you feel like something happened that turned it around? What year marker would you say that would have been where people really saw you as their pastor and things began to become more positive more so than it was negative before that? Can you determine any kind of point where that began to happen?

Speaker 2: Yeah. It was probably 7 years in. So, I came here in 95. That might have been around 2002. It's when that faction, the other church within a church if you will, that bible teacher and again, he loved the Lord. He loved Jesus. I'm not going to say anything negative here, but he could never work within the context of the church as it is currently structured. I'll give him that. Then he finally said, you know, I'm leaving. I said oh, you are? Where are you going to go? I don't know. What are you going to do? I don't know. So, he left and then, I don't know, 500, 600 people left with him. Although he told me he didn't know, a week or 2 later, they actually rented a facility nearby here and there they go. They became their own church, if you will. Church, as they define church. Ever since then, they've become an established church in the community actually and continuing on. Now that particular individual that was leaning on the group that was here off campus at another site actually came down with cancer. He was dead in a year.

Speaker 1: Oh, wow.

Speaker 2: He wasn't able to sustain anything for more than a year. Then they were kind of like, what do we do? I think it caused some people to kind of, he's not here, so I'll go look elsewhere. It was a little bit of a scattering that took place there. Then they called another pastor about a year or so after that and he's still there, still plugging away. I think actually, they had an interim for a while. They're still going. Actually, there's some distance geographically from us, so it's kind of good. There's some of those people that are still there and a lot of people are not there anymore. It's changed. It's become its own entity. When they left, that next Sunday it was almost like there was a sense of peace that came over our campus that people would just remark about it to me. Man, it just feels so peaceful here, because it was always a point of contention.

Speaker 1: I can see that.

Speaker 2: Yeah. At that point, we moved forward. It was really a turning point, I think for me personally because it's sort of like, when you get the cancer cut out, there's still

pain, but it's the kind of pain you know you're healing from. Not the kind of pain that's causing the problem. That's how I felt. It was still painful, but it was a healing kind of a pain that we were going through. We're kind of getting reestablished at that point.

Speaker 1: What about spiritual disciplines that you've had, either prior to that you've just always maintained, or maybe some that you grew deeper in because of going through that basically 4-year period from 3 to roughly 7? Is there anything that you could pinpoint to say "these right here, these key characteristics, these disciplines, these are what I had to be faithful in or else I would find my perspective wandering or going to the negative?" Could you pinpoint any?

Speaker 2: I would try to regularly, of course be in God's word regularly and in prayer. For me, that's kind of a lifetime journey. Some days I would be on more than others, but generally that's a commitment that I have and then I would journal. I've got stacks of these steno pads back in that day. Computers were just kind of getting up and going here. Stacks of those things where I would just kind of write out how I felt, what I thought, what God was telling me. Just random thoughts. Constructive thoughts. I still have them and we got computers, so I've got stacks of print outs, the old Matrix print outs. Dot Matrix things, yeah. So, I have piles of those and I got them. They're stuck away. If I ever died, people read that, I'd come back and haunt them if they read them. Nevertheless, they're still there. I don't know what to do with them. It's kind of a curious thing that I don't understand. Is it just the moment of doing it or is it something to go back and reflect on? I don't even want to reflect on those things. It's how I felt then. It's a little bit of a struggle there. Nevertheless, I try to practice those things. When they left, I still would try to do that. I'm not journaling so much like that as I would back then because I just had so many things on my heart and my mind that I wanted to try to express and to sort of understand all this ugliness. Why do people act this way? Why do they treat people this way? Why do people who proudly tell me how important the teaching of God's word is and then behave in a way as if even a nonbeliever or atheist would treat people that way? Trying to understand this struggle, the Corinthian thing, you know? It was just a lot of sort of digesting what would go on. About that time, I also started doing more physical discipline.

Speaker 1: Okay. That's what I was going to ask you.

Speaker 2: Yeah. I started. I got a mountain bike. I do mountain biking and just getting into the, I can still remember riding through some of the, we're in [name of area], but believe me. There's a whole lot of wilderness area out there. There's a lot of open space out there. I can still remember as I would pedal through these wilderness areas and it's so fresh and vital early in the morning, coyotes and rabbits and deer running around. This is like, amazing. [name of area]. Just thinking, Lord, just praying as I rode. Praying, reflecting, thinking, thinking about the message, thinking about the people, and God, here's what I'd like you to do. Please do it. So, just that journey of riding and thinking and reflecting. I still, to this day, ride regularly. I got kind of addicted to it. I don't do mountain biking anymore because of the number of accidents, but on the ratty stuff that's out there, I do road biking now. Regularly, I'm out there, 140 miles a week. This is an outlet for me. This is part of, just to free myself because when I'm here, I'm kind of cooped up. I don't see outside of the windows of my office. I need what Jesus so easily had. He and his disciples. They're outdoors a lot. It's an outdoor place. You know? If you're going to go from Nazareth down or you're going to go over to Galilee or whatever you're going to do, you're outdoor and you get half an hour of just walking. I wanted to sort of, what's that like to just have that freedom to be out? It's just that time. Because here in [name of area], when you're in a car and you're on a freeway, there's stress. It's not a casual walk from here to there for 30 minutes. It's a stressful ride from here to there and it might be an hour. Riding a bike, physical discipline like that, I find to be a good outlet for me.

Speaker 1: That's good. Tell me a little bit about your family. How many kids do you have?

Speaker 2: 2 girls.

Speaker 1: 2 girls. How old are they now?

Speaker 2: They're in their 30's.

Speaker 1: Did they grow up, their teenage years here?

Speaker 2: Yeah.

Speaker 1: Okay.

Speaker 2: They would have, when we moved here, our younger one was I think in fifth grade and our older one was in eighth grade.

Speaker 1: Okay. Tell me about each, your wife and your 2 girls. Was there ever a time because of what was happening, they had a negative opinion of the church or negative view of the church?

Speaker 2: Yeah. It was awful for them.

Speaker 1: Was it really?

Speaker 2: Awful. It was awful in the sense that I can still remember the day I told them we were leaving. We used to live in [city name]. A little town. Wonderful town. Great place to rear your children. Very conservative. Very healthy in so many ways. Surrounded by vineyards, green, and it's just nice. That's all they knew. That's where their friends are. You're going to pull your fifth grader and your eighth grader from out of school 2 months into their first, into that school year and they're going to leave all their friends behind to come to a place they don't know anybody. There's not a rational parent in the world that would think that's a great idea or a good thing for them. They hated it from the get go, but then once they're here, they could see there's something wrong. There's something wrong here. As an example of the most extreme wrongness of this whole thing, our oldest daughter was a student at [university name] part of that time. I'm on the board over at [university name], It's the only way I could afford [university name]. She's one day sitting in the gym at [university name] for something. These 2 guys, I think they're students as well, come up to her. Is your dad the pastor at [church name]? Yeah. Then they just went off on her about, I don't know, what I'm doing or what's going on at the church and this faction. Whatever ugliness they spewed on her, as if she is somehow responsible for that. That is just over the top. That's what I'm saying. What's wrong with these people? They go to that class to get the word, and then outside of that class, they go over to a freshman at that time, at [university name] and spews all this hate and ugliness. Where is this disconnect from, they get the word, and now we're going to hate on you. That was awful. For me, talk about stress, I fortunately am not an over reactive, impulsive kind of a guy, but even to this day when I think about that scenario playing out and my daughter. Again, not a rational person in the world that wouldn't react very strongly. You're going after my kids and really crossed a line. I feel like crossing a line too. That was awful. They had to work that through. We had to help them, talk with them. They had small group leaders who were here at our church at that time who were very helpful. They had people besides us to go to, to talk about these things. Our oldest daughter is still getting some counseling. Even at eighth grade year, when you come to that eighth-grade class where you don't know anybody and all the kids have grown up together since Kindergarten. It was a clique thing. Very immature. Not very nice to the new kid. It was awful. There was a lot of emotional pain that came out of

that for them and for her in particular, and still going to counseling just to work it through. She's actually a licensed marriage and family therapist. She's doing the same for other people. She's very insightful.

Speaker 1: Locally?

Speaker 2: Yeah.

Speaker 1: She go to church here?

Speaker 2: No. One goes to another church. Again, that's probably a little of a byproduct. Something about coming here. There's a lot of negativity there through those years that they had either firsthand experience, like [name of university] or second hand saw us go through it. They knew the ugliness that was going on. That's one regret that, so one goes to another church where she can just be herself and I'm not [self-reference]'s daughter kind of thing, and actually worked here for a while, an internship and that sort of thing. Just wants to be on her own. The other married a guy who pastors at his dad's church. She connected with that church, and it's local. A bit more connected there through him.

Speaker 1: What about your wife?

Speaker 2: She went through it and she's a sweetheart. She's mature. She's healthy. Grew up in a healthy home and so she brings to this a lot of maturity from the get go. It was hard for her, so she and I both went to the Lead thing and of course Hawaii. The kids went with us. I think a lot of it is us working it through together. We actually didn't go to counseling. We didn't go to a counselor or anything. We just never did that. It probably would have been a good thing to do, but it just didn't fit who we were and who we are. We had people here locally that we were addressing these issues with, who really knew the situation and can help us process it. There's a little bit in us, the way we're sort of made that we can sort of partition off this. When I get home at night in those days, the girls were living at home and dinner time was like sacred time. Dinner comes rolling around. I'm home. I'm not talking about the church. They're talking about them and their lives and whatever they're going through at high school, junior high or high school. We just dedicated our time. We did not talk to them about the church and all the problems. We did not want them to feel as much burden as we were feeling. We would do that between the 2 of us. Now, I probably would have recommended to me, if someone like me came and asked for help, to go meet with someone outside the church and help talk this through. That probably would have been a good thing. I didn't do that. Again, I'm more of a work hard, just work hard, you know?

Speaker 1: What ways did you, or maybe you continue to protect your wife? I guess, in that difficult time, is there anything that you did to try and shield her from what was going on here? And even ongoing, are there some things you just won't tell your wife because you feel like it is not good for her or is it more of a relationship of her more of you tell her everything that's going on because you all are partners in ministry? Explain how you handle that.

Speaker 2: I would say it is both, and probably I'd have to think back, what year was that? Probably 21 years ago it was, at least.

Speaker 1: I'm really bad at math.

Speaker 2: 14 years ago now. I think I tend to protect her from information that I know that would cause her to feel stress. I tend to do that. That's more of my auto pilot. I don't go home and talk to this person and this problem. This person complained to me about this or somebody's after me about that. I just don't do that naturally. I don't like to go home and talk about my day. I just don't like to do that. I feel, I'm tired. I don't want to

have to regurgitate it. She's quite the opposite. She can give me every jot and tittle of her day and her conversation with everybody else. How do you do that? I'm just too tired and don't want to talk about it. I would tend to protect her from things that I believe would be negative and cause her harm because I think she would hurt more for me than I would hurt for myself. I didn't want her to hurt for me because it causes more pain for her than it causes for me. I think I tend to be more protective and not disclose. That was then. Today, we're on a very different plane from where I'm looking at succession and what the future holds. So, life is very different and I feel like I've invested all I can and now we're sort of like, what's next? If there are things that come up and if I think of it, I'll share it with her. Everything compared to then, this is like, great. It couldn't have been any worse. It was Hell on Earth back then. I actually had one of our other wise men, and wise in the sense of people you go to that give you some insight. It was one wise man in our church who is pretty successful in his own right that I will go to and had gone to back then. He had been through something similar. I just thought about it right now. That's another person that I would go to and help me to think about this. Tell me what I should think about this. What should I do about this? This consultant kind of a guy. Entrepreneurial consultant kind of a guy. One thing he told me that still sticks with me because it kind of shocked me a little bit is that "[name], sometimes you just have to outlast the bastards." I found that there's truth to that. That's essentially what we did. You know? If you're going to summarize it, I'll say the divine working of God and the Holy Spirit. I give all credit to God for what he did. We just outlasted them. They've moved on and we're still here.

Speaker 1: That's amazing. I've got one question I want to end with, but before I get to that one, as concise as you could respond to this, why have you stayed here so long?

Speaker 2: I felt like, as I had mentioned earlier, the 2 prior churches were places for me to learn and grow and that this was the church that those 2 places trained me to be part of. I just had that sense of calling that God had prepared [wife's name] and me. I want to include her because we had a home church that was healthy. The 2 prior churches were 100, 600 when we came here, to a few thousand. Such as it is today. Larger staff. It just seems to me and maybe God will straighten me out in Heaven, but I just had this sense that God called me here and this was the place that I should extend. It was 10 years, 10 years, and here's 21. So, it was the opportunity to bring it through and heal from the faction and dysfunction, and then help lay the groundwork and foundation for the future. I'm a peace maker. I'm a reconciler. I'm a restorer. I'm a healer. Again, I'm not saying I do all that really well, but that is where I feel like my sweet spot is to work in. The more of a challenge, the more motivated I am. Now, in the last few years, as I mentioned succession, what I'm trying to do is to lay down the ground work for whoever is going to follow me. I feel the burden to now help prepare the soil for the next farmer or shepherd, if you will, who is going to come in and plant seed and like Paul would say, let God reap the harvest and grow it.

Speaker 1: That's a great legacy. It's all about passing it on. My last question is really a summary question. From all that you learned from the years that you've been here, let's say that you're talking to a guy that just got his degree from seminary. He's about to take his first church and he looks at you and says, I really want to last. I want to be faithful. I want to do a good job. I want to be faithful to the Lord and faithful to the church. We're assuming this guy obviously is a Christian and has a prayer life, is having a quiet time. Aside from those things, what would be the one piece of advice that you would give to him from your experience to say, make sure you do this and this will help you towards achieving longevity?

Speaker 2: Well, I don't know if it is one thing or not, but I sure would say make sure that wherever you go, you know you're called by God. If you have that inner, God has placed me here, because you're going to have problems. You're going to have people that are

going to be a headache. You're going to have staff that is a headache because people are just crazy sometimes. The actual people that maybe brought you in may not be there with you in 5 years because you're not turning out to be who they thought you were. You've got to build your own team. I would say make sure God has called you. Stay long enough to build a church that wants to follow you because the church you came to will not be the church that is there 7 years from now. If you give yourself 7 years, I think it's about 7 years it takes to finally build a church around your leadership, about who you are and how God has made you. Give it enough time. There's a guy here locally who came to a church, got beat up within 3 years, but highly gifted, highly talented. He left after 3 years. If he had only hung in there for 4 more years, I bet he'd have a congregation that loves him. It just takes time, patience to be called by God and build, through patience the congregation that will love you and follow you. You've got to work through the problems. You don't divorce your wife when you have a fight.

Speaker 1: Right.

Speaker 2: You keep on working on it.

Speaker 1: Well, thank you.

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Speaker 1: What ways do you see stress coming at you the most in your ministry?

Speaker 2: There's no question, I don't think people understand preaching, it's always there. As soon as you finish Sunday, maybe I'm unique, you'd know better.

Speaker 1: I actually have to work on that today.

Speaker 2: But it's right there, and it's the kind of thing if you're passionate about it the way I am, it's always in your head. Now the fact is I love it, but I tell people it is like giving birth every week. Now obviously you and I have not had babies, but I've been with my wife, and I tell people you get to see the baby, you don't understand the labor pains to get there. The delivery is the easy part. So clearly for me the greatest stress is preaching week in, week out. I think some reason, maybe why some people leave is so they can recycle sermons, because it is so stressful. So being in the same place for 28 years, I've not recycled much.

Speaker 1: Yeah, somebody would call you out on it.

Speaker 2: So the stress, so for me that's the biggest stressor by far.

Speaker 1: Let me ask you this, in that, obviously being a pastor there's other responsibilities that come upon you, and some of them unexpectedly, how is it that with that being the stress that weighs on you that you're thinking about, how do you balance that with the other responsibilities you have, and especially the weeks where those responsibilities, you've got to pay attention to them, and it cuts into, how do you manage your time like that?

Speaker 2: Well those are the weeks I get the most stressed, it makes it really hard. I end up having to cut something. So when there's a death, or an accident, or tragic news of some kind, that's going to require a lot of time, then basically I tell my assistant you need to cancel everything else, this week is simply sermon prep and this crisis. Now frankly, in some ways, that's the advantage of having been here for 28 years, and the fact that God has blessed us with, we haven't had dramatic growth, but it's just been consistent, and we're not humongous, we're not huge, I guess we're considered a large church, but we're not ridiculous. Being able to hire a staff team that is so equipped, I mean it was much more stressful when we were small frankly, much more stressful. Because I did have to do everything, whereas now, I mean I really am a preacher now. I shepherd my elders, and I'll step into crises, but other than that, the staff, and the elders take care of the flock.

Speaker 1: So, tell me about those early years, why do you think you stayed through those heavily stressful years to get to this point? What kept you here through that?

Speaker 2: I would have to say, I'm a very relationally oriented guy, and relationships. I think that definitely relates to the whole stress thing as well. I think what's kept me from losing it are relationships. I mean [wife's name] and I are best friends in the world in this church. I mean I've married people, I've buried people, I've baptized these friend's children, and then married these friend's children, and then baptized these friend's children's children, I've buried their parents. So, we really are doing life together, and I think being in a place where you're doing life together, it's a stress reliever. Sometimes the most stressful crises are when you don't know people, that to me is stressful, because you're needing, and wanting to enter in as a shepherd, and you know you don't know them, and to some extent they know you don't know them, and yet you're really supposed to be there, and you are, you're there, but it's nothing like when it's one of my best friends, because that's not even stressful, I'm just loving my friend. So, I just think the depth of relationships that developed early on, I mean [name of the church] is an amazing

place as far as, it's not just longevity with me, it's longevity with the congregation. I mean I have elders serving with me that they were here the second service of the church plant, and they're still here. The bulk I think of our elders and deacons, they're long term people, so that's been huge. I think I've got a great wife who is just the delight of my heart, other than Jesus. So, I think I always knew I could be real with her, and she would take on the stress really.

Speaker 1: Really?

Speaker 2: She would just pray.

Speaker 1: Do you feel like with her, an interesting perspective that I would love to hear from you is, as something develops in the church, I don't know how much you've gone through, where maybe personally you're the object of resentment, or anger of parishioners, do you feel a responsibility to protect her from?

Speaker 2: Absolutely.

Speaker 1: You do? Okay, tell me about that.

Speaker 2: Well matter of fact, [wife's name] tells people [self-reference] is a vault, people come to her all the time fully anticipating that she knows about this, this, that, that, and that, she said I have no idea what you're talking about, and they say really? And she says [self-reference] doesn't tell me anything unless I need to know, and most of the stuff I do not need to know. So, I won't get into often details with [wife's name], I'll just share, sweetie I'm stressed big time, there's been a crisis, and now I'm wondering how I'm going to get my sermon done, and not only that but the sermon stinks. So those kinds of things, but no, I protect [wife's name] because she would take up an offense on my behalf. Now, I will say the other thing, so we've got [wife's name], we've got friendships in the church, and we've got, these are probably not in the order of importance, but just God's kindness, we've got a great church.

Speaker 1: You planted this church?

Speaker 2: Yeah, yeah.

Speaker 1: Okay.

Speaker 2: I rarely get attacked, rarely, rarely get a negative email, rarely receive a negative phone call.

Speaker 1: Has that always been true from the beginning?

Speaker 2: Yep.

Speaker 1: That's good.

Speaker 2: Now, if you're looking for some kind of thread, I would say it's our grace centeredness. We are unapologetically and emphatically a grace driven church, it's one of our core values, it's the thread of all my preaching, it's the thread we expect in the lifestyle of all of our elders, certainly all of our staff, but I interview every elder and deacon candidate, and my big, hairy, audacious question is I don't care if you can verbalize what grace is, would you die for it? Not just grace for conversion, but grace for living the Christian life, and then I'll ask them to explain what it is to them, and I have complete black ball power with elder and deacon candidates. If they're not on our page, they might have been an elder at [another church name], or a deacon at [another church reference], it doesn't matter, because we want this church on the same page. So, when you preach grace, what are the elements? Well my doctoral dissertation on grace centered

discipleship gave us a tool call the waltz. I taught it at [church reference], I taught it with the men's group. The waltz is the Christian 3 step with Jesus of how we grow in grace, and I say, I do this real quickly, every Christian dances, and I usually joke, I say don't tell the Baptists, but every Christian dances, there are 3 kinds of dances. The first kind of dance is a bunny hop, bunny hop is a 1 step dance. These people reduce the Christian life to 1 step, it's usually try harder, most evangelicals, that's the Christian life, just suck it up, pull yourself by your own bootstraps, and just keep trying harder. Other variations are confess more, and others just the opposite, surrender, rest more, "let go let God." So, there's certain elements that have some truth, but you can't say that's the Christian life. Then I said you've got the bunny hoppers, then you have the Texas 2 steppers, Texas 2 step dance. Clearly the most common, Texas 2 step, is confess and try harder. God I'm sorry, I promise to never do it again, and I'm going to just double my efforts. The 2 step that's closest to the biblical paradigm is repent and believe. Acknowledge your sin, acknowledge your helplessness, and trust God for the grace to be changed. But the 2 step is still incomplete because you and I both know there is a host of data on commands, behaviors, character, there's a life to live. So we can look at the waltz, Christian 3 step. Repent, believe, fight, repent, believe, fight, repent, believe, fight. So there's an attitude, an action, a behavior, character flaw, whatever, first step is repent. All Christian growth begins with repentance. Jesus said repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand, repent and believe. Luther's first thesis, when Jesus Christ called people to repent, he set the course for the entire Christian life. God opposes the proud, gives grace to the humble. So repentance is the normal Christian life, it's not a dirty word, you don't repent less the more you grow in Christ, you repent more, because you're more aware of his character, you're more aware of his word, you're repenting more. Evangelicals actually tend to think the more you are in Christ the less you're repenting, we say just the opposite. So that creates an environment right away where it's safe to admit your brokenness, because we'll actually tell people unless you're admitting your brokenness, you're not growing, and that in reality we're all 500 denarii sinners, not 50 denarii sinners. We're not Simon the Pharisee, although we actually often are, we're the prostitute, we just don't realize we're 500 denarii sinners. So brokenness is something we talk about. Well that creates an environment of health, okay? So I'm honest from the pulpit about my brokenness, it's almost like you don't do it for this reason, but you talk about stress, I'm almost beating people to the punch by saying look, you may have 100 things against me, I promise you I'm aware of many, many more things that you could say. So no matter what you say against me, I'm going to say not only are you probably right about that, but you don't know the half of it. That tends to have an effect on the culture. But the waltz isn't a 1 step, it's not repent, repent, repent, you'd end up being discouraged, and depressed, it's got to lead to believe, and there's 2 of them as to the believe step, 1 is affirmation, affirm your justified standing, affirm your adopted status, you're still delighted in and loved by the father, and then appropriate. That means you appropriate the present power over the love of Christ to change you at the place of your repentance, so you're filled with hope, repent, believe. Then there is a fight step, we are called to fight the good fight of faith.

Speaker 1: That's right.

Speaker 2: Well as, and, which means obedience, the means of grace, the disciplines, accountability, all those things will be in the fight step. I think as people come to the mountain, and they begin to grab hold of the waltz, because it's easy to grab onto, repent, believe, fight, you had a fight with your child, waltz. Impatient with your wife, waltz. Disgust with your pastor, waltz. I honestly think the constant drip, week, by week, by week for 28 years of grace, and the waltz has created a culture that actually is less critical. I mean I find the most critical churches are the most fundamentalist churches. Interesting Galatians, their issue was they were slipping into legalism, and Paul says watch out, because if you keep on biting one another you're going to devour each other. It's interesting that where there's Pharisees, moralism, behaviorism, legalism, nomianism, there's bickering, there's picking, there's nah, nah, nah, and that's where the stress comes

from, I think for the pastor. Now maybe from a human perspective God's used the master grace to create an environment where there's actually less stress, I don't know. I do know it's affected people, but I still would say it's simply just been God's kindness, is why I'm still here.

Speaker 1: That's good. You mentioned your wife, and we talked about you protecting her, I'd be interested to see if you do go into a season of stress, do you have other outlets that you immediately turn to?

Speaker 2: Well I'm a basketball freak.

Speaker 1: Okay, so you love to play basketball?

Speaker 2: Love basketball.

Speaker 1: Do you find it that you intentionally are using it to blow off some steam?

Speaker 2: Yeah, absolutely.

Speaker 1: Okay, tell me about what it feels like.

Speaker 2: It feels like Eric Little in Chariots of Fire, he said when I run I feel the pleasure of God, when I shoot 3 pointers, I just feel the pleasure of God. I mean I put on my earphones, so I'm not there to show my faith. Now if someone tackled me and said tell me about Jesus, I would. I put on my headphones, I listen to my 70s music, U2, and I just shoot 200 3 pointers.

Speaker 1: Do you really, by yourself?

Speaker 2: Yeah, by myself, just go around the world. There's usually people there, but I'm not having a lot of interaction, because that's not why I'm going. So that's been huge, also picking up just hobbies, I love to cook, so cooking is a stress reliever for me, because I'm so focused, I'm so engaged that everything else just sort of, it's the same principle with basketball. [wife's name] and I love, we love good food, we love good wine, we love music.

Speaker 1: Do you play?

Speaker 2: I don't play.

Speaker 1: Okay, you enjoy like listening.

Speaker 2: Now our youngest son is a musician extraordinaire, like he's written, produced music.

Speaker 1: Which instrument?

Speaker 2: Well he played every instrument on the album.

Speaker 1: Did he really?

Speaker 2: Yeah.

Speaker 1: Wow, that's impressive.

Speaker 2: He's like that kind of kid.

Speaker 1: Yeah, he's got it.

Speaker 2: We haven't even talked about our children.

Speaker 1: Yeah, that's what I was getting to.

Speaker 2: I asked my children repeatedly as they were growing up at [church reference], what do you think it's like being the child of a pastor of a church, positive, negative, neutral? They said we don't even look at it as you're the pastor of a church, it just feels normal, that's huge.

Speaker 1: How did you accomplish that would you say? How did you create the environment where they wouldn't feel that way?

Speaker 2: I tried, didn't always succeed, I tried to always let them know, same with [wife's name], that they were more important than the church. One of the things I did for instance, when each of my children of 3, when each of them turned 5 I would take them on a weekly date before school to Chikfila. We'd do the children's catechism, I'd read to them. We did Chronicles of Narnia, and then as they get older, I tried to tailor it to each child. So for [daughter's name], our daughter, we read Hind's feet on High Places by Hannah Hernard. With my one son who was going through all kinds of questioning, we read Francis Schafer. With the son that's real creative we read Blue Light Jazz. So from the time they were 5 to the time they were 18, every week. So there was many years I had 3 mornings a week with my kids, because they were all in school only 2 years apart, and I just refused to let anything get in the way of that. So I hope that had something to do with it, and again, too, I think preaching grace really disciplined people that they need to check their expectations, and why would they have expectations of the pastor's kids? I'm just a pastor like you're a dentist, I just happen to have a different calling, but I'm just as screwed up as you are, I need the gospel as much as you do, it's a calling issue folks. You might even be more godly than me, I'll say stuff like that. I'll never forget, one morning we were having communion, and I said folks this is not a table for people who have it together, this is a table for broken sinners. So how do we know our sin? Well we look at God's commandments, well let me tell you something, I've broken all 10 of the commandments this week, I promise you. So the next week on our date, [daughter's name] said daddy, she said you said something at communion that I need to have you explain to me. You said you broke all 10 commandments, I said yeah. She said daddy even the 7th commandment? I said not physically, but Jesus in the sermon on the mount said if you even look upon a woman with lust you've committed adultery, if you even get angry, well sweetheart, you know I get angry on the highway, I murdered that person in front of me, and it was a great opportunity for her to learn about the internalization of the law, and that's again, what we've done with our church. It's like look, folks, matter of fact, we even say, I didn't originate this, cheer up, you're a whole lot worse than you think. Cheer up, the gospel is more amazing than you ever dreamed, and Jackson, I really think that that's created an environment of, even when someone messes up, who is the bigger sinner here? In marriage counseling, we cover the waltz over and over again, and I said okay, look, I realize he was a jerk, but could it be that you thinking he's a jerk is just as big of a sin as the fact that he's a jerk? In other words, you think he's a jerk, the problem is you don't think you're one, and that's a problem. So again, when people get critical in our teaching, not just preaching, but Sunday school, discipleship groups, everything, small groups, we're just, like Luther said, we're taking this 2 by 4 of grace, and we're beating each other's heads continually. So it just guts, it guts criticism, you're still going to have critical thoughts because we're broken, sinful people, but if we're walking in the spirit of grace, it's like but who am I? It just affects the culture. Therefore, I know I'm giving you a long answer.

Speaker 1: These are great.

Speaker 2: What it's doing Jackson, it's lowering the stress level in the system, and

therefore lowering the stress level in my life. The funny thing is I'm a very stressful person.

Speaker 1: Really?

Speaker 2: My goodness, I'm a very anxious person, I always have been, I mean, even as a non-christian. And one of my biggest beefs with God, is how can I walk with you these many years and I still feel like I'm the same person the day I was converted? I'm still anxious, I've even created the word, I'm an awfulizer. There's an illustration I use at the congregation, [wife's name] and I were in bed one night, and I heard this tap tap tapping, and I thought crap, there are squirrels, or mice, or rats in the walls, and they're probably right now chewing through my wiring, and I'm going to have to get an electrician in here to replace the wiring in the house, we've got no savings, I can't afford to replace the wiring in the house, we're going to be homeless. I called the illustration 7 seconds to homelessness. Well it ends up it was a roach in a shopping bag.

Speaker 1: Goodness.

Speaker 2: Yet in 7 seconds I'm homeless. So again, those are the kinds of stories I share from the pulpit, just showing how weak I am, and how broken I am, how much I need the gospel, and then I say well then guess what, you're just as broken as I am, and some of y'all's brokenness is actually being revealed right now because you don't think you're broken at all, and that is precisely your brokenness. So those kinds of, just that DNA is part of [church reference] now.

Speaker 1: I can see why just creating that culture would reduce stress for you. What about in your own personal life, like spiritual disciplines, maybe 2 aspects of it. Number 1, what are the spiritual disciplines from the very beginning that you have held onto, and maintained, and maybe even what are some that as you have grown in your years of ministry here, that you saw a need to develop more deeply, and therefore because they helped to relieve stress, and so you've been more dedicated to those. Tell me about your spiritual disciplines.

Speaker 2: Clearly my devotion life is number 1.

Speaker 1: What does that look like?

Speaker 2: I will say that that was the first change of my conversion, I didn't grow up in a Christian home. So, sophomore year at [school name], wasn't an ax murderer, anything like that, matter of fact basketball was my God. So, my whole life consisted of, from the time I was 12, 4 or 5 hours a day playing basketball, school, and then since I'm so relational, friends, and girlfriends. When I was converted, Jackson within a week I couldn't put the bible down, that was the first change in my life. I never had a bible, never read the bible, and I instantaneously had an incredible hunger for God. So, began having devotions immediately, not because I was supposed to, but because I was hungry. Then, and I think this is part of even the gospel in my life, and the gospel at [church reference], God probably took me through the most devastating season of my life, where I went through 7 years of a dark night of the soul, where simultaneously I longed to know God, and my mind was asking questions about does he exist? Wanted to walk with Christ, simultaneously how do I know Jesus was historical, how do I know he rose from the dead? Wanted to minister, and disciple using God's word, at the same time how do I know this is God's word? And I was in ministry living in that tension, and I'll never forget, that's, I talk about [wife's name], the kind of woman she is, I looked at her one day, I said sweetheart, I'm afraid I'm going to end up in a rubber room. I'll never forget it, she said [self-reference] if they move you into a rubber room, have no fear, I will move in there with you. I still get emotional just remembering that. So, I've always felt like I have a safe place with my wife, and I think her love began to point me to the reality of God's

love. Now through it all, I mean I did study my brains out, I read the entire works of Francis Schafer, I was reading everything I could on philosophy and apologetics, and also, through that time of the dark night, God just made me hungrier, and hungrier, and hungrier. Psalm 42, David is away from the temple. As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants out for you, when will I go and appear before God? He's talking about the temple, obviously, because he knew he could be in God's presence in the wilderness, and I think it created a hunger that just intensified, and stuck with me, because we hunger for something so much, it just sort of grows and stays. Then I think the other thing is God broke me to the point where I almost felt like I'm Nebuchanezzar, apart from grace, I'd be eating grass like the cows. I know if God so chose, I could be back in that same place tomorrow. So, I think that's created a sense of brokenness, and weakness in me, some of it is healthy, some of it is unhealthy. The healthy part of it is I think created a humility. I think a repentant heart, and a humble heart is very attractive, and so I think rather than people becoming critical, people are drawn to brokenness, and weakness, and humility. I think maybe the person who thinks they have it all together at least comes across that way, they're probably the ones that are going to be the most attacked.

Speaker 1: I think there's a lot of truth in that, I could see that in experiencing, and just the validity of that statement, just in its own right, always said that people identify much more with our failures than our successes, so absolutely.

Speaker 2: You look at the typical quote successful pastor, driven, competent, confident, those are all the things that are going to unleash grenades.

Speaker 1: You're right, you're exactly right. I have one other question before I ask a summary. What about the organizational structure that you've developed here? You mentioned your staff earlier, and you talked about a competent staff, would you say at times that your staff creates stress for you in any way, form, or fashion? Or would you say they do nothing but relieve stress for you?

Speaker 2: For the most part they do nothing but relieve stress, the only time I'm stressed over my staff is when I think one of them needs to go. Those have been the hardest decisions, most stressful decisions of my ministry life, we've only asked 2 people, no, 3 people to move on, and took way too long to do it.

Speaker 1: Because you're grace driven.

Speaker 2: Yeah, and because I think too, that's where my brokenness comes in of the dark night, I said some of it was healthy, some of it was unhealthy, wrestling with the lie that I have no right to ask someone to move on, and if you do this, you're some level of thinking you're better than they are, and then God's going to get you.

Speaker 1: I've had those thoughts, and I've also had the thought, sometimes we think we're being gracious to people by letting them stay, but in fact we're being gracious when we send them on, because that's what's better for them.

Speaker 2: That's right, yeah. I just realized, I never really answered your question about devotions. So for many years I just read through the bible every year. I, let's see, where is it [looking through the cabinets in his office] Here they are... So, all those red books, they're 30 years of journals.

Speaker 1: Wow, are you serious?

Speaker 2: Soon after I became a Christian, I started journaling, and then I bought the same kind of journal all those years, so.

Speaker 1: Every year you would journal as you read through the bible?

Speaker 2: Yeah.

Speaker 1: Okay.

Speaker 2: So let's see, yeah, here's 1990, so I've got 1990 through 2017, and then I have a couple that are even older than that. These are my 2 [school name] journals, so this is.

Speaker 1: That's right after you became a Christian?

Speaker 2: Yeah, so this is May 29th, 1983, and it goes through, what's it go through? I don't know. May 28th 1984 I guess. So yeah, so I'm a big journaler, I journal my thoughts, I just journal my heart. So read the bible, journal, the discipline that I've been driven to, that I stink at still is prayer. So I created prayer groups, so I can, I have no trouble praying, like this room on Saturday mornings is filled, and we pray for an hour, on Wednesday mornings at 6 there's a few of us, but for 28 years, the Wednesday morning prayer group, and the Saturday morning prayer group have met, sometimes with different people. So I love praying kingdom prayers, like we don't pray for Aunt Jane's toe, not that there's anything wrong with that, but they're kingdom prayers. Then I think the other discipline that I engage in, that I think has really helped my ministry life is I go overseas at least once or twice a year because it just recalibrates everything for me.

Speaker 1: Resets your perspective of the ministry, and the world, and the kingdom of God kind of thing?

Speaker 2: And even my problems.

Speaker 1: And your own problems.

Speaker 2: It's like my goodness, first world problem [self-reference], first world problem.

Speaker 1: Do you have any specific place like where you all have ministry, or are you?

Speaker 2: No, we always go where we had ministry.

Speaker 1: You always go where you have ministry.

Speaker 2: Again, one of the things you'll find is our values, they go way deep. So, grace driven, we don't support missionaries that aren't grace driven.

Speaker 1: Okay, so you know each missionary, you support personally?

Speaker 2: My goodness, yes. I don't necessarily, but the missions team does.

Speaker 1: Okay.

Speaker 2: Yeah, because we support too many for me to know all of them, but the missions team, we have 70 folks on our missions team, so it's really, maybe not 70, we have US ministries and global ministries, so maybe if you put 2 together, but we've broken the world down into sections, and each sub team has a part of the world. So, I've been to Russia probably 15, 16 times, been in Japan a bunch, been to Ireland a bunch, been to Uganda, that's why that map is up there.

Speaker 1: That one?

Speaker 2: No, that one right there, the map.

Speaker 1: This one?

Speaker 2: Yeah.

Speaker 1: Okay I see it now.

Speaker 2: Australia, India, China, and like I said, not only does it relieve some ministry stress because I'm realizing what's at stake in what we're doing, but also even just experiencing different places and saying my goodness [self-reference], come on. You're going to let that stress you out? You've got a bed, you've got clean water, you've got, you know.

Speaker 1: Yeah, that's good. My last question is really a summary type question. So, the scenario would be a young minister who just got out of seminary, and he comes to you, he's about to take his first church, and has a lot of respect for you, and the longevity you've experienced, and he says, "I want to experience longevity in ministry, and he asks you what's the one piece of information you give to him?" Assuming he has a prayer life, and a relationship with the Lord, all those things we know are foundational, but from a practical perspective, from your years of ministry, and you can only tell him one thing, what would be that one thing that you would say to him, make sure you do this?

Speaker 2: When you preach, you're not only feeding the flock, you're creating a culture.

Speaker 1: That's good, tell me about what that means a little bit.

Speaker 2: Well obviously our first aim is to feed the flock, so do your exegesis Jesus, preach the word of God accurately, preach it boldly. I would also say preach expositionally, not topically. When you preach topically you're an easy target for being accused of hobby horsing. You preach expositionally, verse by verse, book by book, it's like I'm just an umpire, I didn't pick this week's text, the text did. And as you're feeding them, make sure you know what it means to preach the gospel. I would point them to Brian Chapel's Christ Centered Preaching, and I would say that's the best book on preaching that's ever been written. Forget about all the ridiculous double helix stuff, all that analytical stuff is not the price of the book, the last section on what it means to preach the gospel is worth the price of the book. As you're preaching the gospel, to realize God is using every single sermon, every single week to put in a sidewalk of brick that is going to put the church on a path to be a gospel driven culture. So many problems, will either be head off at the pass, or they'll be handled in a very gospel centered, Christ driven, kingdom oriented, gracious way. So, you're setting culture when you're preaching, you're not only feeding the flock.

Speaker 1: That's a good perspective to have. Well that's all the questions I have, we covered everything, and I really appreciate your time.

Speaker 2: Well it's a joy to share all of it, I mean because I get to experience everything again.

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Speaker 1: So, I think I want to start with, in what ways do you experience stress most in ministry? Where do you see it coming at you most?

Speaker 2: Believe it or not technology, in my opinion, has really accelerated the stress for the simple reason that technology has made you, made ministers especially much more accessible. When I first started the ministry, Jackson, I had a system set up that when mail came in it would be color coded so if it was in a red folder, it got answered right away if it was in a green folder, you know we had different so. Now because of email and messaging, people can almost get to you anywhere anytime, they can bypass. It's amazing to me how little solid mail I get today. I was telling people I don't get a lot of solid mail, it's email, text messaging, because your phone number gets out, your email gets out. So that's one thing that's just accelerating because now where you used to funnel everything through your assistant, now you still try to do that but now people have those, the streams can go around the wall.

Speaker 1: Yes.

Speaker 2: So that I believe has accelerated just the pressure of, you know it's almost hard to go on vacation, because if you go on vacation if you don't check your email every day you're going to have 100 emails in your inbox and then that stresses you out. So I believe number 1 that technology has really greatly has accelerated the stress and then, you know, it's particularly Sunday's always coming. And it doesn't matter how great a message you preached last Sunday, you'd better come back with it next Sunday. They probably filmed what you preached last Sunday, you've got to bring it again. I tell guys all the time, just imagine having to do a term paper every week and stand up there in front of your class delivering, by the way, you'd better get an A or you're going to get blasted for it. So there's the pressure of just sermon prep and then you have the pressure of, you know you've got a staff to lead. There are administrative duties you've got to carry out. That doesn't take into consideration the phone call you get at 3 in the morning because one of your key leaders been in a car wreck or had an automobile accident or somebody's wife left them or whatever. So, the truth of the matter is the stressful part, being a pastor, I heard this the other day, being the pastor is just like being the president of the United States, when you're elected president and you take that oath of office, for the next 4 to 8 years, you are the president not Monday through Friday 9 to 5, you're the president 24/7 every day 365 days a year, same thing is true of a pastor. I can go on vacation, but if one of my key leaders or one of my staff people are in a crisis or having an automobile accident or it's a matter of life and death, I've got to go. I'm the pastor. So you're the pastor 24/7, 365 days a year, so when you put all of those things together, not to mention you've got to be the chief fundraiser, right? You've got to be the chief press spokesman for the church, you know, you add up all those things together, you don't have to go looking for stress, stress comes looking for you.

Speaker 1: So when identify the technology as creating a lot of stress for you, was there a time early on that it was overwhelming and you had to create some protocol for how you were going to mitigate that stress?

Speaker 2: Yes, in fact, it's happened more than once. I'll tell you the greatest and the most stressful time of my ministry by far, which has helped me to cope with other stressful situations but there's nothing compares to this. In fact, I write about it in one of my books. It was in my, the church I pastored prior to this one, [Church name], and I was 32 years old when I went to [church name], church ran about 1200 in attendance, which for a 32 year old is a pretty big church, and I tell people I did such a fantastic job that in 6 months I took it from 1200 to 800. I went into a church that where frankly the staff was

by and large liberal, it was back during the days of the whole SBC controversy. So, I had a lot of staff that were opposed to where I was coming from because I was on the conservative end of the spectrum. They had staffed the church leadership by and large with people of their own ilk and sort. So, I came into a situation where I needed a 90 percent vote to become the pastor and it's the only church I've pastored where I didn't get a unanimous vote. I had 800 and something people voted for me and 88 people voted against me so I knew coming in that I had at least 100 people against me, including the whole staff, the whole staff voted against me.

Speaker 1: Oh, did they really?

Speaker 2: Yeah so to cut a long story short, over that 6-month period where frankly the pastoral search committee and the personal ministry team should have dealt with this situation, they really should have let the staff go before I got there because they were so militantly against me. They punted so I had to deal with it, so long story short, we agreed, I agreed on my own, I should give this 6 months to see if this will work out between us, you need to understand it's not a priority of my job to work with you, it's a priority of your job to work for me. They didn't want to work with me. That whole 6-month period, anonymous mail, vicious comments while I'd be preaching from choir members, I could go into all detail. I started losing my hair, developed a blood pressure problem, was sweating through my suits, couldn't sleep at night, the pressure was just unrelenting to the point that after I'd been there about 6 months, in fact at the 6-month period, the two great leaders of the staff who were against me both resigned, just up and resigned, and they blasted me on the way out. Said they could not work with me, I was a dictator and the whole nine yards. So, it just so happened that would be followed a couple weeks later by our quarterly business meeting. So, there was a petition that got 300 signatures on it to have me fired, so when it all came to a head-on Sunday night, normally our quarterly business meeting, we might have 300 people. Well, they were selling popcorn in the parking lot. They were standing 3 deep around the wall, you couldn't get them in, it was packed because everybody came to see the lynching. I thought I was going to be fired. I can tell the rest of that story later if it's germane to your dissertation, but long story short, God gave me a victory that night. Through it, and you know Doctor Homer Lindsey used to say it takes you 5 years to become the pastor of a church, well I got accelerated at that point I was the pastor. But it was through that I learned a lot of lessons on how to deal with stress and how God works through stress and that kind of thing, but it was by far and away the most stressful situation I've ever been through in my life and I would never want to go through it again. But I will tell you this, you do not find out what kind of leader you are, you don't find out what you really have in here in the good times, it's when you are facing the stressful times. It's when you're not meeting the budget. It's when you've got to cut expenses, it's when your church is not growing as fast as you'd like. It's when the economy is going to pot and you've got to deal with that. That's when you find out what kind of a leader you are and what kind of person you are and what kind of fire you have in your belly. I've learned to see stress, not as a negative, nearly as much as I see it as a positive.

Speaker 1: Why would you say that you didn't leave before that time when you came to that? What was it that kept you there? Was it just because I don't have anywhere else to go or is it because of the calling that you had?

Speaker 2: Bingo, you got it.

Speaker 1: That was it.

Speaker 2: Calling of God. It was, I mean, there were a lot of times. I wanted to be a lawyer, that's what I wanted to do. I didn't want to be a pastor I wanted to be a lawyer. I

tell people all the time I didn't want to save them, I wanted to sue them but God had different ideas, and there's been a lot of times but that's one time it was when I call it a thread, it was a steel thread, but there's been times, and this is true of, and by the way I do believe this, and I'm not casting aspersions on my brothers who leave the ministry, but I do believe a lot of pastors leave the ministry every month, not because of the stress but because they haven't been called. I really believe that. I mean there have been a lot of times in my own ministry that the thing that kept me in the ballgame was the calling. Is the Jeremiah thing, Jeremiah said I'm not preaching anymore, there's a fire in my bones, that's the calling of God. Yeah so it was absolutely the call of God in my life and one of the things that God taught me was that night when this all came down I really thought I was going to get fired. I honest to God thought I was going to get fired, God reminded me that they didn't hire you, they can fire you but they didn't hire you. I called you. You're not their man, you're my man. No matter what happens, I called you, I'll take care of you. So that's kind of how I deal with it.

Speaker 1: Coming from there to here, what would you say you learned and did differently here to adjust from your experience?

Speaker 2: I hate to admit it but, trust God more.

Speaker 1: Okay.

Speaker 2: And it's one of those things, you better read the scripture how some of the great prophets and even Moses and Joshua and were giving the counsel look back and see what God's done for you. Many, many times I've looked back at that business meeting that night when you know, I thought I was going to be one of those casualties and I thought I was going to be, because there is a, and it's unfortunate, kind of scarlet letter you wear for a while if you get fired because people do want to say what did you do to get fired. You may not have done anything, you know, it may be that if I'd have gotten fired, it wouldn't be for doing what was wrong but for doing what was right because I didn't do anything wrong. You know still, you don't want that around your neck, but anyway, it was being able to look back many, many times, many times to that position. I'll just tell you a quick story, I was under such stress, I guess we have the time, I was under such stress, Wednesday night before the Sunday night business meeting, you'll love this story, this will be worth you flying in here for. I pull into my carport, I had a carport, I pull into my carport and once I pull into my carport I see these flashing lights on the rearview mirror and there's a policeman in my driveway. I started to get out of the car, he runs up to my car, runs up to my car and he's screaming do not get out of that car. So I roll down my window and said officer is there a problem, and he's so mad he's slobbering, he said did you not see my lights? I didn't. I tell you what happened, I'd been at the church at a meeting with some of my supporters, pastor search committee and deacons, 6 or 7 guys. And they were just being honest and they were saying, pastor, we don't know what's going to happen Sunday night, we don't know if you're going to stay or not, we don't know, we just don't know. So, I was just, I was evil stressed out. I don't remember, I don't want to over exaggerate, I think I ran 2 stop signs and I think he said I ran 3 stop lights. I never saw them. I could have killed somebody, I was so stressed out, so zoned out. He had me, I was speeding in 2 different speed zones, he could have thrown me in jail. So I gave him my drivers license, I'm still sitting in my carport, [wife's name] comes to the door, I tell her not to open the door. It was crazy. I gave him my drivers license and insurance card. He looked at my card, and he goes, [last name], and he said you're the pastor at [church name]. I said yes sir. He said I think you need to wait right there in the car. He goes back to his car, his cruiser, he's talking for 15 minutes, comes back and he hands my card and says [self-reference], be more careful and have a good evening. I said that's it? Yes, sir. Not even give me a ticket? No. Why not? Quote, my supervisor says you're in enough trouble as it is.

Speaker 1: Really?

Speaker 2: True story, because this is all over the community. Here's where I was going with all this, so that was Wednesday night, so Thursday, I had my study down in the basement I told my wife [wife's name], I said [wife's name], normally I'd let the kids, I had 2 small boys at the time and I'd normally let the boys come down and play, one was 6 the other was 3. I'd let them come down and play. I said look, tell the boys, do not, I don't want to see anybody, I don't want to see, I don't care if President Reagan calls, no communication. And I went down, I had borrowed a stack of 5 by 8 note cards, 2 stacks and I opened up the Bible and I started at Psalm 1. I can't even tell this without crying, I hope I can get through it without crying because I get these emotions coming up. [begins tearing up]

Speaker 1: It's still real fresh.

Speaker 2: Yes. [long pause] So I open my Bible, Jackson, and I said Oh God if you don't ever speak to me again, [emotional pause] I need you to speak to me today. So, I spent the night, I think it took me about 12 hours, I read all 150 Psalms, and every time I would come to a verse that I thought was me, I'd write that verse down. I filled up 2 stacks of note cards, then I picked down to about 10 of them and the rest of the week I carried them and every time I'd break out in a sweat I'd say, God, you promised. You said this God, you promised. So that night I was baptizing 14 people that night, this was an old fashioned traditional church and I had the curtains across the Baptist church, so I didn't know what the crowd was. I was hearing a little bit but I didn't know what the crowd was, well that's when they opened the curtains and there was this packed out, standing 3 deep around the wall, I mean it was just packed out. So, I went through with the baptism, got dressed, went downstairs and I could feel my blood pressure going up and I had a real bad blood pressure problem, in fact, I used to have my blood pressure checked every morning before I'd go out to preach. It was that bad.

Speaker 1: Wow.

Speaker 2: I was on medication. So, I could tell, and I was almost hyperventilating, my hearts going 120 miles per hour and sweat is pouring down my side, and Jackson, I put my hand on the door, and there's a verse, I think it's Psalms 56:10, I think it is, I'm not sure, but there's a verse David said, and it wasn't even in my cards, this I know, God is for me. And that verse came to my mind, this I know, God is for me. And that's when God spoke to me and said they may fire you but they didn't hire you. And I said to the Lord, if they keep me fine, if they fire me, fine. No matter what happens, you called me, I'm going to trust you and serve you. Before the Lord so help me, I felt my blood pressure go normal, my heart rate returned, my sweat glands dried up. I went and preached and I was preaching through first John and it happened to be preaching the passage, how can you say you love God, and you have to say you hate your brother and had 7 people save that night. So anyhow we're in the business meeting, long story short, nothing even came up about me being fired it was something about the minister of music and what we were going to do for him, that was the whole business meeting.

Speaker 1: That was it.

Speaker 2: And then I got 2 7-minute standing ovations when I said I was going to continue to preach the way that I preach and then I said I'm going to continue to lead the way I lead. And then it was done. Then that week we lost 300 people, between that week and the next, we went 1200 to 900 and eventually got down to 750 and then we took off. So, I'm telling that story to say, I cannot tell you, that's my Ebenezer, I cannot tell you how many times I've gone back to that. I still feel the cold doorknob when God said, this I know God is for me. So that's kind of how.

Speaker 1: That's powerful.

Speaker 2: I wasn't going to tell you that story but it all came back to my mind.

Speaker 1: No that's great because it's almost like a milestone for you.

Speaker 2: It was.

Speaker 1: Your spiritual journey as well as your professional journey.

Speaker 2: One of the greatest experiences of my life, that I tell you, I wouldn't want to go through the Hell I went through again, and it was, it was hell for 6 months. To tell you how bad it was, my 3rd and last son was born on the 26th of December. One staff person, the music minister, even the preschool lady didn't come, 1 staff member and 1 deacon came to the hospital.

Speaker 1: Wow. Out of 1200 members

Speaker 2: So, all of that to say I've gone back to that moment many times, this I know, God is for me.

Speaker 1: So, I would be curious to know, as you reflect back on that, was that 6 months, would you look back and say that was a necessary 6 months to be where I am today?

Speaker 2: No question, I would not be the man I am today, I wouldn't be the leader I am today. I wouldn't have the confidence I have today, and I don't have all the confidence in the world but I wouldn't even have the confidence. It's really great to know, it's kind of like a soldier whose been to war and you've been shot at, but you made it and you didn't cut and run. And you did what a soldier ought to do, that's the experience that I had.

Speaker 1: Wow. Tell me this, and this is almost like a 2-part question. Going into that very significant experience, can you A) identify some spiritual disciplines that you had that you think helped you through that, and B) did you develop any through that process that you said from this point forward I've got to keep these and even maybe deepen these so that this doesn't happen again?

Speaker 2: Not to sound arrogant as to the 2nd question the answer is no. The first question was basically 3 or 4 things. Number 1, reading my Bible and having a quiet time every day, generally praying and having that quiet time every day, that was the first big thing. Second big thing was just continue to preach the truth of God's word which always grows and strengthens so you've got to stay in there and prepare those messages, even when you didn't feel like it, even when your mind wasn't even there, I've got a message, I've got to preach. I've got a word I've got to deliver. The third thing was staying busy and sharing my faith and telling people about Christ, that keeps your heart warm and so you know the fourth thing was making sure that I stayed very close to [wife's name], my wife, who is my best friend in the world to this day and my family and not letting, not taking it out on my family which I did not do. That would be the four things that I've just continued to do.

Speaker 1: That's good. And bringing up your family, let's move to them for a minute. Have you ever through the years seen any negative impact that the stress of ministry has had on your family, your wife or kids?

Speaker 2: No, not directly. I've come to find out later that it's just the name of the game. My kids were sometimes held to a different standard by other people. I never did. I purposely didn't do it. I never tried to steer my kids into the ministry, in fact, none of

them are really in the ministry. [son's name] would be the closest to it, [son's name] went to Seminary. He's now an author, a Christian author, a ghost writer and all of that, my oldest son is an attorney, my youngest son's a pilot. I did just, I said guys, If you can do anything else, you have to go do it. I'm not one of those guys, I wanted them guided in the ministry, but only that. But I made it a point to have a normal family life, like everybody else. I did not allow people to either hold my kids to a higher standard or pick on my kids. I shielded them from the, we never talked negative things about church or anything like that, I never did that with them. My boys are all in church today, in fact, 2 of them are in our church, so we had a very normal family life we took regular vacations, every Friday night was family night, we swapped everybody, including me, on family night, what you would do, you do, what you would eat, we eat. We had a ton of pizza when the boys had it. We really had a normal family life and my boys don't have any real negative feelings about the church in the way that some kids do, unfortunately.

Speaker 1: I'd be curious, did you from the get go have that perspective or did you find out in ministry, "Hey I've got to protect this and set some boundaries?"

Speaker 2: I hate to say this, and I'll let you be judicial. I had it from the beginning because of the experience of W. A. Creswell and I did not want to go down that route.

Speaker 1: Wow, okay.

Speaker 2: And so, no I made up my mind from the get go that I was going to be the best husband and the best father that I could be, and I'm not saying I was but I really had that from the very beginning. Now, I have to say this, because I traveled too much, looking back on it, I traveled too much, [wife's name] carried too much of the burden, she never complained, never griped at all. She's always been my biggest supporter and all. I put more stress on her than I should have.

Speaker 1: Tell me about that, how did she respond to it or did she ever say anything?

Speaker 2: No. [wife's name] is a trooper, she's the finest person I know, I've ever known. She's the rock of my life, just my best friend on the planet. No, she latched on to you know I'm your support, I realize that's what God's called you to do. I want you to do it, I let you do it. I gladly let you do it. And it was always great raising the kids. It's not like I was gone as much as Billy Graham is gone, but I was gone a good bit.

Speaker 1: Yeah.

Speaker 2: So, in fact, it got to the point I will tell you when I was asked to run to be the president of the SBC, my son at the time was a sophomore in high school so I knew that I would be gone a lot his sophomore and junior year and I'd be there for his senior year. So, I sat down with him and [wife's name] and I said, son, they asked me to be president of the SBC, you know I'll be gone quite a bit, I want you to know that if this was your junior and senior year I wouldn't do it. But I said I want to know how you fell. He said dad, I want you to do it. If you believe God wants you to do it, I want you to do it. [wife's name] felt the same way. I said to the both of them, either one of you have veto power. If either one of you say don't do it, I'm not doing it. So, they both did it, or I would not have done it.

Speaker 1: Wow that's powerful. I'd be curious that your wife being as close of a relationship that you're saying you all have shared through these years, did you ever feel like or is there any kind of process in your mind of how you've shielded her from certain things in the church, or do you have a relationship where you tell her everything.

Speaker 2: No, I shielded her.

Speaker 1: So, you did.

Speaker 2: But not why you may think. She can handle anything. It's more of a professionalism on my part that I like, for example, a good example, if somebody comes in for counseling, I never tell [wife's name] anything like that. It's just best I think, for me, I never hesitate to share anything with her that I feel like I'm not breaking an ethical boundary to share or that I think that she really needs to know and can help me process or digest, but it has to meet those criteria and a lot of what I do doesn't really meet that criteria so I don't.

Speaker 1: What about outside of that relationship would you say there's any other significant relationship that's for accountability where you can if you're struggling with anything or that holds you accountable or if you really felt like you needed to unload do you have another significant?

Speaker 2: I've got actually 4 or 5 guys that have been with me a long time.

Speaker 1: That are in the church on staff?

Speaker 2: No, they're not on staff.

Speaker 1: They're just in the church.

Speaker 2: Now, I've got a couple on staff that I can do that with but I'm thinking about them. But even to the point of talking about hey, help me with succession down the road, that kind of thing. Yeah, I've got that, absolutely.

Speaker 1: Let me ask you about physical disciplines. You've talked about the health issues that you dealt with. Are there any physical disciplines that you have that you see as key to making sure?

Speaker 2: Yes. Absolutely. I worked out religiously ever since I was done and worked out. Try to work out every day. So that. As I've gotten older I've totally changed my, not a diet, I've changed my lifestyle. Diets don't work, you've got to make a lifestyle change. So, I've dropped in the last year 25 pounds so the key is not losing way, it's keeping it off. So, there are just certain things I don't eat anymore. Don't eat bread, I don't eat sweets, I don't eat fried foods, I just kind of watch what I eat.

Speaker 1: That's good.

Speaker 2: Then I try to get plenty of, I don't need a lot, for me, I need about, if I get about 6 and a half hours of sleep, maybe 7, I'm good. I can't sleep more than that 6 to 7 hours. So, I try to get regular sleep. I do take the month of July off. I have that, not everybody can do that, I do strongly recommend, you've got to take regular vacations and breaks. So, I'll take the, I'll get through the 7-week series, I won't preach for a Sunday or 2, I'll let one of my other guys preach and I get a little bit of a break. Then I'll take the month of July off because I really, my schedule is such I go pretty hard from January to June, I take July off, and then from August to the middle of December, I'm back in. That's kind of what I do. I think those 3 things are important, exercise, rest, and your dietary habits. I would also say, and maybe for part of it, you got to have a quiet time every day. You've got to be in the word every day, you've got to be talking to the Lord every day.

Speaker 1: And you mentioned journaling.

Speaker 2: I've been journaling for 31 years now.

Speaker 1: And that's just simple writing down thoughts that you have or prayers.

Speaker 2: It could be thoughts, it could be things that happened that day, it could be, I've journaled every person I've personally lead to Christ for the past 31 years.

Speaker 1: Have you really?

Speaker 2: Yeah. I've written their name down, how I lead them to Christ, I put a little red circle because I want to know how many I have led to the Lord each year. It can be that, it can be something like the election of the president, it can be a crisis that happened around the world, it can be the unexpected death of a friend, it can be anything like that.

Speaker 1: Organizational structure, does it create more stress for you or alleviate stress?

Speaker 2: Less.

Speaker 1: It does lessen it.

Speaker 2: Because I'm not an organized guy.

Speaker 1: So you're good at delegating, letting them have it.

Speaker 2: I'm the delegating chief. But the key to delegating, where a lot of guys make a mistake, you cannot delegate responsibility without delegating authority, but you don't delegate either until you can trust the person you're delegating to. So you have to, it's a process. I never ever, ever try to do anything that somebody else can do for me because I need to be doing what only I can do. And that's primarily casting vision, giving leadership, and preparing messages to preach to the word.

Speaker 1: What about the culture around us, the community, how much stress does it put on you?

Speaker 2: Not a lot, I'm not into the rotary, maybe to my detriment. I just feel like I've got enough on my plate, I had enough when I had kids. If I'm a good father, and a good husband, and a good pastor and I do my civic duty and vote. If I do go to a civic meeting or some kind of political meeting where I feel like I need to make a contribution, I feel like my plates pretty full. Unless you do that and you try to take care of your physical and spiritual health you're pretty good. So there's not a lot of community that I stress on.

Speaker 1: Well I have one last question that's a very similar question before I ask you that are there any other thoughts on stress in ministry that maybe I didn't cover or I didn't ask specific that came to your mind while we were talking that maybe you'd like to share?

Speaker 2: The only thing I would say, and I do, I've been where a lot of guys are, and I sympathize and empathize with guys who are under stress and I feel that there is a lot of unfair and undue stress that is put on too many pastors, and I get that, and it is a stressful job. Under the best of circumstances, it's a stressful job. A lot of work. The thing I would say to guys, I think and it goes to some, not all, but it goes to some of these 1500, I think some guys cut and run too quick. I would say that Solomon said he who faints on the day of battle, his strength is small. It's not what you do on the practice field, it's what you do in the ballgame. I would say don't look at stress always as your enemy. Use stress as your friend. God can take the mess of stress and do great work in your life. That would be some counsel I would give.

Speaker 1: Well I think in that you've probably answered my last question. My last question would be setting up the scenario, you're speaking to a guy coming out of seminary about to take his first church. He longs to be a healthy pastor with longevity. If you were to give him only one piece of advice, obviously believing that he has a quiet

time, a relationship with the lord, a prayer life, what would be the one single piece of practical advice from your years of ministry that you would say make sure you do this right here? Is there anything in particular that jumps out at you?

Speaker 2: Believe it or not, and this may surprise you when I say this, and I'm making the assumption, Jackson, you're called of God, you're walking with the Lord, you have the quiet time, you're doing what you need to do with your family, all of these, I'm going to assume those because I don't want to leave those out. I think that the number 1 thing that I would say to, it would be hard to say 1, but if I can only say one, believe it or not, I would say preach the word. And the reason I say that is for this reason. If you're preaching the word that means you're in the word. If you're in the word, that means you're growing in the word and if you're growing in the word that means your strength is increasing, it's supposed to cycle. The other reason it's important to preach the word is the most important to a pastor has at his disposal in leading a church and handling stress is the bully pulpit. Doctor RG Lee used to say great preaching overcomes a multitude of sins and the thing I would say to someone is don't let anything else, no matter how much stress you're in, don't let any of the stress distract you from getting in that study and studying God's word and giving a great message and a word ready to preach to your people week in and week out, because there's a lot more benefit to that than you think there is. Not just for them but also for you.

Speaker 1: That's good. I would like a follow up question to that, it made me think of it. When you have a stressful week, how do you prioritize ministering and preparing a word? Does one supersede the other?

Speaker 2: Yeah, hold on.

Speaker 1: Yeah.

Speaker 2: Preaching the word is always priority because that's something only I can do. Anybody else can minister. When the chips are down you go to the hospital. When the chips are down you counsel that guy going through a divorce. I'm the only one that's got to get up there and preach. So, the preaching of God's word will always take, I mean, you think about what Paul said to Timothy, first thing out of the gate, preach the word. Do your work and evangelism, but preach the word. The thing I would say to this tough, I want to add one last thing, the ministry is not for the faint of heart. If you're looking for an easy job, don't go to the ministry. In fact, if your ministry is easy you're not doing it right. Adrian used to say, Doctor Rogers used to say if it doesn't cost, it doesn't count. The fact of the matter is to paraphrase the famous Churchill you're going to get blood, sweat, toil and tears if you do it right, but the end result is so fulfilling and so worth it. I would end my remarks to say, I can't believe that I get to do what I do. If I'd been God, I wouldn't have done 2 things God did for me. I wouldn't have saved me and I wouldn't have called me. God did both.

Speaker 1: Wow.

Speaker 2: And I give to God everyone of them.

Speaker 1: Praise God on that. I thank you for your time.

Speaker 2: Jackson, my pleasure.

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Speaker 1: In what ways, as you reflect on the years that you've been here, have you experienced stress in ministry?

Speaker 2: For me, Jack, I would say I probably put more stress on myself than anything else puts on me. I'm an achiever. I'm a doer. I come out of an athletic background, where winning is very important, and losing is just not something that I really want to have a part of. With that, when you come to ministry, then having to change your template of, what is a win, and what is a loss? For me to die is gain. And I'm like, no. Learning the Christ life and experiencing that, for me, personally, has been where I've had to deal with stress that I put on myself. Now there's some other stressors that, certainly, come into the life of the pastor, and having been here 26 years. There's stress from having to deal with staff that are not as go get them as I find myself being. Some of the staff, early on, I inherited. I didn't hire them, and they weren't sure they wanted me, so early on, there were some real stress points about staff. There have been 1 or 2 that I've brought in here, that I've had to deal with. You just want them to be on the team. And you feel like when they're not, then it, kind of, reflects on you, so that brings stress to me. The great thing about the church I pastor, I've been here 26. [former pastor's name] was here for 17 years before I was here. And [former pastor's name] was here for 17 years before he was here. All 3 of us came when we were 36 years old. [former pastor's name], at 36, 17 years. [former pastor's name], at 36, 17 years. [Self-reference], at 36, and I've been here 26 years. I was asked when I hit year 17, what are you going to do? I said, well, if I'm out of the will of the Lord, I'm going to stay longer than those other guys [laughing]. See, I'm a winner. The church wrestled with that. The church takes great pride in the longevity of their pastor, and that pride is not always, probably, a good thing, or a biblical thing. But there is a side of that, that they say, hey, our guys come and stay with us. So they've been good about that, and allowing the pastor to lead. There have been times when we've had some angst in the body, in leading. But I've got great men in this church that [former pastor's name] really grew up and built a foundation, and then I've been able to build on top of that. So, the men of this church relieve a lot of stress for me, as the pastor. One of my men sat in this very room, where we're sitting in now, and he said, Pastor, we are the insulation on the wire for you. Let us absorb the arching that comes in the body, and let us be the men of God we need to be. My stress is giving it away rather than wanting to do it myself, but one of the things I've learned to do, is to trust good, great, and Godly men, of which, I have been blessed abundantly. And, this is our deacon, we're about to elect, Deacon Sunday. We'll put another 20 men on. Out of all these guys, I trust every one of them with all my life. We vetted through them, and the church has kind of changed, in that, some ways that we do it, but these are good men. They're really willing to help me. They're young and old. That's one of the things that have, just growing up, that makes generous, so those are 3 or 4 of the ways that, where that's come from.

Speaker 1: In your 26 years, would you look back and say there were any waypoints of, where something built, and maybe you've won a battle here, overcame something, and then that increased your ability to stay longer, or enhance?

Speaker 2: Certainly. 1997 is the year. I have a whole sermon I preach around it. I tell people all the time, I've been here 26 years. 25 are the happiest years of my life. 1997 came. We just moved into our new worship center. Our minister of music, at the time, had been here almost 25 years. He was not a trained musician. He was a great man, soul winner, a Godly man. Our people loved him. I loved him. But it became evident, he could not take us all where we needed to go. I'm a young, 40-year-old something guy at that time. And our minister of music, I tried to move him, and I just couldn't make it happen. He didn't want to do anything else. So, I wound up having to release him, and I'm just telling you, all hell broke loose. That's the only way I know to say it. I went through the, I wanted out. I wanted to leave here. I just didn't want to have anything to do with this church. I just said, you can have him. Just give me time to get out. Well, they didn't want

that. They wanted us to get a long, but it, just, was not going to work. So, we did release him, went through a hard, hard time. We even brought in a guy to moderate that and help us. But it came evident, if you want to let the pastor lead, so I did, and he left, and we got a great interim guy. So, I walked through that. I had one of the greatest experiences of my life when, out of 2 Samuel 23, where David is in the cave of dulm, and the 3 guys go get the water for him at the well, at Bethlehem. Well, I had 3 guys come. And they drove from [current city] to [hometown], which is my home, up in the mountains of North Alabama. They went to my Bethlehem, and got me a drink of water, and brought that water back to me that night, and said, Pastor, we're willing to die for you. That was the words they used, Jack. Those guys got me through that time, and we went on from there. That's a long story of, just, great, old men, coming around. They just, literally, carried me through the war zone of the church for a while. It wasn't a big crowd of people, but it doesn't take many. A little leaven will leaven the whole lump. So, I just had a few folks that, it was really ugly, but we moved through that. I tell people now, it was just all about Jesus knocking everything out of me that wasn't him. It was more about me than it was the whole deal. It was [self-reference] learning to trust Christ. And are you going to really let him be sovereign God in your life, and let him control everything, or are you going to try to control it yourself? Once I died to [self], I die to Christ. That was part of the release of that. So, it was a real stressful year. One of the great things that happened through that was my family. I have 2 children. They were small at that time. They were protected through that.

Speaker 1: How so?

Speaker 2: It's just almost like God put a cover.

Speaker 1: Oh really? Okay. So, nothing you did?

Speaker 2: No.

Speaker 1: It was just something providentially?

Speaker 2: It was just, yes, God's providence, really. And probably a Godly wife, and some wonderful people in the church, that just, kind of, kept my children out of those dialogues and discussions. So, they never got mad at the church, or mad at people. They know Daddy went through a hard time. They remained sweet, and loved the Lord, and the church until this day. Matter of fact, one of them is now married to one of my deacons.

Speaker 1: Oh really?

Speaker 2: Yes. [daughter's name], my daughter, and her husband, [name], in their early thirties. He's a young deacon here, and have our grandchildren. So that was good, the way God protected the family through our crisis. Moved through that from year, about 6 or 7. I was here until year 15. [name] is my deacon chairman. [name] sat in the chair, right over there, at that table. Anytime your deacon chairman makes an appointment, you don't know what it's about, it's a stress level. You just, well, what's he coming for? So, I said, hey, [name]. How are you doing? He's 10, 15 years my senior. He said, Pastor, I came by to just, wanted to tell you something today. I said, okay. What is it? He said, number one, you've been here long enough now, and done a great enough job. You can do anything you want to in this church. As long as you are not unorthodox or immoral, this church is going to go with you. But for the first 15 years you were here, you told us where you were going, and we, then, would lead and help you. Now you've taken us for granted, and you just announce it, and expect us all to follow. He said, we'll do it that way. But, he said, we can help you a lot more if you will tell us, as leaders, where you want to go, so that we can help plow ground in front of you. One of the greatest lessons I, ever, was given, from a layman, was from [name], sitting in that chair. Where I had done that, I'm the leader now, and I can. But, hey, equip the saints to do the work. And so take the time

to meet with them, and explain, and roll out the vision. And let them carry it for you rather than being the general at the top of the hill. God's called you to be a shepherd, so shepherd your sheep. That really relieved a lot of stress for me when I rolled back to trusting my laymen again. Of course, now, I have to trust laymen as young as my own children to help me plow the ground. And that was a new stress because, before, I was trusting older men. Now I'm trusting younger men. And I've just had to learn, hey, God's got his people, and they're here to help you. So, that's kind of a couple places where we had that hurt.

Speaker 1: That's interesting. And you mentioned your family, and your children being protected. I would be curious to hear how your wife dealt with that because, obviously, she probably knew. Was there a way that there, or maybe even, a general idea of what you tell your wife, what you don't tell you wife. Do you feel a responsibility to protect her from some things, or do you, pretty much, tell her whatever is going on in your life?

Speaker 2: Well, I would not say I tell her all. There are some things just between God's alter and the pastor's heart. If there's difficult times, she knows them. And she can read me like a book, and so, hey, what's going on? Through that particular crisis of 97, she was very much aware, I'd say, of 98 percent of everything going on, in that regard. She and I deepened our prayer life, together, and our trust. We just held on to the Lord, and held on to each other. I would say our marriage was the better because of it. It made us love each other. And I had her back, and she had mine. While I had great people around me, there are also some wonderful ladies that came around my wife at that time.

Speaker 1: Did they?

Speaker 2: Yes.

Speaker 1: So, they insulated her?

Speaker 2: Oh, they did. Yes. And some of the ladies of those deacons, and just others that, she's got 5 ladies until this day. They are still dear, dear, dear friends. They swap this Christmas stuff, every year, just those little silly gifts, but they're pretty thick. Those are the ladies that really got her back for her. Those relationships are, for me, that's what's so important in this stress deal. You've got to have friends. When I came here, I had a professor, Southwestern Seminary, who told me, he said, when you go to the church, you don't go to be their friend. You go to be their pastor. I came with that in my mind. But I pushed back on that, so I believe that God gave me some friends in this church too. I need them. I got to remain their pastor, and I got to be a prophet when I see their need to prophetic word. That's what friends do for each other. It's just a surface deal if you're not willing to go to the hard things and talk about it. I pushed back on that deal where I couldn't have some friends in the church. I understand the difficulty because other people say, well, I want to be friends with the pastor, and all that stuff. Hey, if you've got 4 or 5 of those people around you, thank God. Amen.

Speaker 1: That's awesome. Sounds like you greatly benefited from the pastors before you that set these people up, and they saw that responsibility.

Speaker 2: Without doubt.

Speaker 1: That's incredible.

Speaker 2: Now, [former pastor's name] is now 82, and he's back in our church.

Speaker 1: Is he, really?

Speaker 2: Yes.

Speaker 1: Wow.

Speaker 2: He is so good for me. He helps me. His wife died. I buried her. He, then, has remarried the widow of one of our deacons, and I did the wedding.

Speaker 1: Really?

Speaker 2: Yes. And so it's just, kind of, driven those 2 ministries together, where he was 17. Now me, 26. It's all, kind of, all one big family. He'll step up for me. If need be, he'll go to a house and say, leave the preacher alone.

Speaker 1: That's awesome to have, right there.

Speaker 2: Yes. He's been a dear friend. Yes.

Speaker 1: Well, let me ask you this. A lot of pastors in ministry will not even be aware that they're under great stress. Do you have a way of recognizing when you are getting stressed out? Is there something that starts to happen? A habit? How do you recognize stress as it starts to elevate to a difficult level in your life?

Speaker 2: I'd say there would be 2 things, Jack, probably, just come to my mind. Nothing scientific, I guess, about this. My sleep will get a little restless. I'll find myself turning angry. I'll get mad. And I'll catch myself in that, and then just have to wait a minute. What is that about? It's just the flesh. That's what it is. I'm crucified with Christ, nevertheless, I live, but if I don't die to the flesh, those are the two things I'll find in my life if I'm not living the Christ life. The incarnational life is usually, my sleep habit is not the best. And then I get, because if I don't get my sleep, I'm not really nice to be around. I need my rest. Some of my friends, they sleep 4 hours a night, and they're great. Dr. Criswell was one of my heroes from afar. They say he slept 4 or 5 hours a night. My metabolism, I got to have it. And then, I'll tend to get a little edgy, angry. People say, well, that's just because you have red hair. And I say, no it's because I've got a black heart [laughing]. That's my problem. So those are the two things I think I see. It'll bother me. I can be a little short with my wife, or short with my children, and I just have that kind of pinup stuff.

Speaker 1: What do you do at that point? So you've recognized it. You realize there is something going on. Is there anything that you, habitually, or how do you start to address it and deal with it in your life, and in your heart?

Speaker 2: Well, I confess my sin first and bring that before the Lord. If I've wounded or bruised friends, I have to go and say, I'm sorry, in that regard. I've found, for me, physically, I've had to stay in some kind of workout routine. Helps me with my sleep. I remember, as a seminary student. I still have it. It's a little, leather bound book. And I had it. It's just a little, I wrote down 7 life goals. And they were about being about a soul winner every day, about wanting to have a hundred, thousand dollars in the bank one day. And one was to work out daily. That I set, as goals, to have out there. I wrote on that list, one of my goals was, I wanted to be president of the Pastor's Commerce Southern Baptist Convention one day. Well, I did that. I didn't hunt it. It hunted me. I was involved in those life goals that you have out there. Some personal. Some ministry. One of those was the workout regimen, to stay. So I got up and walked this morning, and that's what I do now. I don't do too much of the stuff where you lift, or whatever, but I walk, and that helps my sleep pattern. And it helps my stress level when I get out, away, breathe fresh air, walk, talk to the Lord, sometimes listening. I was this morning. You're at Southern, I listened to Brother Al Mohler's briefing this morning. Listen to Brother Al from time to time, and other preachers that I listen to. That helps me a great deal, physically, to relieve some of that.

Speaker 1: Sounds like that's created some positives in your life. So when there's stress, obviously, you have to deal with it, would you say there's, besides working out, any other positives that it's created in your life, when you've had to deal with stress?

Speaker 2: Wow. Positives. I guess, probably, one thing I may have learned that, is just to not take myself as serious, maybe. And say, hey, it's really not all about you. 20 years from now, it isn't going to remember your name, anyway. So just be faithful, and let God take care of all that. It may not be super spiritual, or whatever, but that's reality.

Speaker 1: Do you think there's any disciplines, maybe, in your life, that going through stress strengthened or created for you, spiritually or physically?

Speaker 2: Yes. The physical side of walking. I think my devotional time probably became better, just reading through the Bible, not to get a sermon. Just let the word of God speak into my heart. I think that helped. Guarding I talked a lot about early on, here, in our interview. Friendships, I have 3 or 4 of those I guard pretty close and work at. It's helped me know I need those people around me, not just to be, quote, successful at your church, but just to be successful as a person. You need that time. It's probably helped me with my day off a little better. I take every Thursday. I don't bat a thousand. But ministry won't let you do that when funerals come up, or different things that have to be. But I guard that, and I have a great staff around me here now that helps me, and an administrative assistant for 15 years that helps me guard that day just to back up and back off. The church has been good about, a couple of times, giving me sabbaticals to get away. For my 25th anniversary, we were 2 weeks in Europe, and they helped us with that, just to get away. They gave us those 2 weeks plus some other time to be away. So those are times. Down time is something you learn from stress, that you have to back away from it. I used to could do it in a short period, but you can't relax. I can't... it takes several days until you get to the restful point. So, we've learned about that. Most of that all goes back to 1997, to the crisis time. The only crisis we've, really, ever had in ministry was that one year, but we learned a lot of stuff from that.

Speaker 1: That year, yes. It sounds like a big marker.

Speaker 2: Oh, no doubt.

Speaker 1: Why Thursday? Is there any certain reason behind Thursday, as opposed to any other day?

Speaker 2: Well, Friday, I'm in, Sunday is coming. I'm a week to week preacher, and I'm in a series sometimes. Friday and Saturday, I'm drilling down, so after Wednesday, Thursday just fits my gate, I guess. The old joke, a lot of people take off on Monday, and I've always said, hey, I wouldn't feel that bad on my time for nothing. I want somebody paying me for feeling like I feel on Monday.

Speaker 1: That's good.

Speaker 2: A lot of preachers take Monday. But that's a day, I take it easy on Monday morning now that I get a little older. You know, I find Monday is just a good, cause it so much, it grows out of Sunday for me, that I'm at and doing. So Thursday for me, and a lot of my staff take off on Friday because they have younger children, and that's a good thing for them, Friday. Saturday is not a work day, officially, for us around here, but we have a lot of things that happen then. Some of them can take Friday, and then have some family time on Saturday. And for us, now that our kids are out and gone, that helps me, so that's the reason I've stuck with it.

Speaker 1: Tell me about your organizational structure and how it either creates or helps to limit stress for you in ministry. I'm sure there was probably something in place when

you came. Have you had to redesign it, and fit it to you, or do you just go with what it had, and you just grew to it? How did that transition happen?

Speaker 2: I would say yes, but there has been some transformation. When I arrived here in 1990, there was no doubt, this was a strong, pastor lead church. [Former pastor] saw to that, was great about it, yet, at the same time, the bylaws of the church did not mirror the way he lead. It was still, the church voted on every staff member, and hired and fired from a vote at the church, and all of those things. When we went through again, in 1997, when we went through that, we began to look and say, well, is that the best way to say that? What [previous pastor] had done, and he had functioned for those long years, what was written down, was really not reality. The way he was leading was the reality. But when push came to shove, the young preacher did not have all the coins in his pocket that the previous guy had, so the rule of law came in, so what do the bylaws say? So we went through, and we changed some of that to give the pastor more written authority. I have a new staff member coming next Thursday, as a matter of fact. I inform the church. I keep people involved. I can use a search committee if I want to, but it, now, is a digression of the pastor. At the top, with all of that as changed, giving the pastor the authority with staff, that they work for him, and that he hires and fires. A lot of that came out of a stressful situation. The church saw it. They said, this is why, so, and, of course, they say, well, what if we get a guy that's not a good man to do it that way? Well, then you've got to deal with it. So there's always a tension when you write any kind of bylaw, or what thing. This is a strong, pastor lead church. The deacons have a strong position in this church. For me, I have a group of 60 men. We have 20 on, 20 off each year. So, I have 60 guys that are active. I run every major thing by them. I don't have to, but I'm stupid not to. If I get them to go along, I've got free say because they're going to be the insulation, or why are they going to carry the water? It goes back to [church leader], and tell us ahead of time. Most of the stress I get, it's just, I've created it out of being stupid. So, you've got to be wise when you hear people give good advice, and you learn from it. And be a good reader of other leaders, and watch people, and listen. Then I find that a lot of that stress goes away if I'm just not foolish, rather than just being bull headed, and want to have it my way. There are some things, you've just got to bow your neck, that you're going to do it. You take it. But those are few and far between, I find.

Speaker 1: What about the rest of the staff, you're other ministers for certain age groups? Are you very free with them? Do you give them control, or do you oversee them to some degree? How does that work?

Speaker 2: Well, one of the things we've changed in the last 5 years, for the first time, we do have an executive pastor here, [pastor's name], who is in this office next to me. [pastor's name], I raised [pastor's name] from a pup. He was just a kid when I got here, a college kid. God called him to ministry, and he served. He started serving in our recreation ministry, lining fields. He was just a grunt. He just, kind of, worked his way up. Then he went out and pastored a church for 5 years. Then I called him back about 4 years ago, to be my right-hand man. He was an associate before, but we had never had the true, quote, executive pastor. So, we brought [pastor's name] back, and he, now, is my right-hand guy. Our executive team, there's 5 of them, and they all report to [pastor's name]. [Executive pastor] and I, right after you and I finish, he and I are going to have a cup of coffee, and chat this afternoon. We meet sometime, usually, every Monday, and go over stuff. So, [he], kind of, runs the team for me, but they know my door is open to any of them. They can come in, and chat, talk. That was a hard thing for me, Jack. I enjoy my interaction with my staff guys. With [him] being in between us now, a little bit, it hasn't brought stress. I just liked it. But it's freed me to do some things, and I trust him with my life. So, he oversees that, and we're tiered down in some other places. Then the other person that is so very important for me, is [assistant's name], who sits outside of my office. 15 years, she's been here with me. [assistant's name], if you went out there and asked her, she'd tell you, I've been called to take care of the pastor and his family. Those

are her words, not mine. She's the one who told me that. So, she really looks after me. You couldn't get in here if she didn't say you could.

Speaker 1: That's awesome

Speaker 2: But she's kind to that. A lot of places I go, people will say, tell [assistant's name] hello when you. And that's because she takes care of everything for me. She's a kind lady, but can be firm when need be. Having those people around you for staff is very important for the pastor. I guess one of the great stressors is music, in the worship. I, now, have [music minister] with me. [He] was a 13-year-old trumpet player when I got to [church name]. God called him to ministry. He went out and served a couple of churches, then we called him back about 5 years ago to be our minister of music. Great young man. Man, I love these staff guys. We have a good relationship. I'm now, I'll be 63 next week, at the place where I feel like I'm, kind of, training them up to turn it loose here, one day, whenever that day comes. I don't know if we're going there or not. It's a new stress level for me. 26 years, 63. How long do you stay? I don't want to stay too long. The last thing I wanted, I've watched coaches long enough because that's what I've always wanted to do in my life. I've watched too many coaches stay too long. I've watched Coach Bryant. I've watched Coach Bowden. They should have just stepped back. You don't want people walking in there and saying, you know, Pastor, it's probably time you [face of disgust]. And I don't know how to handle that, yet. I talk to a lot of my peers about it. Matter of fact, there were a few of us that had been in churches more than 20 years. Probably, some of them are people you're going to interview on your dissertation.

Speaker 1: I guarantee that.

Speaker 2: We met in [location] with [name], my dear friend.

Speaker 1: Already met him.

Speaker 2: Good. We met out at his place. There were 20 of us, or no, 15 of us had been there 20 years or more, and we just talked about, how do you quit? When do you quit? When is it time? At [church name], we've never had a pastor retire. The 2 guys before me went somewhere else.

Speaker 1: Did they, really?

Speaker 2: Yes. [former pastor's name] went to Utah to start a church plant. [former pastor's name] left here to go be the director of evangelism for the Florida Baptist Convention. I don't know what God's going to do with me, but if I have a new stress in my life, that's the one. When do you quit? And how do you quit? And how do you know if you've got enough money to quit? Who are you after you quit? Who's your wife? I mean quit, by retire from the active pastorate. I'm not going to stop ministry. It's a new day. That's a new one I'm wrestling with right now, but I'm listening and talking to people about it.

Speaker 1: Is there anything that you tell yourself? And I've only got a couple more questions before we done. Anything that you tell yourself, you know that you've recognized stress. Here it is, a situation. Maybe it's something that, kind of, blindsided you, but you're dealing with it now. Is there anything that you tell yourself when you're in the middle of a stressful situation that helps you to continue through it? Any perspective of the stress, of the situation, that you keep reminding yourself of to say, this is how I'm going to get through this?

Speaker 2: I don't know if I'm trying to process a phrase here. Is this a hill really worth dying on? Is this just about me wanting to be a winner, or is this, really, a principle of life that's worth fretting over? Some things are worth it. Most things I find I do, there's got to

be some stress involved if I'm going to get it done. I'm building a new building right now. There's some stress involved, but it's going to be a good thing. So, is it really a hill to die on? I've found myself, [executive pastor] will, I think he frets more than I do now, has more stress. But part of it is because I gave it to him. They'll come in here and say, wah wah wah. And I'll say, guys, that's not a big deal. Now, 15 years, I'd have been just like them. You get some kingdom perspective. It's just, always, not as important as you thought. I guess that's the thing that gets me through. Then what I discovered is, then I'm willing to go to the mat. It may cost you, but you just have to do it.

Speaker 1: Do you see the stress as seasonal?

Speaker 2: Oh, yes.

Speaker 1: So even, maybe, cyclical is a better word.

Speaker 2: Yes. We're entering into it right now with December. I don't enjoy December. I enjoy Christmas Eve.

Speaker 1: Yes, when you get to that point.

Speaker 2: Yes. But, right now, I just walked over and visited with the music staff before you got here. They're just all in a swivet over there. They've got their big music deal going on this week. Man, I ain't got nothing going on. I preach Sunday. For me, it's almost like my leadership, that you're almost put on hold here for part of the month, until you get down to Christmas Eve, and then, hey, you're on, man. Let's go. Easter, I despise Easter. I would take off on Easter if the church would, well, they'd probably fire me if I didn't come. I try to make it, but you've got so many Pharisees in the building that day, it's just, oh man. Easter is not a fun day for me. It's a stressful day. Big crowds, but it's usually one of your lowest money days, and lowest new members, and people saved. Every now and then we'll have a great, but rarely. It becomes very religious, and I know what the religious crowd did to Jesus. So, yes, seasonal. When you ask about that, I think it is. It rolls around for some of those things. No doubt about it. We're right in the middle of it right now.

Speaker 1: Last question. This is really a summary that I'm asking you to think about.

Speaker 2: Just before you go, you might want to just, this may, probably, have nothing to do with here. But I preached yesterday for [name] at [another church name] in [location]. He has the first Sunday of December. And I'm going to start doing this. I learn a lot from young preachers. That's what I'm doing. He has the day of encouragement on the first day of December at his church, invites a preacher to come in and just encourage his church. So many people just walked through death, divorce, difficulty. Entering into Christmas is so hard, that season of stress that's coming. I just went in and preached on encouragement to his people, and it was a gory. I'm going to do it here next year, the first of December. That season of stress, of just letting the Word of God minister to people, and them love each other. It was a great day. It, really, was a great nugget for me yesterday. I said, well, why didn't I think of this?

Speaker 1: That's good.

Speaker 2: Yes.

Speaker 1: Well, the last question I have, is, really, a perspective of wisdom that you might share. What do you perceive is the most important thing? So, I'm asking just for one because there's obviously a bunch. If you were to say what the most important thing that a young or new pastor needs to know about dealing with stress, and what's the one piece of advice that you would share from your own experience?

Speaker 2: [Long Pause] Stress will kill you. You'll learn to recognize it. And if you're married, you better learn to be honest with your bride about it, and not only stress for you, but stress for her. Before I came here in 1990, in the year 1989, my wife went through brutal stress. She saw a counselor. I was embarrassed. I thought, me and Jesus can handle this. But she had to see a, and went on medication for stress. She was about to burn out. So, the counselor invited me to come to one of the sessions. I said, I will come, but I will not come in the front door. You've got to bring me in the back door. I ain't walking into no counselor's office where anybody can see me. She brought me up the fire escape in the back deal. I went in the office upstairs, Dallas Texas. She sat me down, looked right over at me and she said, your wife is, just, burning the candle at both ends. She's teaching preschool, singing in the choir, doing. I mean, she's just, [name] had 2 little kids. She is just going like a house on fire. She looked right at me, and she said, do you make her do all that? I said, well, I don't make her do anything, that I'm aware of. I looked at her, and she said, no, I've... My wife, that lady helped her when she told her these words. She said, [wife's name], your husband does not need you to do all that you are doing. And she said, well, I know he's never told me I have to. Church didn't hire her. You know, she's a winner, too. She said when she came to the place that she only did, personally, and in ministry, what Jesus told her to do, what the Spirit of God said, do that. She said, I have a blank check to say no to anything the Spirit does not say yes to. It changed her life. She still has to watch it, and take care of that. Every young preacher needs to learn, it's not just him. It's your bride, and you better watch out because if she burns out, you'll burn out. And that lady looked at me, and she said, are you in burn out? I said, lady, I'm too lazy to burn out. I said, when I get tired, I sit down. I do. When I get weary, I quit. I sit down because, Tony Evans said, if Jesus dying for the church is not going to help it, me dying for it ain't going to help it at all [laughing]. That became my watch word. If Jesus dying for the church is not enough, me dying for it ain't going to help it at all. And so I'm in it for the long haul. That's not to say I don't have stress. But young preachers, watch, not only in your life, but watch your spouse because it's a team. And if you lose her, not many places going to let you come do, what I, I can't believe I get paid to do this. And that's incredible.

Speaker 1: That is incredible. Thank you, very much, for your time.

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Speaker 1: Pretty broad. But I would say that a lot is self-inflicted, feeling responsible for some things that you really have no way to be successful in just by the nature of the responsive people. I think just creating high expectations that sometimes you're inadequate or unable to accomplish even what goals you set for yourself much less what other goals may have been put on other members of the church, leaders in the church or just parishioners. And so I think the stress is relative to one, people expect a lot from you and I think there is a sense of maybe inadequacy because you know you're doing yourself and your vulnerabilities and your weaknesses and you feel like maybe often times you just can't reach that expected standard. And much of it has to do with the way you're treated by some people that they maybe it's benign in enough but it's just critical and so dealing with responses of people plus things that we erect in our own mind is part of it. And you can't help but get emotionally connected with people that you invest in. And so I think one of the good signs of what everyone wants is someone who empathizes with your situation and they can identify with their woe, their conflict. And obviously it pulls you in emotionally and creates some stress on because you are connected in that relationship, that dynamic that low. And conversely that celebration. So if it's a win, I mean there's been opportunities or that as well. Things don't always happen badly in people's lives, there's some wins that certainly is along the way. But those you don't learn quite as quickly. But I just think the emotional attachments and a number of people in crisis situations plus our own vulnerability and insecurities or whatever that may be come with just who we are.

Speaker 2: Let me ask you this. As you talked about that in the length of your ministry, I would assume that the longer you serve, the stress increases, probably doesn't decrease, but somehow maybe gets easier to manage or you've learned how to manage it. How do you as you reflect back on that, how did you learn to manage stress? What were some of the key things?

Speaker 1: You know I think it almost sounds a little bit indifferent to say this. But you really have to learn to let go what you deal with often times. We can be sympathetic in the moment, but I can't carry that burden ongoing. And so I guess the learned behavior is learning to let some things go and not that it doesn't make my prayer list or not that I'm not continuously concerned. But it's not the forefront of my mind that I've always got to be figuring out why these situations might happen, could happen in other people's lives. Some of these things become more personal of course than others. But I don't know. I think it's learning just to let some things go as it says in 1 Peter 5:7. Casting all our care on him because he cares for us. So not just the cares that I have and cares that I am carrying for other people. Otherwise you get pretty ineffective just from your own personal burden of bearing more burdens that you can.

Speaker 2: You say that letting go of, elaborate on that a little more or like if you have a stress and you've identified it, what does letting go, you mentioned you're going to the Lord with burdens. Are there other ways of I've identified this, I'm going to let go of it in this way.

Speaker 1: Well, this is me personally. I've got a close relationship with my wife and I know sometimes it can probably be unhealthy in relationships to be telling them everything but I think it's kind of beneficial. And just sharing those situations and things that's just what I've done. And I think that's part of it. Sometimes it's a matter of voicing a prayer request or whatever. But at least I've shared the burden. So, I don't know. I think that's probably the way I handle some of that.

Speaker 2: You mentioned your wife. And one of the things we've seen in the statistics is it's not always the pastor, sometimes it's the family that takes the brunt of a lot of stress.

How do you think the stress over the years of ministry that you have had, how has it impacted your family either positively or negatively?

Speaker 1: Well we've had a lot of trials, you stay in the ministry long enough and you have a lot of things that are significant. And my wife by nature, it takes a lot to upset her. She's pretty patient all suffering person. But if you get to the tipping point, it's hard for her to be too quick to forgive or get over much. And conversely, I'm usually quick responsive, more emotional but I can get over it, I'm forgiving, I go on with life. And so, it's probably a healthy balance in our responses in things. But maybe it's a little frustrating for, I've moved on from that and she's still living that and harboring that a little more. Not because I'm better than she is I just, I'm wired differently. And so, we've had some heartache and got disappointed with some people. I think it hurt her more deeply than maybe it did me. And I also believe some of it is the way that we respond as husband and wife. I can take people being disappointed with me or saying things about me but I know how to respond if they were saying things about here. And so that's part of what bothers her most. People were saying things about me, or our lives have been painted in a negative way. And so, I think to probably cost her anxiety maybe it's a little harder for her to move on with life than myself. But so, has it had a negative effect? Maybe for short periods of time. But I'm a pretty winsome person. I'm just not prone to depression. I'm not prone to staying down for any period of time. I'm pretty resilient and pretty light hearted. And so just one personality, it keeps me from staying to stressed for any length of time.

Speaker 2: And you have children?

Speaker 1: We do.

Speaker 2: Were any of them ever impacted by the stress of ministry or do you just kind of protect them from it throughout?

Speaker 1: You know they went through some difficult times in our home primarily because I'm a pretty; transparent person. I, some people are more guarded with their family and try to protect them a little more. I just bleed on everybody if I'm wounded. So, and I've got two boys. One of them, they both saw the church at its best and its worst. And one of them always loved the church and he was always a key player in the church and unaffected by that stuff. Other son was indifferent to the church and had a real struggle getting anybody in the church acted in an unchristian like manner and things went wrong. He used it as ammo I guess to point out against the hypocrisy of people in the church. And you know they're grown now and they've both matured and he's not that way anymore. There was a period of years that he was a little scarred by some of the trials of the ministry. I'd like to think that I might could have done better by guarding them a little more. But I just do the best I knew to do at the time. And I just, kind of who I am and while it didn't seem to bother one, it did bother the other boy. But it worked out okay.

Speaker 2: Just out of curiosity, why do you think it is that, I know the personality you talked about that. But the approach to ministry I've seen it so many time with families usually take the negative things that happen more seriously. A lot of times maybe not more seriously but maybe more personally than a pastor does. Is there some kind of respect with the kids or why? Somebody is either or both. It seems to hurt them more than typically the man that's going through it. Do you have any thoughts on that?

Speaker 1: Well one, I think it's a little bit of defense. They want to defend their dad or they want to defend their husband and so that's kind of a built in. But you know in the ministries, that's an issue one day. You've got a new crisis the next day. And so, we move on with issues and stuff. They don't and sometimes it resides in their own level of

consciousness about this person who did that. And maybe they, they just milk it for all it's worth and we move on with things. That's kind of speculation, but I do agree. I think sometimes it's just easier to move on with issues than the family does sometime.

Speaker 2: How do you think that stress has impacted your physical health? Are there ever times when you may have experienced something physically because of the heavy stressful situation that was on you? Maybe it was just for a season or whatever but.

Speaker 1: Well stress is a physiologically affects people. I'm a Type I diabetic. I have been for 49 years and it just resulted in some coronary problems and I've had five heart interventions and nine stints in my heart. And it's hard to sort out what stress did and what Type I diabetes did. I do know that it does affect blood sugar. And lack of sleep or stress has a direct effect on those things. I've learned to cope because this is what I know. But I took retirement early because my cardiologist was insistent that while we can work to control your diabetes, we can have you on a good diet and exercise program, you're going to have to give some of the responsibilities away because that's going to be the death of you. And so, he asked, and really mandated, that I give half of my responsibilities away. Which is easy to say and hard to do. But it did initiate a process of me transitioning out of senior pastor to really try to extend my life a little. And I think it was the right decision. And I think God's timing seems to have worked it out. But he had a more conscious observation from a lot of people who go and work and are engaged in running a large organization. I have to know that stress will take its toll on you. So just trying to really help me as much as he could to buy me a few more years.

Speaker 2: What about from a spiritual perspective when you go through those really stressful times. How does it impact your spiritual health?

Speaker 1: Well I probably at different times, different ways. I don't think it was every time I went through a trial I necessarily got more spiritual. Sometimes I just got mad. Just totally frustrated. But I would say just in general observation, I think I learned a lot of life lessons through the trials that they were stressful at the time and they were painful at the time. But I learned some things that otherwise I probably wouldn't have learned. And I do believe that I always think we learn our greatest lessons, not only when we win but when we lose. And sometimes the losing situations we put a lot of stress upon us and it's a teaching time. So, I would say it's affected me some, but different.

Speaker 2: Would you say that early on in your ministry it was different than later in your ministry/

Speaker 1: Well yes, I think so. Early on, at least with me, was I wonder if I'm going to be able to hang in here. If my ministry is ever going to be validated for whatever that means. And then, in due time I've turned the corner to realize I've reached a few goals to where that I can feel a little validated here. I don't know. But I do think that and maturity perhaps just where I am in life maybe is some of it. But I do think things have gotten less stressful as I've gotten a little older because sometimes I think of things that happened, often things that happened later in my ministry if they would have happened early in my ministry they would have really, really bothered me. And I guess just through some experience of dealing with these things, you process them a little different, you see them through different lenses and you know life goes on and take on the next challenge. I do think it's different when you are a little older, not quite as traumatic maybe.

Speaker 2: Good. As you reflect back over the years of ministry, of course there's all kinds of stressful situations. Some are super heavy some of them momentary. What are probably the most effective ways that you learn to mitigate that stress? When you knew it was there, you identified it. What were the ways that you typically to protect yourself from all those things? Negative impact on your family, negative impact on your health,

negative impact on your spirituality. Were there any things that you found were key to okay, I see this coming so I've got to make sure.

Speaker 1: Well honestly, the only anecdote I can think of is exercise pretty much. I've been a runner most of my life and it's kind of a form of escape. And it that would have been taken away from me, it would really hurt. But really look forward to running every day and kind of clear my head, kind of work through some things physically, kind of emotionally helped. So, I would say probably the exercise piece was as much of it as anything. And I've had some mentors in my life along the way and I could share a few things with. And they are the personalities of they put it in perspective maybe better than I could have in just that this is not a life or death situation. And so, working through someone who had more experience than me that I looked up to where part and parcel of it. And obviously the exercise piece, I am not able to run anymore but I still exercise everyday and try to walk a few miles everyday. Pretty much the same idea you know, kind of chill out or relax a little bit and break from the ongoing anxiety of life.

Speaker 2: What about spiritual disciplines that you develop through ministry? Were there any that the further you went along you used throughout the routine of spiritual discipline as you look back, there were probably keys to keeping you focused on going in the right direction even stress or stress free kept you.

Speaker 1: Yes, and I do think that's significant, I just developed a habit of certainly giving the first part of the day to the Lord, relative to reading the Bible, journaling, prayers. I prayed for five families a day in the church and so I committed to do that. So, there is some accountability there, praying for those people. And so, yes that was my routine whether there is any measureable stress or not. And so, yes that routine was very therapeutic. And then praying is essentially being able to, in this faith transaction, giving this stuff to the Lord. Consciously making an effort to let Him have the stress in situations.

Speaker 2: Good. Organizational structure of the church. I'm not sure exactly what your church was like when you first started, how it grew over the years, if it was something that you had to turn or if it was just something you had to stoke the fires. But organizationally, how much would you say that the organization of the culture of the church created stress? And if so, how did you learn to manipulate or change or redirect the organizational piece of it to be less stressful? Does that make sense?

Speaker 1: Well mine was a unique situation. I'm the founding pastor. So, I kind of created the culture. And early on I'm doing everything, administratively I'm very weak. But I'm smart enough to get somebody to do it. And so I was able to get good people and delegate a lot there. And so I'm a real hands on guy as far as relationally. But just the administrative function of the church pretty hands off. And so just the structure of the church itself it is [self-reference]. It just, my personality kind of shaky knowing the church function. So I can't blame it on anybody else. For good or bad it had my imprint on it. But I wasn't one that was, I'm not much of a detail person, big picture guy. So, I didn't become too angst about small things. They didn't bother me that much. And so, created culture that was kind of that way. So, I don't think I really could say that structure of the church caused it. There's a lot of people in the church that caused stress. I don't think it was really the structure. We, after I had been there 3 1/2 years, we lost half the church and almost killed it. For about a year and a half just struggling to survive. And it was a high stress time in our ministry. Just like anything else that was struggling to survive and whether you're going to be able to survive. And so, we were hurt pretty deep for an extended period of time. In due time, we were able to turn things around and breathe new life into the church. And so, everything was different after about our 6th year. We began to have a lot of wins and we did have some challenging situations with personalities and disappointments. But the scope of ministry was different. We were

getting some wins rather than moving from one real stressful situation to the next. And it did get easier after about seven years.

Speaker 2: Was the falling apart because of things happening in the community as a whole.

Speaker 1: No, it was internal. It was a mission of three guys in the church that wanted to fire me.

Speaker 2: That is high stress.

Speaker 1: That is high stress. They had me in their crosshairs. And they had more influence in the church than I did. So, it wasn't pretty. And I didn't quit. I didn't feel like I had done anything deserving of being fired. But they essentially didn't want me to be the pastor. Really it was that simple. And so, I had a laundry list of things they didn't like about me but none of them had invited me to get fired.

Speaker 2: What you got you through that on a sense of support? Was your staff a strong support to help you or key members in the church?

Speaker 1: I had some friends in the church. I didn't have any staff at the time, trying to get going. But yes I had some good friends in the church that stayed with me, really three or four men that really kept me propped up. And I'll be eternally indebted to some of those men. Those guys are still my friends and have been with me for what is it now 20, 23 years.

Speaker 2: Wow that's awesome. I have one last question. And this has to be, you can answer it in a very short way, or feel free to elaborate on it. From your experience, what do you perceive is the most important thing that young or new pastors need to know about dealing with stress? What is one piece of advice you can share from your own experience? It's hard to narrow it but from your perspective, what is the most important that you would say you've got to do this, you've got to watch out for this.

Speaker 1: That's hard. I guess not taking stuff too seriously and try not to wear your feelings on your sleeve. Don't borrow any trouble. Don't let your mind create scenarios that probably may never happen just so you can worry about it. We have a tendency to want to do that, create a worst-case scenario and if this happens what am I going to do. And pretty soon we get stressed out about things that are highly unlikely that's ever going to come. But I would just say don't borrow any trouble for the sake of worrying about it. And there's been better men, even better men than us that have had issues and have had trouble in ministry and there's a phrase in the Bible that comes to mind, it says this too will pass. And it's in there a lot. This too will pass. And often what we're making such a big issue about in a stressful situation and saying it's water down the stream in due time. And we need to realize that. Not unlike what Jesus said tomorrow will have enough trouble of its own. And don't worry about it. We feel guilty sometimes though if we're not worrying about something because we write that off as indifference, don't care about anything. Somehow, I don't know, we've got to get inside our soul and say I don't have to worry about this. But it's going to take a volitional effort to do that for sure. And I guess that's what I would say. I'd talk around it and say something like that.

Speaker 2: I mean if I could ask a clarifying question, it sounds like what you're saying is there are seasons in ministry as long as you identify it's just the season. You have to buckle up and you have to get through it and you've got to do what it takes but it's not going to last forever. You've got to do what you've got to do. Is that kind of what you're saying there as far as?

Speaker 1: Yes, it is absolutely true. And now some things can be brought back to me

about hey, remember this, this and this, which was such a huge deal at the time and now it's just a small thing in my past that it is a little of nothing. But at the time it was a mountain. So, I just understand that this too will pass. It's not the end.

Speaker 2: Yes that's good. That's all I have. Is there anything that comes to your mind that you would like to add to this, something you may have reflected on that I didn't has specifically?

Speaker 1: By the grace of God, I've been a pretty light hearted person. And I don't, I'm a peaceful guy. I don't like trouble. I hate it. I hate conflict. But you can't always avoid it. It will find you. So the stressful parts of my life is when I'm just trying to have a good time, I'm trying to live life in a joyful manner. All of a sudden someone's got me in a choke hold and I try to work through to resolved and go on as soon as possible. Sometimes it keeps sucking me back in. But I want to let it go as soon as possible.

Speaker 2: Well thank you very much for your time. I really appreciate it.

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Speaker 1: What ways have you experienced stress throughout your ministry, the years that you've been there?

Speaker 2: Well, I think first of all you have to realize that ministry is a calling and you have to constantly keep that in your heart as a pastor, realizing that you're leading people and you're leading an organization that supposedly serves those people, and whether it's the people that work with you, the leaders within your church, or the people in your fellowship, whether they are de-penishing your life or replenishing your life, that's a part of life and that's a part of ministry, and I think you have to accept that, and you have to walk there and not be always thinking of stress. What I find is the people that talk about stress all the time are the ones who have it. I think stress is going to happen any time in your life when your life gets out of balance and the balance of work and family and even various levels of your work for the priorities of your responsibilities, when those get juggled, then obviously stress can occur. When your schedule becomes consuming, then obviously the pressure of stress comes, but one of the reasons that happens is because many pastors have the gift of whining and complaining, rather than seeing life from the big perspective. Any time you leave anything, it doesn't matter who you are, and sometimes pastors and ministers of the gospel act like they're so privileged that nobody's walking in leadership. That's not true. The only thing that separates our leadership from corporate leaders is that we lead an organization, an organism of people called that the church, that are supposed to be on mission with God about everything in the world we do, and we've got to keep that focus, but we have to keep the balance of our work life, our family life, our personal spiritual life. The element of recreating ourselves, of the place of being away, taking time off, and what happens is that oftentimes where I really want to be sure to stay on track because you ask something and I want to stay on that. I was starting there, but I forgot what was going to say, but now I remember what I was going to say, and it's about the seasons of ministry. Every job has a season, and many pastors and spiritual leaders whine because they're in a season and they don't see it as a season. They see it as, this will be my life forever and ever and ever. Great leaders have to learn to live with longer seasons, however. And if you're not a great leader, your seasons won't be as long. Because your responsibilities are wider, they're deeper. There are more of them. For example, today I left home. I'm in Atlanta. Tonight, I've got to be in Dallas. I'll be going home Thursday morning, and I'll speaking to several hundred leaders. Ever since Sunday, Sunday's been coming, and that relentless challenge of preparation is where many pastors feel the stress the most. Because it never lets up. Since that's true that your week has to be prioritized there, if it doesn't get prioritized there, then all of a sudden, the stress comes. When you do sometimes what I've been doing, speaking a lot outside, traveling a whole lot, whether it's responsibilities that I have now or responsibilities where I've been for 2 years serving as the president of Southern Baptist Convention, then you have to be flexible, and you have to plan as far ahead as you possibly can, but you also have to learn how to prepare in different ways, in different places, and live with it and just accept everything is not going to be perfect. It never has been perfect. And it never will be perfect. And I think at times pastors and leaders get really stressed because they get this, they build this straw man that never exists, and they read about somebody else's life. They read about somebody else's church, and it's perfect in their mind, but they don't know it's not perfect. Nothing's perfect. And the guy that makes it all sound so wonderful, he just has the gift of marketing and the gift of communicating in an effective way. He's got stuff that's falling apart as well, but he may just be dealing with it better. And he understands that you've got to keep leading even through the stress of life, so I'll stop right there, but I could talk all day about this.

Speaker 1: Yeah. I mean that's great insight. And what I heard you saying was everyone's going to experience stress in ministry.

Speaker 2: Sure.

Speaker 1: And it's really when the imbalance happens that you notice the stress more.

Speaker 2: That's correct.

Speaker 1: And that's a good insight. I was thinking beyond that. Maybe that's one of the indications that you're coming with as you've seen in your own ministry and in others that, as stress comes in, the way that you experience the longevity is that you think bigger than the situation than you're in right then because the stress isn't going to be permanent. I'm going to get past it, so I've got to work through it. I've got to deal with it, and then what happens a lot of times is they allow it to overwhelm them?

Speaker 2: Right.

Speaker 1: Is that what I hear you saying?

Speaker 2: Exactly. And pastors have to, they have to take an approach like a football team in the heat of August when they're in two-a-days. It's seasonal, it's at a price, and it's a grind, and throughout the season, the longer the season goes, the greater the grind. The grind of Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday, and then it lets off, but you go through the grind for the glory of a Friday night or the glory of a Saturday afternoon or a Saturday night or the glory of a Sunday afternoon. It depends on what your level is. But the glory will never be any greater than the grind, and most ministers don't get the grind. And I think a long term pastor who is still effective has to, he's just got to buy in. It's just the grind. You never get past the grind. You don't outlive the ground. You don't out think the grind. There are no shortcuts, and you can't be a great preacher if you don't study. You can't lead your church to be an evangelistic church unless you have the right priorities. You can't make disciples if you don't have the right priorities. You can't do the Great Commission if you don't have the right priorities. You have to understand a lot of that is grind and grunt work. The rest is a blessing.

Speaker 1: What I also hear you saying then is there's 2 aspects to stress, and this actually comes up in the literature as well. One of the researchers called it Eustress, which is the positive elements of stress, and of course, we're very familiar with the negative impacts of stress. What would you say dealing with that grind and dealing with the day in and day out and then the situational stress, such as dealing with death within the membership, maybe even an early death, dealing with maybe a crisis within the church. Personally, what are the negative aspects that stress has caused for you in a personal way? What are the things that you feel or think, like you were talking about you have to get over it, but what is that initial feeling that you begin to recognize, I'm getting overwhelmed.

Speaker 2: Well, those times come. They're real, and you have to, to me, you have to confess those. You've got to admit those to yourself. For example, I've had so many tragic deaths that I've had to conduct funerals of young men, young women, younger adults, young teenagers, you name it, and I've been doing this a long time. And when you do that, you never want to treat it as rote. You don't want that. You might think you want that, but you don't want that. You want it to shake you, and the key is, to me, the most healthy thing about dealing with that in my own life is taking care of that family. And ministering to them, whether that child was like my son or that child, I dedicated them and I married them, and now I'm burying them. Whatever it may be. One of the greatest things I can do for my own stress level is take it to God, take it to the family, feel their pain, shed a tear with them if necessary or if I feel like it, not if necessary, but it is necessary for me at times, and process my own stuff. There've been very few times that I have ever really broken down in front of a congregation in the midst of a tragedy, for example, at a funeral. I have done it, but it's very few times. And I don't think, I didn't feel bad about it. I never have felt bad about it. It's never bothered me. People say, well,

you're weak. Fine. I'm weak. God likes weakness. He doesn't like strength. So I don't have any, I don't feel any of that. So I deal with it, those kinds of moments are very tough. I think it's very tough when pastors go through crises in their leadership, their crises for example, they had a vision. They took their people on the vision, and the vision rifiers just dominated the vision, and they didn't reach their vision. They didn't reach their goal. They didn't reach their desire to raise 3 million dollars for their next building, you know. They raised a million. And he's got to deal with that and how you have to deal with that. And so to me it's all about your attitude. It's about, I really think it's all about more than your attitude. It's more about your walk with God and how you deal with that in your walk with God because how you deal with it personally with the Lord will determine ultimately how you deal with it in your leadership. And I think Jesus' words, you come to me who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest. And I think that's what pastors have to live. Because if they don't abide in the presence of the Almighty, then stress can overcome. And I can honestly say, while I know that I have had stress in my ministry, and I know there've been those times, I cannot recall a time when I thought stress was going to take me down, but I've been in some hot situations. That's not a proud admission. But there are reasons why I believe I've had that blessing, and I'll tell you about all that if you want to talk about it.

Speaker 1: Okay. I was thinking about what you said there. You probably know, because of your experience, pastors have a very unique role in the sense when we think of the emotional stress of dealing with families and people who are in crisis situations and then people who are in celebratory situations.

Speaker 2: Sure.

Speaker 1: There is almost this expectation that you are always emotionally present and that you're emotionally appropriate. With that in mind, in the same day, you could deal with someone who just got diagnosed with cancer, go to a birthday party, do a wedding, do a funeral. How do you keep yourself emotionally appropriate and yet transparent and honest when transitioning through those very volatile times where so much happens at once. As you recognize it, how do you tell yourself moving from one situation to another?

Speaker 2: Well, I'll go ahead and talk about this, because I think I haven't talked about it because, to me, it puts everything in context, but to me, I mean, I can't remember the last day I didn't start my day with God. I must have been in high school. And that's not, am I a legalist? Probably. I probably would have made a great Pharisee, but you know, I take very seriously my time with God. And whether that time, like this morning was a little pressed because I had a 6 o'clock flight, but you know, I could've gotten up and just rolled out of bed and got my stuff and gone to the airport, but you know, I got up and had a quiet time at 2:30, and I discipline myself for a 30-minute drive to the airport, packed mostly last night, so you know, I had some things I had to get done. I got to the airport about 50 minutes before the flight left. But I order my day there. That's where God brings me order. I pray through my day. I pray through my life, and I let God speak to me. Every year, I read through the Bible at least once. I've done that since 1990. That discipline, along with the discipline of journaling a prayer to God every day at the end of my time with the Lord. I've done that since 1990. Prioritizing that in my life, giving my mornings to God, to me, has been the game changer in my life. Dealing with the whole stress thing. The second thing is the discipline of exercise. It's very important in the life of a minister. I know that every pastor who has got a busy schedule says he doesn't have time for that, but that's been a part of my life for years and years and years. And I just went under 2 years, I've been on a 2-year sprint, literally a sprint. A sprint season. And I've spoken some weeks in 5 states, you know? And done things that's crazy. But I never sacrificed my time with the Lord, and I never sacrificed exercising 5 or 6 days a week for an hour. I run. I jog. And I work out, condition via weights, and unless I'm with someone,

which would be rare, I'm with the Lord listening on podcasts, letting people pour into my life, preaching, teaching, talking leadership, or learning about something that's going on in America or the world. So, I use it as a replenishing time back into me, so I don't feel like it's just a bunch of bodily exercise that profits nothing. God says that it is profitable for all things, so I try to blend it. And so that's very important. And then really prioritizing the schedule and understand the most important thing is what I do on Sunday mornings, standing up and declaring the truth of God. And, the whole element, Jackson, of really understanding whatever the preparation is, and to me, pastors, I just know that my life, more than anything, is preparation. It doesn't matter what I'm doing, I'm preparing. For 2 years, I've had endless preparations. The presentation is a lot easier than the preparation, you know? The preparation is the grind. Now every now and then it's the glory, too. It is usually when the Lord really comes on it, but the point is, when the moment comes and you get to present it, then all of that makes it worth it. And so that's so important because so many pastors don't even know how to order their day. So, the way I look at it is this, and this is another way I've done it is, and this is really critical, what I'm about to say, because God's got to get this, and they think, and they just don't have this in their life, they've got to do it. It's not optional if they want to make it long term. I run real hard from Sunday morning through Thursday night, until Thursday night. If I'm home or if I'm on the road, it's rare I take a Friday engagement. It's rare that I do anything on Friday, and I've done this probably since 1985. I've taken every Friday off with my wife. And that's our day. Now, in our most common last decade, obviously, that's gone crazy on networking and email and social. I do some of that because it's just inevitable. In life today, you have to be connected, and while I can walk away from it, and I'll leave it alone if I go to a movie, or I'll leave it alone if I'm just, you know, but again some of that is, it can be refreshing also. So that's important, that you take that day, and then Saturday morning, you know, I'll spend a couple of hours in study after my time with the Lord. I guess it depends on how early college game day starts, because that's my favorite show, I am a football fanatic, so you know, I might be up earlier, but I do that because I also have grandchildren that play in games or kids in the past that have played in games. See them play that game, you know? And that's okay. And then we live in the shadow of [stadium name], and so we're very big [school name] fans, and you know, we'll be fully engaged, and so the point is that you operate your life a lot like everybody else operates it, and I think a lot of pastors don't think, they think they're the only ones that work hard. They think, well, not every pastor works hard. I can assure you. And I think a lot of my thinking, too, has been really influenced by the region I live in. We live in [area], which is the home of [business name] headquarters, [business name], [business name] headquarters, and [university name], and now about 1200 to 1400 companies that are national or international have a little representation in [location] to take care of [business] and the accounts of [business name], so we have a presence of a lot of different, in that little small region of about a half a million people, there's just a lot of mega power and influence in that setting. And I've learned a lot from others, and to lead those kind of people, you've got to be a great leader. And great leaders have to be disciplined in their life, or they're never going to be great leaders.

Speaker 1: I hear that coming from you, the discipline and the preparation, and I hear some of that, what you're saying. I'm going to ask one other prompting question and that is, the preparation, I hear the discipline of spending time with the Lord, of planning out your day. Is there anything else that you could share that helps us to understand what do you mean by that preparation? So in other words you're going into a season, maybe it's a long season, and you're seeing that coming. For you, what does that preparation look like when you know there's something that is long term organizationally. How do you keep those things organized? You have speaking engagements all around. You have your Sunday that you prepare for all the time. You have these other funerals, weddings. How do you maintain and plan for and organize those things?

Speaker 2: Some of those have to do with, a lot of that is determined by the level of that engagement. For example, I'm here today to speak at this conference for the [organization], and so I spoke at their first one that they had in Nashville this past August. It's a workshop for about probably 100 or so pastors, all for the purpose of how to teach them how to have an evangelistic church, and so they wanted me to do something, and so I planned, I did a brand new thing I've never done before, okay? And they liked it so much they want me to do the same thing here modified a little bit, so the preparation for that was maybe 15 minutes. Because it was more of a, it's been modified but barely, but I modified it. Because I did the same thing for my, I did that same presentation for my own staff team about a week ago, so I modified it for them. The point is that there are some of those kinds of things. Those are rare because I'm pretty much the kind of guy who's going to do something new all the time or have it refreshed at least, but you know, and now let's say, for example, I mean, I can give you an example. Last week, I spoke at a conference for 1,000 pastors at [school name], pastors in their region. Literal pastors, not guys getting trained up. They wanted me to do something on leadership "pastor as leader," and so obviously I did a presentation I'd never done before, so that cost me. I didn't get it done 2 weeks ago because I was looking long term. I got it done 1 day before I had to have it done. So now there's a lot more of that. Some pastors, and this may encourage younger guys, once you've been doing it and your well is deep, deep with the word and deep with your walk with God and deep in the realm of leadership and sometimes when you're out here doing some of the kind of stuff I'm doing, you're going to, they have you because you have a zone, and God seems to raise that zone up in your life, you know? Whatever it may be. For me, it's leadership, okay? And a couple of other things. But that's what a lot of people want me to talk about, and so with that, you know, you just learn it. It's like that thing, the rule of 10,000 hours, you know, of a violinist. I mean, world class people in music and arts, they reach that 10,000 hour rule of practice and they're just classics. Well, I would never compare myself with that greatness, but you know, I've been doing this a long time. I don't know if I've reached 10,000 hours or not. I guess I have, Lord, I hope I know a little bit more, you know? But you get in that, but you can't live on that. Because that doesn't bring you life. What brings you life is your walk with God. And another thing about how to overcome the stress thing, too. I didn't add a while ago. Because I'm real big on this. Is there are times in your life when God puts you through seasons of fasting and prayer. And I think that really brings order to your life. I just completed 21 days doing that, and ended it Sunday night, and you know, those are great times because you, the Lord uses it to call you on retreat, and everything changes, and your perspectives change, and the Holy Spirit just begins to get a hold of your mind and your will and your emotion, kind of like that conductor of a symphony when he stands up and he orders the orchestra to get their instruments ready, and all of a sudden, they're all so in tune. That's what fasting and prayer does to your life. It calls your body. It calls your mind, your will, and your emotion into order. And all that has to do with straightening up the stress in your life. And all that has to do with, come unto me all ye who are laden, heavy, burdened, and I will give you rest. Those are the words of Jesus. He didn't say, you know, go to a support group. Some guys may want to do that, and that's fine. It's up to them. But you've eventually got to get to the one who can bring it. And that may be a part of your process, but it'll never be your solution. So I'm not trying to dumb it down. I'm not trying to minimize it. But I know what's real. I know what destroys. I know all that. But I also know everything in my life is connected to my walk with God. And if that's right, then I've got a better shot at getting everything else right.

Speaker 1: That's good. Let me ask you, moving on to a different aspect of that, how do you think, we've talked mainly about your role as a pastor. How has the stress of ministry, particularly your ministry that you've been conducting over these years. How has it impacted your family?

Speaker 2: Well, my family is all living for God. I had 2 boys that were wonderful growing up. We didn't have any issues with them. For us, it was never an option for them

to participate in life and church and ministry. They grew up loving the church, and they still love the church. They're involved. Their families are involved. One of them lives in Birmingham now. One lives here. One is a football coach. One is in ministry with me. And we have 7 grandchildren. My wife was raised in a pastor's home. She's done quite well through the years. Her dad had gone through some bumps in ministry, pastoring churches and dealing with the stuff of pastoring churches, and you know, back in that day, guys didn't stay too much very long anyway, so, but you know, she's coping with that as an adult great. She loves the church. She's active in the church, leads a Bible study in our community. It's not, we don't have any of that junk that some pastors' families have. We never have. And I don't think we ever will. And to me the key is your attitude as a parent and your attitude as the pastor. Pastors create a lot of stress in their families because they go home, and they dump all the church stuff on their wife. And that's the stupidest thing you can do. God didn't call your wife to pastor the church. There are times you talk and you bring her in because you don't want her to be surprised, but she doesn't need to know every time King Kong wants to kill you. Unless it's going to be a public event. And if she needs to be warned or if you feel she's out here being deceived with an individual that is trying to harm a situation, whether it's a staff member or a staff member's wife or whatever it may be, and I tell my staff members all the time I'm not going to deal with your weird spouse, but I am going to deal with you. Keep your family in order. And keep her in order or him in order. Whatever the situation is. But I think that the Lord has done that, where people have asked me for years, how in the world did your boys turn out so great? What did you do as a parent? Well, there were 2 or 3 things that we always did. We prayed for them every day, prayed with them every day. We went to school. We prayed with them. We prayed with them many nights. I pray for them all the time. Many days, I would fast for them and ask God to give them success and favor in their life. And so that we never brought home the church and dumped it on the kids, you know, somebody's trying to be crazy or something. We didn't do that. It was all new when they started getting older and started hearing certain things, you know, about their dad that has no truth at all, you know, and maybe after they were around in their 20s, you know? Something like that. Because we just protected them. We wanted to protect them. Why not? I'm called to protect my family. And so, I think that was real key. And we just really begged for our people to pray for our kids. People ask me how can we help your family? Pray for my kids every day. And that's what I asked for. Either we believe in prayer or we don't believe in prayer. The greatest thing they can do for you is pray for your kids. So, we did that, and so my family felt that they, Did they feel the stress of ministry? Every now and then. But it wasn't an, oh, my gosh, this kind of a situation. It just wasn't. And so, you know, I've been in some unique situations. In over 30 years, I've been in all kinds of situations at the same church. Before that, I was pastor of some churches in the state of Texas, my home state, and some of those churches, you know, they were all growing churches, but you know, everybody doesn't celebrate when you grow. I mean we've had challenges in the past. I've never forgotten that. I grew up in a church of about 30 or 40 and we had a brand new preacher every 2 to 3 years, you know? He was a bivocational pastor. That's what I grew up with. And so, I know all of that. I know the stress of what's out there and the negativity and that's what is so very interesting. This may be interesting to you in what you're doing. When I go speak at some of these conventions and some of these conferences, here's what I'm always told, "Pastor, would come in and encourage us?" Now, you know, Jack, listen now. That's good that they need encouragement. I need encouragement. But boy we're in a bad shape if every time you're asked to come do something that's with a group of preachers our goal is their encouragement. What does that say about us? What are we, psycho or what? What's our deal? So, I just think, to me, you have to look at ministry. Man, it's a calling. It's a joy. We tried, if my kids ever brought, "Do I really have to do this?" I said, "yeah, you know what? You do, but let me tell you what you get to do because of who your dad is and your dad's calling. Think about all the great people you get to meet, you get to have your picture made with. People that some people never get to hang with. People you've had

dinner with, and you've sat and listened to and now you know they're somebody. When you were a kid, you didn't know that." And the thing is you've got to look at the positive. Because what we do, that's why somebody gave us tickets to go do this. They love us, and they appreciate our investment, and that's a joy of ministry, you know? Or if somebody says, okay, why don't you go stay in my condominium on the beach or something that they might have. That's happened a couple of times through 30 years of ministry, and you know, the whole reason this is happening is because of this. The blessing of the Lord. So those times when maybe you had to see me track out to do something for somebody who was in trouble or challenged and whatever, God takes care of us other ways, and we have to see that as a blessing of the Lord.

Speaker 1: That's good. You mentioned that one of the ways that you protected your family was by not dumping a lot of stuff on them. I'm curious. Do you have someone that, when you feel that overwhelmed, is there a specific person? Is it just your staff in general? When you are overwhelmed with what's happening, is there a person you go and talk to? Obviously, you said prayer time and going to the Lord first. Beyond that, is there anything that you would say that you have to go to?

Speaker 2: There are some leaders of my church. I have a group of men that comprise what we call our pastor's council. Legally, they're the board of directors of our church. They basically, you know, helps me set the order of the day and ministry business and finance and direction in relationship to, they're my accountability, if you may. That makes people feel better. And that's what they are, even though they don't have dominance over me. They're there with me doing the ministry. And then my staff team, especially my upper leadership team. We meet every week. And that's where, again, here's another thing I think that I've learned through the years is that I share my leadership. I think pastors who don't share leadership really become more vulnerable to the enemies of stress and really demonic enemy as well because you can easily open yourself up to real disappointment, depression, some of those matters that, you know? And I've never been long term depressed, but I've been discouraged before. I've been depressed, you know, maybe a day. I'm not minimizing that. But I have. But it's never been anything that's kept me at home or overwhelmed me. Can I see people doing that? Have I ever had that on my team? Absolutely. You work through it. We help them. We get them ministry along the way. We try to teach them how to do this or that better, maybe, or put them with a counselor, whatever we need to do. So, I recognize the issues. I know it's real. But I also know, for me personally, how God has used it to get me through it, whatever it is. And I really think most guys deal with more disappointment than they deal with real depression. They get in their mind, you know, this person's supposed to be so loyal and so this and so that. Well, you know, you've got to keep your eyes on the Lord. I'm not simplifying it, but you really do. And it is simplification. I don't want to over simplify it, but you really have to do that because people are going to disappoint you. You just have to realize that. You don't need to be devastated by that. You need to be prepared for it, and to me, a lot of it is we've got, we want this idealistic thing. We didn't, when you're in seminary, and you're being consumed in your studies, oftentimes nobody tells you what you're about to face. They teach you theology. They teach you certain things about the Bible that you need to know, archaeology and all those matters that are so important to the credibility of scripture and preparing you as a Christian apologist, a Christian thinker, preacher of the gospel, but you know, a lot of our schools don't even have any guys that have pastored in the last 30 years. It's a little hard to prepare them for that. And that's why I think that we need to rely more on the local church for ministry preparation as a complement to the academia. Not competing with it. But to complement and to work as partners. Because together we're going to do a better job of getting the next generation of people ready. So my point is that all you have is that stuff in you. You go out here to the real world of church, and let's say that God blesses you and you start growing. Everybody's not going to be celebrating at the church. I remember it was a wake up call for me. You didn't tell me that. Why didn't you tell me

that? I was in your class. Well, you know, I didn't know. Or maybe I said it but you didn't hear. Well, that's possibly true. I was a very good student, but there's just some things you don't know until you get there, and then when it starts cratering because these idealistic leaders that came on so great all of a sudden are deceitful and wicked at times in their heart, and you've got to deal with all that, you know? And you can't take it, I'm going to say this, and have I done it? Yes. But you cannot take it personally. You really can't. Sooner or later, you've just got to mark it where it is, and you've got to let people fail, and I think one of the real keys to overcoming stress in your life too, you just determine nobody's going to get outside of my circle of love. I will have no wall against no man or any woman. I don't care what they write about me, what they say about me, what they tweet about me, what they post about me. It doesn't matter. All people matter to God. Therefore, all people matter to me. And I refuse to let people be excommunicated from my life, and then you know, I just do. Now if they're divisive and they have proven what Titus warns us against. I'm not going to go take them to lunch, but I mean I'm going to love them. I'm going to work through, and I think, again, I want to go back to the prayer pattern there. When we fulfill prayer and the principles of prayer that are given to us in the Lord's prayer, we talked about the power of forgiveness and forgive them of their trespasses as you forgive others, you know? And all of that. And the whole deal is you've got to forgive. You know, people are like "what, [Self-reference] nobody's ever done anything to you? What are you talking about? Absolutely. I've gone through devastation at times personally, but again, I can only think of one time where I just, after a meeting, I went home and I thought man, Lord, help us. This is crazy. But the next morning, hey, you know, we're rolling. You just have to rebound. And you have to, also you have to grow. That's growing in your leadership, too. I may have devastation today with somebody at the church. I don't even know much about today right now, you know, you're going to be ready. You're going to adjust. A pastor's got to be like a quarterback going to the line of scrimmage, and man, he's got to be willing to call the different plays if he needs to, but he's got to know the playbook.

Speaker 1: That's good. You mentioned one thing about the depression and you said that you experienced it maybe a day. I was curious. Is there a process that you could articulate that, when you feel that, you recognize it, and then this is how you responded to it?

Speaker 2: Absolutely. Yeah. The process for me is, if I have it, because usually it's people that put you there, or situations, okay? It's not, it's usually nothing else. Usually. And what I do is, again, I try to stop. I try to really think about that situation. I'm an analytical kind of guy at times. And what can I learn from the situation? What can I learn from them? You know, they're saying something to me. Is there something I can learn from them. Am I blind to anything? I want to be open. And then, you know, we've got to take it to prayer. You've got to release it and give it to God. And you have to trust the Lord. And that doesn't mean it's going to happen in 1 day, and it may never be resolved as you would hope it to be resolved, but it's resolved in you. I'm reminded of the scripture over in Romans. I think it's Romans 12 where it says, if possible, be at peace with all men. And I think that's real critical, you know? If possible. When possible. In other words, you do everything you can to be at peace with all men. And that's what you've got to do. And that, to me, because when you're not at peace with people, that can really dominate a pastor's life. Pastors are really approval oriented, you know? For guys who say, well, I don't care, you know, he's lying. That's crazy. Why would you not want to be liked? I love to be liked. God wants us to be liked. God loves approval. That's why we praise him. We all love approval. God made us that way. But at the same time, we have to, like Paul said in the book of Galatians, Do I exist to please God or do I exist to please men? I'd rather please God than men. You know what? That's what we've got to be. To me, again, that's, when I see that, I see a stress reliever. Because there are times everybody's just not going to be pleased, and when you're a leader, you have to resolve, where's God? Where does he want me to go? What am I doing? I've got to go. Now if I'm

a great leader, I can take people with me, but no leader takes everybody with them. Even Jesus didn't have all 12 with him. One of them erred. So, don't be too hard on yourself.

Speaker 1: That's good. A lot of these questions that I have going towards the end you've pretty much answered them in one aspect or another. How has your stress impacted your spiritual health? I hear you saying that there is definitely a positive, that it drove you more to relationship with God. It drove you into scripture, drove you into prayer. Is there anything you would add to that besides those things? As far as your spiritual aspect?

Speaker 2: Well, when I go through a tough time, I really look for God to give me a word in the word of God. What does God... I'm just searching... and I let it happen through the reading of the scripture that I do every day and it's amazing that the rendezvous with the Spirit. He brings the word of God to light, and I'll just stand on that scripture. If it's a situation that's negative or potentially negative. If it's a person who is problematic, and you know, I remember I was in a staff situation. They guy was really causing some real challenges. He led a really successful rotation on our team, but it had become really dysfunctional because of a lack of truthfulness consistently on his part. And he had a real problem telling the truth, saying the same thing, but he was real persuasive, you know? He had been really great doing certain things in his life, and he was very gifted, so he wasn't a loser, you know? He was a builder, engaging. He did a great job. He's a friend of mine today. I've had lunch with him several times. But I had to fire him. And I remember it was in a 40 day fast, and I remember the Lord, I was reading the scripture, and God showed me, I think it's the book of Titus, if a man is divisive once or twice, expel him. It's like God said, okay, today's the day. I went to the office. I called into order the whole process with people, of leaders, and by early afternoon, I called him in my office and dismissed him. I went through hell for 2 months probably, but you know, with that part of the ministry that he led, but we overcame it, and people saw it sooner or later, you know? We may have lost a few people over it, but you have to do what's best for the church, and I think there's another reason pastors really screw up their life and get all stressed out. To me, I call it the grid. I tell my pastors all the time that are on my team, here's your situation, buddy, because this is what you have to always ask. The number one question, think of a grid, 1, 2, 3. I've got to put my decision making to a grid. Pastors don't do this real well. The first question we have to ask ourselves is always what's best for the church? What's best for the church? Not what's best for me? What's best for the church? If that decision makes it there, then I ask a second question from there. What's best for the office of the pastor. Because you cannot, for a church or a staff member, you cannot lose the value of the office of the pastor. It's the office of the pastor that's sanctified and holy, not the pastor, except he is through Christ, but the office is what we want to hold. If that office loses integrity, then the church is not going to be great. So, if it makes it there then I tell the staff members, you ask yourself then, what's best for the ministry I lead? And then the final question I tell them to ask is, what's best for me? We get that thing all screwed up and just ask what's best for me? They are not really thinking about the church and what they don't understand is that creates more stress long term for them, in their life, because they screw up organization. You can't build anything like that. You can build a little ego, but winning every battle is not the answer. I tell the pastors, I told them last week, and I believe this, this is another thing about stress. It's all stress related, in fact, but pastors have to understand God does not always want them to have the last word. God wants them to always have a right word. The right word is His word. And he always has the final word. Leaders don't have to always feel like they've got to have the last word, and it's that pastor out here who always things he's got to have the last word in this marriage or the last word with his kids or the last word with his church. Boy, I've got to get that. I'm not going to finish this until you hear me. Well, if that's where he lives, I'm telling you, he's living a stressful life.

Speaker 1: That's good.

Speaker 2: You just have to let it go. God didn't call me to be King Kong of the world.

Speaker 1: Yeah. That leads me into a question that I want to bring into what you just said. What brings the most stress to you in ministry?

Speaker 2: Staff. Staff. Sure. Because staff pastors, staff people are just like anybody else. They're in it, at times, our priorities are not what they ought to be. They're walking through stuff in their life, and when their life is a little disorderly, then they create disorder because they're decision making is loose. They violate the culture of the church or the culture of the staff team. Most of the time it's never intentional. It's just a matter of survival in their minds or not thinking. They're not discerning. They're using bad techniques, and bad traits in their personality are coming out that are not favorable. I think it's really important when a pastor has a staff team that he really takes extra care of trying to build a culture with that team. And that's really hard work. That's part of that grind, you know? One thing we do every year Jackson, and that, we've done it for, in fact next summer, I will do my 30th. We will take our team away for, now it's grown to, we leave on a Sunday afternoon, and we don't get back home until Thursday afternoon, and we do a staff advance with them for 3 days, Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday morning, and two thirds of it's work, one third of it play and fellowship and all of that. [wife's name] deals with all the women. I deal with all the men. And then we bring them together 2 or 3 times. That time covers a multitude of sins later on. We have 5 campuses and a plethora of staff, and you know, last year, I think we had, we take their spouses, so we had, I think last summer we had 80 people with us.

Speaker 1: Wow.

Speaker 2: Something like that. And it's just pouring into them. And it's also us doing certain ministry dynamics together. Creating certain things. That's where we create culture. So the culture is, you know, you've got to build that away from the base of the church, as well as at the church, you know? And that's hard. That's intentionality. That's a sacrifice. And the church spends a lot of money on it because it's part of who we are and what we do. We pay staff members. Any big churches and all churches pay their staff if they have a staff, and they try to take care of them. At whatever level they take care of them, good, bad, or ugly, okay? That's not the point. But they take care of them. But they don't do anything to develop them. And that's why we have unhealthy staff members. And I think you can create less stress on the team if you don't pounce on them every time that they fail. You let them fail. Now I don't want them to fail. I'm going to try my best to not let them fail. But I can't control that.

Speaker 1: Yeah.

Speaker 2: Sometimes you just fail. That's just part of life.

Speaker 1: Some great insight. And we've run out of time. I have one last question that I want a sentence answer.

Speaker 2: Yeah.

Speaker 1: And basically it's just to sum it up. What do you perceive as the most important thing, the number one, in other words priority. What is the one thing that young new pastors need to know about dealing with stress and what is one little piece of advice that you would share from your own experience.

Speaker 2: Prioritize your daily walk with God. Make it in the morning, as early as you can possibly do it. And you take everything in your life to the Lord in prayer. When you start right in your day, you have a greater probability that your day will follow in order.

Speaker 1: That's perfect. Thank you very much.

Speaker 2: You're welcome.

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Speaker 1: What avenues do you see stress coming at you the most? Is there one certain area that provides more stress for you?

Speaker 2: People.

Speaker 1: People. Okay. Explain that.

Speaker 2: Just dealing with people is what creates the stress. You know, and I don't want to be philosophical because you asked me not to be. There are different kinds of stress, and there are different streams of stress that come in. There's stress from those that are antagonistic toward your ministry. That is one type of stress. Versus another type of stress in a counseling situation when you know, I can help this person but they will not what do what I've asked them to do. That's a totally different type of stress, and you handle that 1 way versus handling an antagonistic church member, so ask the question again, and I'll try to answer that.

Speaker 1: No that's good. So, which one of those would you say weighs more heavily on you as you personally deal with it?

Speaker 2: Well, that's kind of what I'm trying to say, is I don't know that one is easier to handle, but one pulls you and pulls at your heart one way. For example, if I have somebody that comes in, they have an issue, a couple that has an issue, and I know I can help them. I know that the word of God can help them and what they need to do, and it breaks your heart in that sense when they will not do it. And that creates a certain type of stress that is heavy versus someone, and I've had this, who is very brutal and antagonistic and is seeking with everything they have to embarrass you, hurt you, smear you, compromise you in the eyes of everybody out there. That weighs differently.

Speaker 1: But just as heavily?

Speaker 2: Yes, but just as heavily as the other.

Speaker 1: So the one that is, you're trying to help them. Let's start with that perspective.

Speaker 2: Okay.

Speaker 1: You sit there in the counseling session, and you're dealing with them, and they won't respond. How do you deal with that heaviness of it when they walk away. Where do you cut off the responsibility?

Speaker 2: You know, you carry them on your heart. If you have a pastor's heart, and I'm convinced that I do, or I wouldn't be in here, you carry them on your heart. You take that home, and you kind of grieve for them. You pray for them, certainly, and you think, you know, how can I get this across to them. I know they can be helped. I know their marriage can be good. I know that they can be happy together. And so it's more like a grieving process for them and a hurting for a child, almost, now I'm explaining how I feel, that you hurt for these people because, in a sense, they're like your children. You love them. You may not know them well, but you love them. God's given them to you to care for, and I don't, almost the way Jesus prayed in John 17, you know? Lord, you've given them to me, and I have lost none of them, but 1, the son of perdition. You almost hear the heart of Jesus break at that point. I've lost him. And that's a type of stress that you experience, but it's different. It's not that it's better or that it's easier, but it's a pastoral stress that you almost, you're glad you feel that way. You're glad you feel like that.

Speaker 1: Why would you say that?

Speaker 2: Before I felt like, well, I don't give a flying, if you're not going to listen to me, just get out of here. You don't care about those folks, you know? You are in it with them. You hurt and you grieve with them kind of a deal.

Speaker 1: How far do you go with someone who constantly is asking you.

Speaker 2: Well, now that's where time and age in the ministry comes in.

Speaker 1: Yeah, okay.

Speaker 2: To where you say, I've learned enough through the years to where I can't come to your house and hold your hand, and I can't give you all of my emotional energy because there are other people here that have needs, and I think to realize that, I have other people. I do what I can do, but you understand and you get comfortable with, I have limitations. And God does not expect me to crawl up on a cross and die for them. He's already done that.

Speaker 1: That's good. So from the perspective of the other, that's antagonistic towards you. When we think about that person and what they pull away from you and drain you with, how do you keep from the way you view both of them becoming negative? Like getting very frustrated with both, to the point that you become.

Speaker 2: Well, with the person with the marital issue, you may get aggravated with them, but again, it's almost like a parental type of aggravation. I'm not going to quit on you. I'm not going to give up on you. Even if you break up, I still am going to hold out hope for you. The other is darker. And these are emotional terms. This is not philosophical, but it is a darker sledging through a palmetto swamp type of deal. You know, you're slugging through and these a resentment that is there. There's an edge to it. There is a combativeness that you have to constantly deal with. You deal more with your own emotions than you do their emotions. They create in you something that you have to deal with within yourself that deals less with them and more with yourself. You see the dark side of who you are. When somebody is antagonistic toward you, they bring out the flesh in your own life that you have to battle with. So that it really is not, it's not really them that's the issue, it's your own dark side. It's your own flesh. It's your own anger and bitterness and things like that.

Speaker 1: Well, so when that comes out and you identify that, how do you deal with that.

Speaker 2: Well, let me tell you, that's the best thing you can do is identify it.

Speaker 1: Okay.

Speaker 2: So what I'm giving you now is that is what I have learned to do over the years, is identify the problem that's in me.

Speaker 1: Okay.

Speaker 2: And stop focusing so much on what they're trying to do, what they're trying to create, the hurt, the struggle, the embarrassment that they're doing to you. And to focus more on yourself.

Speaker 1: And what does that look like as far as internal, like what do you?

Speaker 2: It's a battle.

Speaker 1: Is it something that you handle mainly in prayer? Or is it something that you go to talk to someone else about and go through those issues? Pastor friends?

Speaker 2: Yes. All of that.

Speaker 1: All those things together?

Speaker 2: Yeah, yeah.

Speaker 1: So it's just a way of dealing with it that you kind of have your disciplines that you've created over the years?

Speaker 2: Yeah. I think you learn. You kind of, I'm very visual. I see things in my head. That's crazy. But, you know, it's like I have a library here, and everything has a slot that you slide it into, and there are areas that you, you know, I've learned, and I've put the book in this, this is how I've dealt with it. I go to this section and pull these things off, and these are the things that I kind of run through. You pray. You pray you have a good enough relationship with your spouse, which is very important for pastors, that you can sit down and talk. At a quiet moment when things are okay and you can sit down and kind of pour your heart out to your spouse, because let me tell you something, as a pastor, you'd better be very careful who you entrust information to.

Speaker 1: Okay. Tell me about your spouse, and when those things happen. Is there ever a way that you say, I will share this, I won't share this, to protect them?

Speaker 2: Yeah. There are.

Speaker 1: And what is that process?

Speaker 2: Well, you know what's going to upset her or not. You know what she's going to be concerned with. And there's no need in putting her through that. We went through, and I don't know how you'd write this up, and I don't really care about it, but we went through a very difficult time where we were very publicly attacked here.

Speaker 1: Oh wow.

Speaker 2: Over the internet consistently for an extended period of time. And it was the darkest moment of my ministry personally.

Speaker 1: Really?

Speaker 2: Yes. With a blogger.

Speaker 1: How far into that was that in your ministry here?

Speaker 2: That was within 6 or 7 months of my being called here.

Speaker 1: Okay, early on.

Speaker 2: And they picked up on this because a blogger was doing this to another pastor of a mega church in another city and another state, and they picked up on how, I can do that here. It's almost like, well, gosh, this guy's getting tons of attention for doing this, why don't I do it and get some attention? And so that's what happened, that's what took place, and it was attacking me, my family, in every conceivable way possible.

Speaker 1: Wow.

Speaker 2: So. It was unbelievable. I can't explain to you how deeply, it sent into my wife into a shell that now, these years later, she's just begun to come out of.

Speaker 1: Really?

Speaker 2: Yes.

Speaker 1: Wow.

Speaker 2: You know, you protect yourself in a lot of ways. Mentally and emotionally, you shut down to protect yourself. You know when you get a severe head trauma, your brain seals itself in a fluid. It will secrete a fluid, and it will shut itself down. It will just shut itself down to repair itself, to heal itself, and it doesn't worry about the rest of the body because it shuts itself down. It shuts you off. You do that emotionally. You just shut yourself down emotionally. You put a wall around you to protect yourself, to keep anything from coming in and creating further hurt, until you can repair yourself, stabilize yourself so that you can handle what's coming in. And everything that comes in, regardless of what it is, you see it as threatening. It is seen in that kind of way. Here's something that's somebody's saying. They don't mean it in a threatening way, but you will perceive it and take it as a threat. Because you're in that mode of trying to restore yourself, you know?

Speaker 1: And would you say you and your wife went through that together? Or she?

Speaker 2: Well, we did, and individually.

Speaker 1: Individually, too.

Speaker 2: Yeah. You can't separate that. You are one, but you are still an individual.

Speaker 1: Yeah, that's true. So going through that, how would you say that you eventually came out of it, and what was it that got you to persevere through that.

Speaker 2: Oswald Chambers said that when God's will is in complete control he relieves the pressure. So what you do is you attempt, first of all, to say, I am going to be in God's will. Is what I'm doing the will of God. Am I, before God, clean? Am I doing what God's called me to do? That kind of thing. And that has to become the priority for your life. It may be why God allows this to happen. Very painful, very hurtful, but God certainly allows it or it wouldn't happen, and part of that process, I'm convinced, is that God is trying to teach me, you rely completely on me.

Speaker 1: That's good.

Speaker 2: You come to me, and I'm what you are to be obsessed with, not what they are doing to you, but me.

Speaker 1: So as you go through that, and let's say there's a situation that comes up, mentally, could you explain, here's a situation that's presented itself. I know this is going to be stressful and very difficult. I've got to persevere. Is there anything mentally that you start to say, okay, here's what I've got to?

Speaker 2: Well, what you've got to do, what I do is, you know, am I in God's will. Am I doing what God has called me to do. Not what everybody else wants me to do because I've got 1,000 people out there clamoring for me. I've got people, not just in the church, I've got people in the convention. I've got people who watch me on television who are convinced they know what I need to do, you know? Which is a funny kind of thing. You've even got family that's convinced that they know what you need to do, as well as other pastors, as well as denominational leaders. I was just responding to a denominational leader here, but I've got to get before God myself and say, now God, you're the one that called me and you called me here. I've got to look at you. I've got to keep my focus on you. I've got to hear from you and not all this other stuff. So that's the critical issue right there. The second thing you've got to do is you've got to acknowledge

that. You've got to acknowledge that I am responsible to the Lord and while I have some responsibility to everybody in this church, I'm responsible to the little lady that I've not even met yet that's a member of this church that has no real power or ability to do anything. I'm responsible to her. Because God gave her to me to care for. So I understand that. However, I'm not responsible for how they treat me or respond to me. I am responsible for how I treat and respond to them. God taught me something in my first church with a family who was the most negative family I've ever seen in my life. I've never met anybody that was as negative, that whined. It was a husband and a wife, had a son and a daughter, and they had absolutely marked these 2 kids with the same attitude. And I discovered, just out of seminary, in this church, and I would preach, and I discovered that I was trying to preach at them. There were a lot of things that I would say. And one Sunday morning, God just made it so clear to me, God just spoke to my heart and said, if I can't do anything with them, why do you think you can? And it just gave me a freedom to stop preaching at them and just start preaching.

Speaker 1: That's good.

Speaker 2: The other thing with them was this, was don't antagonize them. Don't fight battles you don't have to fight. And don't respond to them, don't become a spear thrower like Saul. Now if they want to throw spears at you, that's fine. The fact of the matter is this, even in a confined room with a man who was head and shoulders taller than every other man in Israel, who was a warrior, who had spears, who was proficient in throwing them, threw 2 spears at David and missed him both times. So, God can make an easy target hard to it. Even for the best javelin thrower. So, stop worrying about them throwing spears at you. You just be sure you don't turn around and start throwing spears back at them.

Speaker 1: That's good.

Speaker 2: Because the fact is you might just help them, and you don't want to do that. So, I kept the ministry open to them. They can shut the door on me, but I always kept the door open from my perspective, and I did, he had cancer, the family fell completely, totally, absolutely apart, which was no surprise, and they looked around at me at the hospital that day and said, can you go in and tell him what has transpired, what has happened, and I did. Which means in the moment when they desperately needed a pastor the most, I was able to walk through that door. But I had not shut it on them. Although they had slammed the door repeatedly on me. Well, that's okay. That's all right. I didn't need them to stay in the ministry, you know? And that's another thing. What do you need to stay in ministry? Do I need everybody's approval? Well, good Lord, Moses would've been out the first week, you know?

Speaker 1: Yeah, that's true.

Speaker 2: So obviously, Moses didn't have to have everybody's approval. Because he didn't get anybody's approval. Multiple times.

Speaker 1: Would you say that that first experience in that first church prepared you for that dark time that you said you walked through?

Speaker 2: I've discovered this, that God will allow you to go through things in your 20s to prepare you for your 30s, and things in your 30s to prepare you for your 40s, and things in your second church to prepare you for your third church, and things in your third church to prepare you for your fourth church.

Speaker 1: Good, so it's a progression, and God's teaching you.

Speaker 2: It's a progression, and you're not going to get it all at once. It's not all going to come down in your book. I hate to tell you that, but as useful as it will be, you're not going to solve it all for every guy out there.

Speaker 1: Right, yeah.

Speaker 2: Because guys are going to have to live through it. They can read it, but it will have to come home to them.

Speaker 1: Yeah. It's like a map, but they've got to walk it.

Speaker 2: Yep.

Speaker 1: That's interesting.

Speaker 2: And I can look on the map and see what Barcelona looks like, where it is, the description of it, even see a snippet or two of it, but it's not the same as walking down the street in Barcelona.

Speaker 1: Right. So there is some good that comes from the bad stress if you treat it right.

Speaker 2: Yes, there is. Every time. Because God causes all things to work together. To put it together in such a way that it moves, that it produces something positive.

Speaker 1: That's good.

Speaker 2: That doesn't mean that it doesn't hurt, you know? Or that it's not painful or that it's not a struggle. But God's able to put it together in such a way that it's going to produce a benefit in the long run.

Speaker 1: Okay, good. Let's talk about, for a moment, disciplines that you have created because of stress. Are there any spiritual disciplines in your life that you could point to and say this specifically, because of going through stressful situations, I've learned to do this and make this a priority because if I don't have this, the stress will overwhelm me. Is there anything over the years that you would point to that has help to sustain you?

Speaker 2: Yeah, a couple of things. One is a proper amount of time off.

Speaker 1: Okay, good.

Speaker 2: Which you need less of in your younger days and more of in your older days.

Speaker 1: Why would you say that?

Speaker 2: Just because you're getting older, you know?

Speaker 1: Okay.

Speaker 2: You need the rest a little more. I used to preach 3 times on Sunday morning and come back and preach on Sunday night when I was in Dallas. I was a lot younger, and I could get up on Monday morning and recover quickly and move on. Now, I preach twice on Sunday morning, and it takes me the rest of Sunday and into Monday to recover. So simply because of age. And I would certainly say, and everybody's going to say this, you need to get some exercise. Which I don't do on a regular basis, but that is very critical. It is very helpful.

Speaker 1: What kind of physical? Walking.

Speaker 2: Just anything. You don't have to do much. Yeah. Just walk. Get out and get a good brisk walk every day. Do something like that. And I hate to use the word yoga, but I use it in the sense of exercise and not the philosophy.

Speaker 1: Right, right.

Speaker 2: But you know, some stretching and some core to strengthen your core kind of deal. Any of that that just causes your blood to flow some. That's naturally going to make you feel better. It helps you think better, too.

Speaker 1: Yeah. Would you say that this is something that you do consistently as a discipline or is it more of, whenever stress comes, you are more, I've got to do this?

Speaker 2: Whenever my wife, you know, and she's another great barometer. She can tell. She can sense when I need it... "you have got to get out and get you some exercise. You've got to get away."

Speaker 1: Okay, good.

Speaker 2: And she has come to the place where she plans a little getaway about a quarter now. Because it does keep me fresh. It does help me to recover. It does help. Because when you stay under it for so long, you begin to get tired. Everybody responds and reacts to being tired or stressed a little differently. I begin to get a little short. I begin to maybe get a little short with somebody. And I have to watch myself for that. I have to know, I'm tired right now, but I've got a week coming up, to where I'm going to slip away, and I'll be able to just sit down and read and do that kind of stuff. And I just mentally say, hang on. Don't jump on this person over here. You're going to be too harsh. When you start to correct them, you're going to over correct. So just wait. You're coming up on it.

Speaker 1: Got it. That's good.

Speaker 2: A time away. But pastors need really to plan that.

Speaker 1: Do you do a sabbatical every so often or?

Speaker 2: No.

Speaker 1: You don't do anything like that?

Speaker 2: No, the church has not ever given me one. But my wife, like I said, because of a physical situation I had about 3 years ago, she started saying, we're going to take, we're putting it down on the calendar. We're going to take, because you have to rest up, you have to do that. You need to have a day or an afternoon at least or a week, you know? And then you need a few days every month or 2, or a week every month.

Speaker 1: Okay. You mentioned having a physical thing within the last few years?

Speaker 2: Yeah.

Speaker 1: Would you say that you, in your time of ministry here, that you've ever had a stress related illness?

Speaker 2: I would say so.

Speaker 1: Okay.

Speaker 2: Yeah.

Speaker 1: So you think a lot of it's stress related?

Speaker 2: Yeah.

Speaker 1: And so that, I guess, obviously your wife identified it. She said, okay, this is what caused this.

Speaker 2: Well, I had a thing called a spontaneous cerebral fluid leak.

Speaker 1: Wow.

Speaker 2: Well, when a doctor tells you spontaneous, which means they don't have any idea why it happened, and I'm convinced that it was just stress related.

Speaker 1: And it was during a stressful time of ministry? Or right afterward?

Speaker 2: You know, I guess so. Stress is a funny thing. Stress will not hit you when it's going through it. It always comes a little after. You can go through a stressful period of time, get over it. We made it through that, that's good, and about 3 weeks later, you come down. And you are just, stress is always delayed, the results of it.

Speaker 1: The physical ramifications of going through it?

Speaker 2: Yes. You have a lot of guys, if you interviewed a lot of young pastors, they will, I bet you, if you interviewed them and asked them, how many of you have acid reflux problems? You might be surprised how many have acid reflux issues, how many have what you may call irritable bowel syndrome, IBS, or something related to that. You ought to notice that in your research. Because those are 2 things that are directly the result of stress. You have this, your esophagus here.

Speaker 1: Right.

Speaker 2: There's a muscle that fits right around that esophagus that, when you swallow food, it pinches off. That keeps what's eating that food up down here. Stress causes this muscle to relax. And that's where you get acid reflux from.

Speaker 1: Okay. I didn't know that stress caused it to relax like that.

Speaker 2: Yes, it will. It will.

Speaker 1: That's amazing.

Speaker 2: And you'll discover that a lot of guys in the ministry struggle with acid reflux.

Speaker 1: Yeah. I could see that. I did that. Of course, that's not part of the interview, so I'll save that for another time. You've answered a lot of these. I guess the last question for you from this perspective, just kind of a summary thing, and then I'm going to ask you one question to end our interview. Before I get to that one, let me say, is there anything else that you would say, from an organizational structure? Because you've talked a lot about spiritual and physical. What about the way the church is set up, your staff is set up, the power structure of the church? Is there certain things over the years that you've identified as very stressful and had to change them or you've learned to work within them in a different way?

Speaker 2: Communication is always an issue in an organization. Whether it's 2 people or 200 people on staff. Communication is always, it's stressful. Whether you under communicate or over communicate can be stressful. You have to find where's the balance in here. It's always difficult. Am I being understood correctly? I think email and text

messaging have exacerbated the stress in communication. We think it's made it easier. I think it makes it a little more stressful in a lot of different ways. But I think communication between staff and church and all, that's where a lot of stress comes in. So you do have to kind of organize and plan and do some things administratively to alleviate a lot of the stress that goes along with that.

Speaker 1: Wow. So I would be curious to see how you see, does the organizational structure, maybe particularly your staff and deacons, do they, in your perceptions, do they help alleviate stress or create more stress for you?

Speaker 2: Yes.

Speaker 1: So both?

Speaker 2: Yeah.

Speaker 1: I thought that might be the answer.

Speaker 2: Yeah. And I do think you have to, and I think each, and every church ought to give the pastor the freedom to organize that stuff in a way that best fits his leadership style and communication style.

Speaker 1: Okay.

Speaker 2: Thankfully, this church gives me great latitude in that area. And I think, and then, for the pastor, you know, if he has that freedom to do that, however you, he's going to have to constantly tweak it, with whoever comes into leadership with him, whoever's either on staff, whoever is lay leadership. You have to constantly tweak at that when you learn what their style is and how that fits, and that ought, that shouldn't really, there's a difference between stress and difficult, and the difficulty's not bad. All difficulty should not be stressful. I think that's, a lot of the problem that we have in ministry is that we think ministry should be difficult free. No job is difficult free. And difficulty should not threaten us or cause us to panic or even create stress. God gave us the ability to reason, and we ought to use that ability, and that's what we should do through difficult situations. I've got these 5 different staff members, and they don't communicate exactly right. Let's solve that. Well, in doing that, that should alleviate stress because I'm using my creativity, I'm using innovation, I'm using abilities and gifts that God has given to me. That ought to be fulfilling. We need to stop seeing everything as stressful and an attack, you know?

Speaker 1: Okay. Let me ask you this, then, as you come into a church, and this church is, how old is it?

Speaker 2: This church goes back to the mid 1700s, probably right around the Revolution or maybe a little bit before.

Speaker 1: So a lot of history before you got here.

Speaker 2: Yeah.

Speaker 1: So as you came in and then reflecting back on that. From the perspective of a new pastor coming into a church that's established, is it better for the pastor to mold himself into what's already there or to change what's already there to fit him? Or is there a give and take within that?

Speaker 2: Yeah. There is. You have to do a little of both.

Speaker 1: Okay.

Speaker 2: And the timing is something that only the pastor can know.

Speaker 1: All right.

Speaker 2: And you have to get that from God. You have just walk, you've got to be sensitive to people. I've taken two mega churches through transition, which may be harder than putting an aircraft carrier in a toilet and trying to turn it. Now I've not done it perfectly, understand that. That's not what I'm saying. And it's hard on a church. I hurt for the church because a transition from the former pastor to a new pastor is very hard. It's very difficult, especially when the last guy was idolized and loved and looked up to and admired and respected and all of that. A lot of people don't know how, a lot of people struggle with how could I love him and love him at the same time? They never can work through that. Well, in order to be loyal to this last guy, I've got to love him, which means I've got to be against him. And they never learn that, I can love both of these guys. They don't have to be exactly alike, you know? I can love and appreciate various things about them both. It's like children. I remember when I had our daughter. I thought I could never love another child like I love this child. But the fact is, it's kind of like the Grinch, he discovered his heart grew 3 times that day. Your heart just grows and grows to encompass. But I have found, in churches following men who had great ministries, that people struggle with saying I can love him and love you at the same time.

Speaker 1: That's interesting. You said something, and I want to go back for a second before actually this last question. You mentioned your children. How many children do you have?

Speaker 2: 3.

Speaker 1: 3. I meant to ask this earlier when I was asking about your wife. Did they ever experience any negativity towards it?

Speaker 2: Yes.

Speaker 1: Tell me about that, if you could.

Speaker 2: Well, you know, every pastor's child experiences that. There's an expectation placed on them that's not placed on other children. We worked very hard not to expect any more out of our kids than what we would if I were not a pastor. And at the same time, I told them, whether I'm a pastor or a garbage collector makes no difference. This is how we're going to live in this house. It doesn't have anything to do with my being in the ministry. It has everything to do with my relationship with Christ. So, I tried to, and I think we were successful at that in our home, for them to understand we don't do this because my dad's a pastor. We do this because we're committed to Jesus Christ.

Speaker 1: Did they experience negative perceptions of the church because of what you do? Or because of what they experienced?

Speaker 2: Some, but they were able to walk through that.

Speaker 1: They were?

Speaker 2: I've got 2 children. I've got a daughter who's married to a preacher. I've got a son who is a preacher. And I've got a third son who probably struggled a little more with that than the others. He is very irregular in church, but it's not because he's bitter toward the church. It's because he's lazy.

Speaker 1: Okay.

Speaker 2: So, I'd have to say it's not that he views the church in a negative way but.

Speaker 1: Own personal circumstances.

Speaker 2: Yeah. It's just that, you know, he needs to get his rear end up out of bed and lead his family. He does not have the issue.

Speaker 1: Did you do anything specific to protect your children from having a negative view of the church as they grew up?

Speaker 2: Yes. I didn't talk about church. My children have never heard me criticize the church in the home. We didn't do that. People are imperfect. The church is the bride of Christ.

Speaker 1: Okay. That's good.

Speaker 2: And everybody's imperfect. I'm imperfect. They're imperfect. Everybody in the church is imperfect, but that doesn't diminish the fact that the church is the bride of Christ and we're not going to talk negatively about the church.

Speaker 1: Yeah. Good. All right, one last question, and we'll be done. And this is really, I'm looking for a statement. Let me read it and then I'll tell you kind of what I'm looking for. From your experience, what do you perceive as the most important thing that young or new pastors need to know about dealing with stress and what is the one piece of advice that you would share from your own experience? Now to situate that, we assume this person has a relationship with Christ, that they have a prayer life, so I'm not looking for, you know, you need to have a quiet time every morning. What I'm looking for is that one piece of practical advice that says, when go into ministry.

Speaker 2: In 50 years, what you think is the major issue right now won't even be a blip on your radar screen. It'll pass.

Speaker 1: That's good.

Speaker 2: It'll pass.

Speaker 1: That's good. Is that it? That's as succinct as you can have it. That's perfect.

Speaker 2: Yeah. It'll pass.

Speaker 1: All right, well that wraps up our interview. Thank you for your time!

Speaker 2: Sure thing... it was my pleasure.

PP10

Speaker 1: In what ways would you say that you've experienced stress in ministry?

Speaker 2: Well, I think probably the major stresses for me have been number one, just the internal imaging of myself going from a small church, one horse town, one horse pastor kind of role, to a multiplicity of ministries of, we now have 10, 11 full time ministerial staff, another 8 or 10 support staff. We've got a preschool with 50 people employed, so I've moved from a guy that did everything from changing the cartridge in the copy machine to preaching, and now I'm looking around going okay, so what am I supposed to do now? So, I've moved into a role of more leadership, disciplining, the staff. We have a very young staff so just really bringing some of them along. And so, it's just been a change, personally, for me, in how I say myself as a pastor from where I began.

Speaker 1: So, what about the avenues that stress comes at you the most? Is it parishioners, staff, the community, personal?

Speaker 2: You know, some of it is very change related in terms of the pressures and the push and pull of expectations of people. I have a very gracious church, this is a wonderful church. I couldn't be here 24 years if it weren't. They trust me, they know I've been here longer than most of them so it's not, most of them know I didn't start the church but I might as well have, I've been here, I've got more invested here than most people. I've got a few charter members left but most of them are gone, so I'm kind of the old man of the group. Anyway, and that's given me a lot of freedom. I got to kind of set the culture and the expectation of who we are as a church and what we're doing, and really kind of speaking the DNA of the church's makeup. I don't have a lot of challenges to my leadership, I don't have a lot of people who get into my way, I don't have a lot of people second guessing me. I second guess myself more than anybody in this church does so I have no, there's no expectations of how do I dress, anything like that. At the same time, we're seeing that, right now, I have to say that if one thing was the most stressful thing, it's the collision of the generational cultures and expectations of what does this, what do the millennial folks want, what do the boomers want, what do the builders want, what do the gen X guys want. And deciding who we're going to cater to, who we're going to kind of play into their expectation versus the other. So, that's stress. I stand in the middle, I'm kind of the cushion in the middle of that conflict that's always ready to happen so I'm trying to deflect and trying to absorb some of that. I kind of become a lightning rod for some of that kind of stuff.

Speaker 1: I understand.

Speaker 2: That's probably the biggest stress right now, really.

Speaker 1: Okay. When that stress amps up, how does it affect you personally?

Speaker 2: Well, personally, I have never been an extremely healthy person. I had, when I was very young, I had ulcerative colitis. I expect I became kind of a Type A, highly driven, and probably a little too perfectionistic in a lot of ways. And so, I internalized that, I sent it to my colon and got ulcerative colitis when I was 14. It just about killed me. They figured out what it was. It went away until I was 28 and found myself back in ministry again. So, I started dealing then with some major health issues at that point in time. From 28 to probably, I was probably 40, 42 before it kind of got under control again. So just a lot of, you know, my stress would go right there, I would bleed.

Speaker 1: That stress level.

Speaker 2: Yeah, so major, major, major stress, stress driven illness with that. And something I did not talk about, people didn't, most people would never know I had it. My hemoglobin would drop down to 8 sometimes.

Speaker 1: Wow.

Speaker 2: I've never had a blood transfusion but I probably should have on a couple of occasions. So, I really process. When I was 47, the colitis, really, I mean there's a story about God just finding, showed me how to deal with this. When I was 47, I was diagnosed with prostate cancer.

Speaker 1: Oh wow.

Speaker 2: At that point in time I'm hitting that 50 mark. Getting ready to turn 50, I'm thinking okay, so I've got a decision to make. Part of the decision is how much longer do I want to live? Do you want to keep being sick, do you want to keep having issues, or do you want to get a handle on yourself? I've never been, I'm a musician, kind of, but never liked athletics, never got into sports, but still today could care less about most sports. But, I did something I've never done before, I went to the gym and I started working out. That in itself, I mean I'm not a fanatic, but at the same time, even 15 years ago to now you would see a different person because I just made a decision, I've got to start taking care of my body. I'd never incorporated that into my discipleship, never really saw that as part of my spiritual formation but had to get a handle on it. If not, I would die young. So anyway.

Speaker 1: How do you identify stress? A lot of people in the ministry say that they start feeling things but they fail to identify that it's actually stress that's making them feel that way. Do you have a way that something?

Speaker 2: Well, I'm pretty, I'm fairly intuitive and I read myself pretty well. I mean I can, I'll tell you one of the ways that my stress would really amp up. I would start micromanaging everything. The more stressed I would get, even though the staff around here could not read that necessarily, but that's what's going on. I would begin to micromanage everything down to what the custodians were doing and how they were dusting. I would just, and I started realizing that's a stress reaction. I had a friend that's a stress bio, he's a bio physiologist in London and has actually come over here dealing with ministry, dealing with work and stress in the workplace.

Speaker 1: Oh wow.

Speaker 2: And, he's worked through our church and with our church and all kind of stuff. He's an interesting guy. He has taught me more about stress, just managing it, recognizing it, what to do with it than probably anybody. I just kind of buy his stuff and listen to him. He comes and yells at me and councils me and such.

Speaker 1: That's good. So, would you ever say that stress has been positive?

Speaker 2: I think it always has a, I think it has a positive potential in terms of just energizing, and driving. I don't think, I think if I did not have a level of stress I could easily gravitate to being a lazy person. You know, so I have to have a little bit of that drive, that push, that kind of a motivation. That's an internal clock that keeps going. You've got to do what you've got to do. So I'm still, even though as a 62 year old, I'm still undisciplined in certain levels. I want to write and haven't been able to just pull my head together around just getting that done. I want to do something and I decided now I think I'm just going to retire and be an Uber driver. [laughing]

Speaker 1: Tell me about how stress in ministry has affected your family. You have a...?

Speaker 2: I have a wife and 2 children. Well, of course, I mean the direct push back, my wife's a nurse so she has, she sees it and reacts to it before I do. She sees, she is continuously on me still today in terms of, "what's your day off this week?" If I'm on my day off and I'm reading and I've got my laptop out, I'm reading, or writing, or doing something, "...is this not your day off?" I mean she's been really good about pushing me to take the Sabbath. She understands how I work and she understands what, you know, drives me. Sometimes I'll relax more if I can do this, if I can just get this done I will be able to relax, but she knows that's a lie. She's knows I won't just walk away from it and let it go. That's been the hardest thing for me, I have a hard time letting go of stuff. I'm doing better. I have a really, really wonderful Executive Pastor that I have dumped tremendous amounts of workload on, just because he likes to do the stuff that I hate to do. I don't do the committee meetings if I don't have to. I don't do the day to day around here, he's the direct report for everybody on the staff except me. So, any supervisory related issues, he manages. So, he's literally given me a dream ministry. I'm able to do, I'm at the hospital now, I love to go visit people in the hospital and go chat. I like to go do that. I'm a counselor, so I'm counseling, I do the chaplaincy, I go to the hospital, do crisis care, those kinds of things that I really feel like I'm good at. I told him his job was to keep me off 60 Minutes and keep me out of trouble legally, and just keep an eye on that kind of stuff. I've just really been able to, I've got a really good assistant, she takes care of a lot of stuff. She's in the back running back and forth right now, frustrated about something... can we edit that out [laughing]. But I've got that, and she watches my calendar for me, takes care of stuff, takes stuff off the plate.

Speaker 1: That's awesome. Do you ever protect your wife from things, or do you feel like?

Speaker 2: Yes.

Speaker 1: She's the one that you have to talk to about?

Speaker 2: No, I don't dump on her. Well, sometimes I do. I don't bring everything to her. My kids, she and my kids have a wonderful, wonderful impression of this church and of our last church because I just, she loves the church, she's an organist, she just is a church person. A lot of the stuff that I deal with that frustrates the life out of me, I probably wouldn't even bother to try to tell her about most. I don't think she would ultimately buy into why I'm frustrated about it, it's just not something that would have any concern for her at all.

Speaker 1: Yeah.

Speaker 2: So, both of my daughters married a pastor, so. We didn't mess up too bad.

Speaker 1: Both of them?

Speaker 2: Well my daughter did. My son and his wife are actually on the praise team of one of church plants, so they're invested. So you know, the family is healthy, they're good, they do not have a bad memory of being mistreated at church. That's never, never been a problem.

Speaker 1: Something I'd be interested, and maybe you can articulate this maybe not. Can you tell me where you draw the line at what you share with your wife? Is there some kind of, could you even?

Speaker 2: Well, she knows, and again, we sometimes will flip around the channels and see reality TV and stuff. You know why I don't like reality TV? I said that's my life. My life is a reality TV show. I don't want to come home and watch reality TV. It's not what I want to do. I do a lot of counseling, I do a lot of marriage counseling, I do a lot of

counseling. She knows I do stuff, but if I sit down and say you'll never guess what so and so did today, and I really kind of need to be able to say to people who come in here that this is the stopping point. My staff knows that if you want to get fired in one step, tell somebody that you saw somebody in my office today, or tell somebody that you heard something and I will fire you. There will be no severance package, there will be no letter of recommendation, you'll be gone, that's it. One time, you do not get even the first strike. It's not a 3-strike system, you don't get strike 1.

Speaker 1: Yeah.

Speaker 2: And I had a problem when I came to this church, the office was a leaking sieve of information, so I said can't do that. So I kind of reversed that trend.

Speaker 1: I was thinking about how you do a great job explaining that with your family, and you've already talked about how it affected you physically, especially with the disease that you worked through in your childhood and into your forties. Are there any other things that you would say that affects your health wise when stress amps up? Is there anything?

Speaker 2: Well, I mean I think it hits you at all kinds of levels. It has hit me sexually, it has hit me, I know a lot of pastors don't want to talk about that but the bottom line is that stress comes with you in the bedroom and it affects you there. So, I mean I've seen that. It's just part of the, unfortunately, part of the uniform of being a minister. You're going to have that happen. I don't know, I sometimes, I don't know what your theology, your biblical picture of what a church is. I realize that what I run here is a religious corporation, and in the middle of this there's a church. Everything that happens here at our church, there's some stuff that happens that is the cultural definition and its pressure in the church. That's where most of the stress comes from. I find variable stress in terms of just dealing with the body life issues and being the pastor of the body of Christ in this church is not stressful. Managing the corporation, the financial issues, the staffing issues, the conflict that comes about this sort of thing, that's where the stress comes in.

Speaker 1: Okay. You mentioned that when the stress came on, the positive influence was working out, driving towards that. Are there any other things that maybe?

Speaker 2: I am a drummer.

Speaker 1: Okay, so it drives you to do that more?

Speaker 2: I keep my chops up and I keep telling myself if things really get bad I'll just go play drums for a living. That was part of my struggle going into ministry was really, at the same time I had the need to go back to seminary and go to school, I had an opportunity to go on the road and play drums professionally. Really, that was my dream, that was my childhood dream, was to get to be a drummer and make a living do that. I did that for a number of years inappropriately. So, to have an opportunity as a Christian to go on the road and make a living was a really, really attractive, really attractive opportunity. So it was really a struggle to have to give that up. Part of what I had to give up was understanding that the drums were an emotional release to me. That was where I put my emotions, that was where I put my stress. Actually, when I quit playing drums is when I got sick. So, when that channel got blocked off, it kind of went back into my body.

Speaker 1: Wow, that's interesting.

Speaker 2: So that was, so I realized I needed, I don't have hobbies, I don't do wood working, I don't paint, I don't play golf, I don't do stuff like that. I don't do the typical [state] things, I don't swim, I swim but I don't surf, I don't do the stuff that people do in [state]. I work, and that's okay. I like what I do, but at the same time it's not, it's a

different kind of work. It's not like working on the railroad all day. You kind of just go this is fun. Sometimes you just don't want to quit.

Speaker 1: That's good. Let's think of that from a spiritual perspective, not physical, from a spiritual perspective. How does stress impact you in your spirituality?

Speaker 2: Well, you know, I've heard for years that sometimes the simpler things that we should be doing that we don't do and then we're too smart to do that, I have learned that if I don't pray I pay a price for that. I realize that keeping my devotional life, my prayer life fairly active, I'm not a legalist about it, but if I can spend an hour or so a day at least early in the day before things get going, I notice a difference and I pay a price for that. That's not a sermon on keeping prayer life up, but it's a reality and realization. Part of my stress management system is I do meditation, scripture, and focus on prayer is pivotal to that. It has, when I went through a period when I kind of got lost and I was in seminary and doing 10 different things. I just kind of lost that. Just I do this all day long, but I realize that in addition to doing it all day long you also just need that time for you and God are there alone, and I really fight for that, you know, try to keep that in place.

Speaker 1: Is there any negatives towards your spirituality that stress can create? For example, we were talking earlier that you get into it to help people and then all of the sudden get burnt out.

Speaker 2: And I'm very sympathetic. I was president of [state convention] for 2 terms. I've done convention work and done denominational work and a lot of different types of work. I've seen the burnout happen, and I think that, I mean I think just... I have listen to [another pastor] talk about this, just really, really good guys can crash and burn. I think just, and I've done some counseling training, I've seen guys get into counseling to fix themselves. I think, by the same token, I think there are pastors that get into ministry to fix themselves, which means that you're coming in with a broken wing anyway. And then, when you get into the process of ministry and realize that you're getting crushed by this, I certainly think there is spiritual attacks. I think it's, you're in warfare. I just tell a guy, if you're not healthy, you probably don't want to be here. This is not the place to come get better. You will be shot at. If you want to be in leadership, you're sticking your head out of the foxhole, you will be a target.

Speaker 1: That's good.

Speaker 2: And I think there's a lot of guys that are finding out the hard way that they are targets and they have not done what they need to do to protect themselves, or to get themselves healthy and surround themselves. One of the things I told them in that retreat last weekend, I told the guys, I said I don't care how old you are, you need somebody in your life who is mentoring you. Somebody out there is doing this better than you are. You surely do not believe that you are the top of the pile. So that means there's somebody else who's doing this better than you're doing it, find them, find that person.

Speaker 1: That's good.

Speaker 2: You know, whether you see this guy and go okay, I like the way he does ministry, I like the way he speaks. It doesn't have to be a preacher. You can be looking for another pastor but it doesn't have to be that, it can be a person who's in higher education, it could be a person who's a doctor. Somebody to just go I like the way they handle themselves professionally, lock into that person and let them speak into your life. And then you find that other person that you need to pour into. But I think what happens is we get to a certain point, a certain level in ministry, and especially the mega-church guys, where they feel like okay, my role is done, just pull, pull, pull, pull, pull. That's great, but they don't think there's somebody that needs to be pulling at them. And so, you cut yourself off from the input but you're continuing to give the output. Eventually you

dry yourself out and you start to sink. And the demand is there, and it's flattering to have guys coming up, can I talk to you, can I spend some time with you, can I buy you coffee. Well, sure, you know. And then you are like, "Lord, I guess this is the burden I have to bear. I'm an old expert, I will be the expert." And you just convince yourself that you don't need that other moment. You need somebody, there needs to be somebody authoritative in your life as a pastor who is teaching you, who is speaking into your life. There has to be a preaching voice in your life where if you hear them say something you're not going to go well, that's no big deal, I don't have to listen to them. But you will hear the voice of the Lord, you will hear God speaking to you through that person, whether that's on a CD, or whether that's on a personal visit, or whether it's a conference, but you need somebody who is speaking into your life the word of the Lord so God can, that's another channel that God can speak to you and pour into you. You have to be obedient to that. I've got my guys that are in [church] in [state]. He is not Baptist, he's a charismatic. But he is a friend, I met him and we're buddies.

Speaker 1: And who is that?

Speaker 2: His name is [name]. [He] has actually been here, but he has a regional ministry so he's got, you know. But I mean he did... If you know [Church] and [church leader]. They just do the, they start with Genesis and they work through the whole book. So, that's what he's doing and I've got a bunch of his tapes, I've got the whole series on Job right now. This is the guy, I'm listening to this guy, I'm listening, and if God's, if he says, now I'm now saying don't be discerning, but the Lord, I'm listening to him to hear you. If you want to say something to me I'm going to listen to him. I'm going to give you the opportunity to speak to me through this guy. It's not necessarily preaching his stuff but it's listening and trying to learn or something.

Speaker 1: Think about it from a perspective of organizational structure or strategy. So, when you identify stress that's coming from the congregation, or from the culture around you, organizationally, how do you handle it? Just beyond yourself, what you are doing, how do you use what's at your fingertips, or at your command, to also deal with it? Does that make sense?

Speaker 2: No.

Speaker 1: No? Okay, so in other words, like there's a big, there's a blow up in there. Obviously you can't run every single time.

Speaker 2: Got you, got you, okay. Yeah, no, I have no problem releasing authority to somebody. The staff that I have, I mean I said first you just really do something stupid, and I said if you're going to do something stupid, if you'll tell me first I can even forgive that. If you blindside me with stupid, that's a different story. But if you will just do what you know is right, and I've got, honestly, I've got a couple of guys on staff right now that are, I've got a couple of guys that are really wild cards and they're really good at what they do, but they're not really good at dealing with people. Right now, I'm just about the best guy in the room in terms of dealing with people and they know that. So, if they get a really, really tough situation they'll come to me and say how would you handle this, what would you suggest I do? Sometimes they react and they go uh oh, I did this, now what do I do? So they want me to come and help them walk back, you know, what they've done. Sometimes they get into a tunnel maybe, and they don't get out. So it's just, but I trust them, and my mantra is if I can't trust you, I will fire you. I have the right to fire anybody. If you're here on staff, that means I trust you, and that means that if I trust you I will support you. When you come up with an idea, or you come up with a solution a problem that you're having, I will let you handle your own stuff. If you can't, I'll help you but I will let you do it yourself. And then if you hit a boulder in the road that you can't move, I'll come help you move it. But for the most part, I don't micromanage their

ministry. I just let them do what you do. I really think God has put a good staff together here.

Speaker 1: That's awesome. It makes things easier to deal with.

Speaker 2: Yeah, it does.

Speaker 1: Just say if you have anything to add to this. Spiritual disciplines and physical disciplines that you see as priorities in dealing with stress, you already mentioned prayer and you mentioned exercise, anything that you would add to those?

Speaker 2: Well, I think the main thing, and the thing that we lose most, I think, in ministry, is even though our stock and trade is books and reading, I think we don't read like we need to, I don't think. I think, I can't remember if it was Piper or C.S Lewis, was saying something about you need to read an old book every now and then, something that wasn't written in the past 20 years, and hear what the old guys said, how they said it. Every now and then build that in. It's just a discipline of reading and reading not just for entertainment, or not just for engaging your preaching better, but reading to deepen yourself, reading to help you think. I put myself under really, really hard guys to read that are frustrating, but it's helping me to think about, we kind of fall into our patterns of thought, speech, and it helps kind of break down that. I enjoy it. I'm a word guy so I like to dig into that some, I'm kind of given to that. I'm an introvert by nature so it helps me, it gives me an excuse when I have books with me, I'm sitting down and have places that I go in my house with books piled up. I'm sitting there reading.

Speaker 1: Yeah. Last question, and this is really a very succinct, precise response. You have to think about it because I'm asking for one thing. From your experience, what do you perceive as the most important thing that a young or new pastor needs to know about dealing with stress and one piece of advice that you would share from your own experience? If you had to pick one, what would you say?

Speaker 2: Well, I would circle back around to keep yourself alive spiritually. Keep your personal walk with God alive. Because a lot of us are, we're a tin can, and we can really look good on the outside and just be foam inside, easy to crush. When the pressure comes, we just collapse. If we don't keep that internal pressure in place, that internal fullness in place that helps us resist that external pressure, just keep the can full.

Speaker 1: That's really good. Anything that you would add, or anything you thought of that I didn't ask you?

Speaker 2: No, again, I think the relationship piece is important. I think keeping people around you that, because I think, and I think it was Gordon McDonald or somebody a long time ago I read before he fell, was talking about the kind of people that tend to gravitate towards pastors. You've got really needy people, you've got really angry people, you've got these different kinds of folks that are always pulling, pulling on you. I think we sometimes think that we are a bottomless pit and that somehow God gives you that gift when you go into ministry, you can just give, and give, and give and never have to get it back. Sometimes you have to find that balance and keep your emotional health alive, as well as your spiritual health.

Speaker 1: Well thank you very much for your time.

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Speaker 1: In what ways did you experience stress in ministry over the, how long has it been? I know it's over 20.

Speaker 2: I've been in ministry 40 years, Jackson. I've been here at [church name] 27 years.

Speaker 1: Wow, that's a long time.

Speaker 2: Relocated twice in 12 years. Relocated the entire campus twice.

Speaker 1: Really?

Speaker 2: Yeah.

Speaker 1: Did you start this church, or was it already?

Speaker 2: No I inherited, I came to it 27 years ago followed the pastor that fell morally. There were 6 pastors, I was the 6th one. When I came, there were 5 pastors here. 3 out of those 5 were my interns from where I served before, and so that's how they got my name. I served in [city, state] for a couple of years.

Speaker 1: Okay. When you came, obviously, you were dealing with a lot of other aspects that probably created some stress. Think for a moment, what kind of stress did you come into and experience over those years?

Speaker 2: Well my first pastoring and I look at you, right?

Speaker 1: Yes.

Speaker 2: I was in ministry since I was 22 years old. For 13 years, being in ministry as a singles pastor, a student pastor in various churches. I was a student pastor, student worship, music. Then I went and did a singles pastor at [church name], and then I went to be the college and singles pastor at [church name] in [city, state]. Was there almost 8 years, and the last year there I was the campus pastor at a satellite, what they call kind of a satellite church, before coming here. 35 years old, we're meeting in a high school. They had bought some property, 41 acres. They were going to relocate the church. The pastor had announced that church was going to relocate, announced a 12-million-dollar campaign. Then the next Sunday, resigned. 8 months later, they called me to be the pastor. Now, it's my very first pastor as a senior pastor. I've been in ministry. I've married this big woman, 800 or 900 people. I would say I may not have known what to call it, but there's this pressure, this incredible pressure of pastoring. Everything becomes new, you're preaching Sunday morning, Sunday night, Wednesday night. We'd begin to grow. We discovered those 41 acres we'd lost about 29 of them in wetlands. We lost some money on the property. We're relocating the school. We get there at 430 every Sunday morning, we're mopping the floors, we're setting up cribs. It wasn't like today with IMAGS and praise bands. We had an orchestra, we had a choir, we had robes. We brought in robes, we had hymn books, we had brought in hymn books each week. Then lots changed in that regard. I'm not just the pastor now, I'm kind of the vision caster of what we're going. We start growing, we have to do another service. We're meeting on 2 campuses, at the regular campus and at the school. We're meeting in, we're paying 2600 dollars a week in 1989. 2600 dollars a week. Now, things are going well. I don't even know and you call it stress, somebody said if you enjoy what you're doing, it doesn't feel like work. There was a little bit of that degree. My children are younger. Now I feel the pressure, a little bit, growing as we continue to grow. I don't know if I've ever lost that pressure, to tell you the truth. There's a part of it that I don't think you ever want to. It's like riding a

motorcycle. If you're not afraid to get on it, you probably should stay off of it. I think I feel that was a little bit as a pastor. Knowing me personally, there's different kinds of leaders. I'm probably motivated more in the spiritual gift of mercy than anything else. I feel quickly, I feel with people, I hurt with people, I weep with people. I'll have a tendency to make myself sick to make you well. There will be a lot of people at my funeral, but that funeral may come early. Because I would kill myself trying to please others. God had to take me through this journey of Christ in me, the hope of glory in pleasing people versus pleasing God. When sermons are coming at you every week... well, we start growing, and we relocated. We then had to start the Saturday night service. So, now I'm preaching Saturday night, 3 times on Sunday morning, and Sunday night, and Wednesday night. We we're in that building for 12 years, but the last 6 years of that, we were maxed out in growth, so we had to continue starting services. There wasn't such things as video overflow, there wasn't anything like satellite campuses or planting churches. It was not as prevalent as it is today. It seemed to be an easier solution. Saturday night, 3 times Sunday morning, Sunday night, and then Monday morning at 7 o'clock for 7 years, and building meetings to plan 450,000 square feet, 146 acres, 82-million-dollar campus.

Speaker 1: That's stress.

Speaker 2: It is.

Speaker 1: Wow. Would you say that stress increased with success, or do you feel stress is more prominent when things aren't going so well?

Speaker 2: I think one of the things that you have to do, to understand stress maybe, is first of all define it so that we know that we're talking about the same thing. I've always felt like you define stress as actually the gap between the demands that are placed upon you for service, and the strength that you have to meet those demands. There's a gap. The gap is the demands on you, and the strength you have to meet them. Now, it's a key word for us, as not just a Christian, but us as pastors. The Bible say in about John the Baptist in John 5, that he was a shining and a burning light. You can't have shining without burning. It's impossible. You show me a person that's effective, there's something going out of him. When I preach, somethings going out of me. When I'm ministering something's going out of me. When people need help, something's going out of me. I see stress, kind of, in some levels, frankly. I don't know if this is answering your question, I hope it is. Take a little sifting around to get to the answer. When I think about stress, Jackson, I think that it can come from 1 of 3 things. I think it can come from the energy out of you, I think it can come from the expectations to you, and I think it can come from the evil that's in you. There's a sin stress that a person ought to feel when they're not right with God. Isaiah 30:15 says "in returning in rest shall you be saved." Then it says "in quietness and in confidence shall be your strength." When you have sinned in your life unconfessed, there's no quietness, and there's really no confidence. John says if our heart can give us not, then we have confidence towards God. A person that has an unconfessed sin in their life, the evil in them that there's going to be some stress. There is an energy that comes out of them that creates that stress. Then I think there's also that spiritual warfare coming at you as well. You've got energy out of, you've got evil in you, you've got the enemy after you. I think that's a combination for you to be that gives us instruction all the way through to deal with that. I would have to tell you that in every level of growth, both to me personally but to the church cooperatively, I think I felt a little more weight at each level. Because it added responsibility to me. I'm not a pastor that is happy about getting on a plane and traveling through the week and just popping in. I'm the preacher. I'm the pastor. Pastoring to me is a little more than just preaching. It doesn't even really feel like I'm a great preacher, I just feel like God pays for what he orders, this is what he's called to me to do. In faith he has called me so I shall do it. Yes, the demands, and then the strength to meet those demands, I have felt that gap many times.

Speaker 1: Would you say the demands, thinking through the different perspectives that you come from, do you sense more demands from parishioners, staff, community, your own self, or maybe even the organizational structure, the culture of the church.

Speaker 2: Yes.

Speaker 1: All of them? [laughter] I figured that's what you were going to say.

Speaker 2: That's an easy answer, but the truth is, I think it begins with me. I don't know about how other people handle it. Some people don't have stress, they just give everybody else stress. It's not what you eat, it's what eating you, right? It would begin with me first. It always should begin with the pressure that I put on myself. Given enough information about a person's life, every behavior makes sense. It just makes sense if you understand why they feel what they feel. We do what we do because we feel what we feel. We feel what we feel because we think what we think. The enemy knows that that's what they say in Corinthians 10:3 - 5 it talks about strongholds. I think the enemy knows, and he knows that whoever wins the mind, wins the body. There's this pulling down of strongholds Paul mentioned. This pulling down and tearing down every lofty opinion, he said lofty thought, that's a word that means partition. It means that in central classrooms, we've put partitions up. Just because somethings going on in this side of the room, we didn't want it to go in that side of the room. The enemy puts these partitions up. Paul said, and he's speaking to believers, he said the weapons of warfare is not money to the pulling down of these strongholds. Taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ. Tearing down these lofty opinions. The devil doesn't care what we think about him, he does care about what we think about Jesus. If he puts up this partition and he doesn't want the secular and the spiritual to ever cross each other, he wants you to do what you do on Sunday and be somewhere you can be on Monday, you can be somebody different. James calls that a double minded man, and says by the way, you're unstable on all your ways. There's no reason why some people have stress. They're acting out of the character of who they really are in Jesus Christ. God says I've given you some weapons, the weapons of prayer, the weapons of the word, the weapons of community to help do what? To tear down those lofty opinions so that it's 12, 24/7, 365, it's every day of our life, that's who we are.

Speaker 1: That's good. That's a good perspective to have. It begins with you, if I understood you right, when it starts with you, then you can deal with the other stresses better. Whether the is culture, staff demands, whatever. If you've dealt with that first one.

Speaker 2: We're going to miss some expectations. I think the most important part of stress in a pastor, once he moves beyond his calling, what God's calling him to do. I would say one of the greatest things a pastor can learn is to learn who he is. He doesn't have to be somebody else, in fact God didn't want him to be anybody else. I think all of us, we coach like we coach, we parent like we've been parenting, we preach many times like we've been preached too. Pastors sometimes like what we've seen. I think sometimes a stress level comes because we're acting out of a character of who we really are. We'll reach something and we'll hear something and we'll emulate that or imitate that. All of us has done that, and we discovered kind of who we are in our own skin. It takes a while I think in ministry, to understand that. I think the people that feel it the quickest is your family.

Speaker 1: That's a great segue. How do you think the stress has impacted your family? The stress of ministry demands that are places on you? Have you noticed anything?

Speaker 2: That's a great question. I have 4 children. they're all within 6 years of each other. My older 2 remember the days of me being on staff, not as the senior pastor, but a pastor. My last 2 only thing they've ever remembered was me being the senior pastor. By God's grace, I have a daughter that's married to a student pastor with 6 kids, my oldest. I

have a son that's a deacon and helps in our financial counseling. He's a financial planner. He's a Bible Fellowship teacher raising 2 great kids. I have a daughter then after that, so there's a girl, boy, then another girl. She's at [school name], working on another masters. Working in women's ministry there. Also then I have another son, my baby son, who is a deacon. He's been involved in a recreation ministry and been involved in a tech ministry. All of them love church. All of them love the lord. My baby son, the youngest son, has 2 children, pregnant with a third, lost 1, a child, not too many months ago. I watched how they're responding to that. All of our kids and our 11 grandkids are growing up they have to develop their own convictions of course, but my children have their convictions. It's not secondhand convictions anymore, they don't have to come to church on Wednesday nights and Sunday nights, but they do. They like it, and they're involved. It probably says as much about their mom as it does their daddy. But I have watched in the family those two. My youngest son called me this week and said "Hey, we came over the other night and you seemed a little quiet. You all right?" He said, "I noticed that you," red alert preacher's kids! "I noticed that you got on the phone and you were on the phone when we came. Did the quietness have anything to do with the phone call?" In fact, it did. Home is where you can be who you are, but just because they're my kids does not mean that I'm at the liberty to tell my kids or even my own wife at times things that are confidential nature that you're dealing with. I said, "Hey, [son's name], you're pretty perceptive." I said, "Yeah, I'm pretty quiet." He said, "You don't have to get into it, I know you can't tell me." And I said, "No, I really can't, but I appreciate you. I hope I wasn't being rude, that wasn't my intention." He says, "I can just tell Dad, I've been around here I can tell." My family, they get the joy of ministry, and then they see the things behind the scenes that nobody else gets to see.

Speaker 1: What about you personally? How does stress in ministry affect you internally? When you're dealing with it, processing it, trying to grab a perspective of it. How has it impacted you?

Speaker 2: Now I'm going to tell you it has been positive and negative. Isaiah said in Isaiah 33:1 that "they that waited for the lord shall receive new strength. They shall might up with wings as eagles, they should run and not be weary, they should walk and not faint." I think what Isaiah was trying to say to us is that there is something that we do, in ministry especially, that he gives us kind of an ingredient and a help there that says waiting upon the lord must renew their strength. Stress affects me in a way that I get quiet. I get contemplative. I become maybe even critical of my own heart. I just lose that strength, that confidence. It's like it's holding on and just kind of losing grip in some ways. I always know those as indicators that God's trying to get me to press deeper into him. God wants me to wait. The way that comes across is: Number 1, I widen my horizon for instance. Widen my horizon means sometimes what I think I'm going through is real bad. God says no, this is going to be real, real good. I'm going to take you through something. You have to walk by faith. You got to get above sea level, you can't see what's going on. He knows, and he watches. When those disciples in Mark were in the water and they were rowing, he saw, and the bible says the Lord, he was in the mountains praying. That's what storms do, they press us into him. His presence led him there. His prayer surrounded them there and that's what he was doing. You widen your horizon. Secondly, I have to admit my own limitations. God gives us stress in my life, Jackson, to just help me to understand that all the worst things I think we try to do is, we try to live the Christian life instead of him living it through me. Galatians 2:20 says I am crucified with Christ never less it is not I who live but Christ within me. The life that I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith in the son of God who loved me and gave himself for me. Translated, I took your life from you, so that I could give my life to you, so that I can live my life through you. I think the entire Christian life is learning that God doesn't want me to give him my best. God wants me to abide in him and to rest in him and let him give his best to me. Stress comes when we start realizing that that gap, you remember that gap, it's the demand of service and energy I have. Whose energy am I working out of? That's always the

prevailing question. Is that energy I'm working out of my energy, because guess what, it's going to run out really quick. Back to the question, I'm going to wait, I'm going to widen my horizon, I'm going to admit my loss. I'm going to invite God's strength. I'm going to say God, I need you to help me. He'll do that. Then while I'm doing that, I'm saying God, I need your strength. I'm going to make a great exchange, here's my exchange, I will give you my weakness for your strength. That's that idea, Jackson. I'm going to admit, I'm going to widen, and I'm going to wait upon the lord. I would say that waiting, we think waiting is doing nothing. When someone's serving at a restaurant, we call them waiters. Are they doing nothing? No, they're doing something. It's a longing, it's a listening, it's a looking. There's biblical definitions you see that's waiting. When we moved out to this property, our project manager took his eye off the ball. I wasn't liable, I wasn't responsible for that whole reach and yet, I was liable for it. I was responsible. I sure as heck wouldn't lie that I was responsible, I'm the pastor, I'm responsible. The entire building committee missed it. 3 weeks before we move in here, we realize that we've got to go borrow another 8 million dollars. We're 8 million dollars over budget. I don't know that I've ever had more stress in my life than 3 weeks before you're moving in to come to a building committee to not realize to not know that the chair of the building says there's something I need to tell you guys. My entire staff and building committee totally missed it. We had to change orders. I'm responsible for that. I'm going to walk into a 42-million-dollar debt as opposed to a 34-million-dollar debt. Probably at that time, if I hadn't been here 15 years, I don't know if I would have made it through. They knew my integrity, they knew my credibility. We had to manage through that. We had to maneuver through that. There was a real sense of brokenness in my life. I remember we owed 2.7 million dollars that needed to come in. We'd just gone through the building part. It's not like somebody... it's now January moved in in October, it's now January. Some of the building wasn't even finished, because we ran out of money. Nobody stole anything, nothing scandalous, did an audit, everything, but it was just change orders. Man walked up to me on January one and said, "My pastor okay?" He saw stress. I said, "I'm going to be okay." He said "Listen, my wife and I have been talking. We were talking just before I walked up here to you. I'm going to send a million dollars tomorrow, would that help any?" I teared up and I said child, now, that'd help a lot. Thank you!" He said, Look, we didn't mean to get into the situation that were in. Do you think you and the associate pastor and the chair of the build committee can meet with me this week?" I said "Yeah, we can do that." "I want to find out how we got here. All the numbers, what would it take to stop the bleeding?" We met, he said, "Guys, where are we?" We were 2.7 million, we needed, he graciously gave us 1 million. He said, "Listen, I've already called my banker on my way in from breakfast this morning. Just on my signature, I'm going to wire you guys this afternoon another 1.7 million. This is called a benevolent loan." He said to my associate pastor, "I don't want to fill out any papers. I've made all my money all my life shaking hands. We'll just call it a hand shake." He said "in 6 months let's just see where we are." In 6 months, we'd done pretty good. In 6 months we had... Now the first million of the 1.7. We had paid about 1.4 back to him. I was in a series, a sermon about 'get in the game.' He said tell pastor to keep the \$300,000. I just want to get in the game!"

Speaker 1: Oh really, wow.

Speaker 2: Yes. That was God's way of saying to me you have a bride and I have a bride. You go home and take care of your bride, I'll take care of mine, I'll take care of the church [participant begins to cry]. That hasn't come without, and you can probably just tell by emotion that that's fresh. It's been here 11 years. That was 11 years ago. That's as fresh as if it happened 2 weeks ago, in my heart. That's God's way of saying to me that I called you, I'm going to take care of you. I never promised you a stress-free life, but I did promise I'd be with you at every step of the way.

Speaker 1: Good. It seems like that's the one that kind of stands out. During that time did you notice any physical manifestations of the stress? Physical infirmities, dealing with any kind of sickness?

Speaker 2: I look back on it and I think of a couple things. Number 1, I find myself trying to find pleasure in food. I look at some pictures of myself and think oh, I put on a little weight eating. Eating for comfort. I was burning the candle at both ends and I just wanted to know where you got more wax, I didn't want to really stop. I got pneumonia. I looked back at that now, kind of a chastisement from God. He said, "You know, you and I are going to make it long, learn to rest in me." Here Matthew says, Jesus said Matthew loved him. Come unto me all your labor. Come to me, meek and lonely in heart and ye shall find what? Rest. Rest unto your souls. I think what he's saying there is come into me, look to me. That's fellowship. Labor with me, lift with me. The yoke, lift with me, you put that yoke on the ox and they both share it. It's partnership, fellowship. He's saying come to me in partnership. Then he says learn of me, I am meek and low and heart and you shall find rest unto yourself. I think it's Jesus' way of saying I didn't come just for fellowship. I didn't come just for partnership, I came for discipleship, learn from me. Those are lessons that I had to learn in the hard way.

Speaker 1: The physical seems to, and correct me if I'm wrong, I'm just clarifying it. It seems like you're saying that physical manifestation of stress are usually connected to a spiritual problem.

Speaker 2: I think it's 2 things. I think it's Philippians 4:7 and it's Colossians 3:15 both of them say let the peace of God rule over your heart. It's interesting that he equates peace here and the rule of the peace of God with thankfulness and with gratitude. We're calling that one the body. Paul said in Philippians 4:7 let the people, he said let the peace of God rule in my heart. Peace of God. Guard your heart in mine. There's a peace of God that guards your heart and mind with the words of Jesus Christ. I think it's God way of saying to us when a referee blows his whistle the person gets out of the box. He goes and he blows the whistle. The holy spirit does that. He can do that through some sickness, he can do that through some stress, he can do that through something irritable. I've begun to realize that this energizes the flesh instead of walking in the spirit. Romans 8:5 - 8 talks about how the flesh is going to be carnal and, think about this, it's going to lead to death but the spirit is life and peace. Those have been monitors for me and those have been gauges for me. I've been able to see that, to say hey, pastor you cannot depend on the energy of your flesh. Who would have guessed that Simon Peter would have fallen at the level he fell by fear? His greatest strength became his greatest weakness, and the reason for that is because we protect our weakness, we don't protect our strength. When we don't protect our strength, that becomes our weakness. Simon Peter denies, who would have guessed Simon Peter of all people, he is the guy who cuts off Malchus' ear in the garden. He shouldn't have done that, well he didn't mean to... he meant to cut his head off. He wasn't afraid of anything. Yet when it comes to that, he was afraid. A little girl said aren't you, I recognize your accent, three times through the story. He denies; that's true, but us too. We have strengths, we have weakness. God says come into me all you who labor and our heavy laden. That's an invitation.

PP12

Speaker 1: In what ways do you see stress coming at you most in ministry? Is there a certain area? Is it people, is it your staff, is the culture, the community that you live in, is it the organizational structure? Where would you say that stress comes at you the most?

Speaker 2: That is a, and of course this is a personal opinion, my observation of what happens is as the stress that comes to me is, "Are we getting the job done that God has given us?" And so, if I have staff members who are not producing like they should, and I do not mean to they have got to win a certain number of people every week, but I mean, if they are not carrying their part of the load, whether it is music, or education, or whatever, that puts stress on me because I am going to have to pump that up some how or other. So, friend of mine said one time that the worst problems he ever had were staff disease. And so, I think there is a lot there, the more, you know, it is one thing to lead, it is another thing to manage, and you have to manage the people you are with. There is always, in a multiple staff ministry, especially we have got a school, we have got a college, we have got so many other things, there is always something going on in somebody's life. So, if I can fix the things close to where the spring, the water comes out, then we can, everybody is functioning well, because we do not have staff members around here that leave every 3 years. I mean, they stay on because we try to build an environment so that if they have a problem they can come directly to me, my door is open to them quicker than it is open to anybody. Because they are managing or ministering to these people out here who have such complex needs. That is probably the number 1 issue, and then having to deal with you are not functioning here well, we are going to have to let you go. Those things are just, they just eat your heart out, but that is number 1. I think the other area is that, my particular focus is on pastoral ministry. I have staff people who take care of most of the administration but, I have, I receive the calls like I did this morning of attempted suicide. I get that around 6:15 in the morning, and so I am dealing with the family back and forth. And then another lady called and she is widowed about 6 months now, and she is struggling, you know? And, so I am hands on ministering to these people and helping them, and that can drain you, you know, you can only give out so much. And, other than that, I do not really have, I do not see a lot of stress, I do not worry about what the attendance is, in fact I do not ever even ask how many we had, in worship, or bible study, or anything. The fact is, are we doing the job God called us to do? And my goal is that this church reach the expectation God had for it when he set it down here on [street name]. We are not a church to be in [city], or [city], or somewhere else, God planted us here in [city, state], and so we are going to minister to this community as much as we can, and are we doing a good job of that? And, you know, we are working at it. We felt like our church should start a Christian school because of the, actually the conspiracy of secularism that came through the schools, we wanted to give our people an option to put their children in a school that can give them a Christian worldview. And if you want to ask for headaches, start a school. Because church members have kids over there, the kids get out of order, they come to me because they are church members, they want me to spare their kid from being expelled, the rules are right here, and some of them will say, well, we are not even, we will leave the church. Well, they just have to leave the church. There are certain standards you have to have, and I tell you, keeping the standards, not legalism, but having a standard that everybody has to understand takes a lot of stress off of the leader. Because you can turn and say, okay, I know you have got an issue here, where did we go wrong? Are our rules not good? Do you want us to change these rules? Would you really like it if this person over here did the same thing your son did? And so you have got a standard to go by, and we have had some excellent people put those documents together, and really we do not have, we have a couple maybe over 10 years instances where a family withdrew from the church because their child got in trouble at school. But you still get all the headaches that come with that. And, you know, I think a lot of ministers, I think their stress comes from their home. You know, maybe the wife

does not understand the sacrifice that has to be made, and maybe he does not understand that he cannot be a 24 hour a day pastor, he has got to take time away from that to be, not only with his family, but to just be with the Lord. And so, that is where I come from all these years, I have told our guys I said listen, if you do not love these people you really need to leave. Cause if you do not love them, you are violating a command of God to take care of you. He said give, and it shall be given onto you. And that is not just money, I think that is a principle. And so if we give out love instead of just trying to get them to do something for us, God sees to it that we get fed, He sees to it that we get encouraged, and comforted along the way. And sometimes, I mean, if we did not have that we would be sitting alone in a room like we were in a cell not knowing what to do. And I can understand why people would quit. I mean, the pressures undulate during the year, and that is a whole different picture but, there are times when you just feel like, you know man, I just cannot carry this anymore. I need to get somebody else to do this. I felt that a couple of times through the years but, not really, I mean it is not something I dwell with, I enjoy what I am doing. And I like the people, I enjoy being with the people, I am happy when I am down here, I am happy when I am in my study at home, and I am glad to help somebody. But, I guess I am not a good, typical person because I do not really, I do not really pay as much attention to the stress because I think if you focus on it, it gets worse. You dwell, if you ruminate over what is negative in your life, like [football team] losing, and I am an [football team] fan, if you ruminate on that, you are just going to get sticky with it, you know? You have got to lift your eyes out of that somehow or other, and that is the discipline a pastor has to turn to God's word. I read through the Psalms constantly, whether it is a negative Psalm, an imprecatory Psalm, or whether, or it is a Psalm of comfort or whatever, it seemed that God meets every emotional need, and concern, and issue in your life. Somewhere in the Proverbs and Psalms area over there, and then you can find that same thing over in the New Testament. And so, in my private life when something comes up, I am already doing that anyway, once I get up in the morning, but I just go back and read some more, and it is very encouraging.

Speaker 1: You talked about a couple of times maybe in your ministry, your tenure here, where you may have experienced stress where, you noticed it, you felt it. Could you, explain what that felt like? And how did you noticed that you were being overwhelmed? Was it a feeling that you had? Was it something you noticed, your perspective of your job? What was it?

Speaker 2: Yeah, I do not know how your body talks to you, but for years I ran marathons, and I trained, and did all that, and you learn to run through bad experiences and that is helpful, it is very helpful. But, when I get really under the pressure, and I am trying to sleep at night, I have a hard time sleeping. I wake up and at times, I just talked to my doctor a little while ago, he is a good friend of mine, we were talking about something else but, I begin to feel like I am, my body is just, the outside of my body is just kind of heating up, and I get, I do not get nervous but I get tense. And I can tell, I need to back away, I need to take a deep breath here. And, I used to do that in running a marathon, I get to a place about 18 and a half miles, when you say, man I am going to quit, this is killing me. And then you realize, you are going to break through that wall, but you have got to have some experience breaking through the wall to overcome it easier. And I think every pastor has his limits, and you can get to that limitation, and however you react to it when you get very quiet, or you get very talkative, or you just close yourself in a room, or you have got to get out and go hunting, whatever it is, I think everybody realizes that something is not right here. And, I tell you I have been blessed with a wonderful medical doctor who knows the Lord, and he understands stress, and pressure, and obligation, and all of that, and he has coached me through the couple of times that I really, I did not think I would make it through. In fact, and example would be when my son got killed [participant becomes emotional].

Speaker 1: Oh really? Wow, how long ago was that?

Speaker 2: 1992.

Speaker 1: Wow.

Speaker 2: I came here in 78, and he died in an automobile accident.

Speaker 1: Oh my goodness.

Speaker 2: He had a little 8-month-old girl, and I felt the pressure of taking this family, and moved them into my house that day. And so, when you lose a child, your wife has more problem with it than you do, because she has had this baby inside her body. We can try our best, we cannot get to where the mother is in that issue. And to see her agonizing, and fearful of life, that something will happen to one of the other kids. And I am going to tell you, and then to know that you have got to get up and preach this coming Sunday and the next?!? I skipped one Sunday, and I came back and preached. And these people are the most gracious people, I mean, personnel committee said listen, take as much time as you want off. I said, well, I will take time and be with my wife and my children, cause one of the children was already away from home in college, one is in college and one had already gotten married, but they gave me space, but I process things and overcome things by trying to be productive. In other words, working is a catharsis for me, give me a message that I am supposed to preach, let me get into research on it. Cause I would, I would find time that I just had to shut the books down, but it was at that same period of time in the life of our church, that we had grown, we had more than doubled in size since 1978 and I had to go to a different, well, a different structure of leadership. I could no longer manage all of the personnel and be the administrator of the church, and be the pastoral minister of the church. It was draining me, plus I was very weak during that time, you just, it is just the way it is. Now, I guess if a person was going through marital problems, or a person had somebody you know, trying to kick them out of the church or whatever, those would be different kinds of stresses that you go through. And people may not be as sympathetic with you there, but they were so sympathetic that we just, we processed it over a period of time, and it was interesting because we were not, we were into tennis and outdoor activities, and all, my wife and I, and we were not really into football, you know, stuff. But we learned, we liked [football team], we liked, we remembered [coach's name], and all this kind of stuff. In the end of the year in 1992, he died on April the 2nd, a couple in our church called us and said, would you like to go to the [football] game? It was going to determine the national championship, and they said, would you like to go? And we said, no, we just do not feel like going, we feel like we just need to stay home and relax. Because we were in the Christmas season, and that was a, that is always a pressurized situation when you lose a family member, but, they would not take no for an answer. They said, well we have already bought you a package. Hotel room for 3 days and 3 nights, tickets, special events, and all this, and so we got to thinking, well you know, these people really care for us, and we did not know them real well, but we finally said, okay we will try. We thought we would just be a drag on everybody, but two other couples came in with them, and we went down there, and it was like we were released. We had gotten where we did not think we would ever smile again, and we were released in the sense that we were, we realized that we could get beyond this. It is a question, will I ever be normal again? And the answer is, no. You have to discover for yourself a new normal in life, and that normal has to respect this person, but you can no longer have them with you. And that is a thing God has to do all by Himself, I mean, I do not think anybody else can help us. But those people, helped us through that time, and became lifelong friends [participant becomes emotional again].

Speaker 1: Really? From that point forward?

Speaker 2: Yeah.

Speaker 1: Wow.

Speaker 2: My wife is on her way back from [city] right now.

Speaker 1: Oh really?

Speaker 2: She got sick on her way home, and they had to stop. She is traveling with the lady who took us to [city].

Speaker 1: Really? And they went to the championship game this time?

Speaker 2: They went down there.

Speaker 1: Wow.

Speaker 2: So, that was a, that was a normally stressful time. But the thing that really compounded was, I felt like I was not getting my job done. I am kind of a creature of habit, I want to do what I have been called to do, and I get under pressure if I do not get it done. And I put that pressure on myself, now that is when I have to step aside, and my doctor taught me this, he said, when you get out of fellowship with the Lord, that is because of sin, and you need to confess your... Now he is treating me like I am, he is the pastor, he said, you need, you will have to confess your sins. He said, I am not telling you anything you do not know, but when you think you are out of fellowship with the Lord because you feel badly that you did not get this done, or you feel like there is pressure on you, or whatever, he said, you can pray all day and read the Bible all day, but that is not going to help you if it happens to be an emotional pressure. Because spiritual and emotional things interact, but they do not replace each other. And so he said, the only way you can replace emotional energy that is being expended, is to do something emotionally positive, and good, makes you feel good. Like if you like to run, get out there and run. If you like to get out on a boat and go fishing, go fishing because you get in that environment, and it is pleasing to you, it is not negative, it is a pleasing, positive experience, and it ministers to your emotional well being, makes you feel better. And then he said, you love to go to the beach, we would go to [beach name] all the time down there. He said, let me tell you, you can go to the beach everyday that you want to, without even going to the beach. He said, when you feel this pressure building up, go to your office, sit down in your chair like this, and just close your eyes and think about the last time you were down there, and listen to the waves as they come in, that is a mental discipline, and that is not some kind of a meditation, foreign ideal, it is called Christian self-talk. And you talk about those things, you imagine those things, and he said, if you really want to get strong at this, he said, get 5 things that have happened in your life that are really pleasing to you. I mean, just really, they were high times, there is no guilt attached to them, I mean it just, a blessing of the Lord, I mean, something where God stepped in and He did something in your life. As simple as even getting to go to the beach, and run around out there for a while, and then sit down early in the morning before anybody else is out there, and listen to the waves lap, and then the seagulls. You can, if you concentrate on a memory, you will remember more of it, and more of it, and more of it. And so, I took his challenge and after our son died, as I said, we took our little granddaughter and our daughter in law in. She was 8 months old, and she was, [son's name] was, he was so, he walked in the room, she was coming to him, and he just loved that, big old, big boy. And she started staying with us and started living with us, and then I got them a condominium, and she would come over and visit. And there was one Sunday when everybody came in to eat, one of the kids was home and her name is [daughter's name], she had on a little red dress, with little black shoes, and she was in the kitchen and she came sailing around the door, and I was sitting in my La-Z-Boy chair being a lazy boy after church. And she came running at me and she was saying, Granddaddy, Granddaddy, Granddaddy, and if I had not caught her, she would have, she

would have landed on her face, and I caught her up in my arms, and she hugged my neck, and she said, I love Granddaddy, I love you Granddaddy, and then she hugged me and then she is gone again. But to see the expression on her face and all that is so pleasing. And so, if you, if it is emotional stress, you need to get some emotional fuel, you need to put something in your fuel tank. And as a result of that, I have taught that to hundreds of people in counseling over the years, and it has really paid off because people come in here and say, "I feel like I am backsliding, I do not know what is wrong. I am numb, and I pray and I do not think God is even listening. I am reading my Bible, and I do not even really want to read my Bible, what is wrong with me?" And I asked them I said, well is there something, I am just being honest, are you, are you doing something you should not be doing? Are you feeding a habit that is dishonoring to God? And when they say, yes, then I say, well let's get in the Bible and let's confess this sin, let's get this thing out of the way, because God is ready to forgive you right now, he is on your side. And then if we do not get there, I say well, how are you feeling physically? When is the last time you had a checkup to see if your thyroid gland was working right? Or when you, when is the last time you had your blood work done to see if your sugar is all right? Because a lot of things can cause you to get out of sync. So, I try to get them to go get to the doctor, now if they still do not get it, I do not tell them about the other until the end. All right I say, there is one other area we need to fish in, what are you doing that you really enjoy? Has no guilt attached to it, and when it is over with you feel better than you did when you started? And sadly, most people do not have anything, especially preachers. We have got our job, we have got our family, we have got guilt because we do not get to be with our family all the time, or we got guilt because we do not get to study enough, all these things going on. But few people that I have talked to, especially my staff and others, have regulated their life to the point that when they feel the pressure building up they go down the pecking order. Is there something I am missing here in our relationship with the Lord? Is there something that I need to have checked? Cause a lot them, see most people do not want to go to the doctor, they will go 20 years without going to the doctor, and then die of cancer because they did not get it diagnosed. So, but when we come to that emotional area and we start, and I start asking, what would you like to do that is enjoyable? What have you ever done that you really enjoyed? And some of them say, well, I want to go to the mountains, I like to go to the mountains. Well the problem with some of us preachers and some of our members, we do not have the money to just go off to the mountains any time we want to, or to the beach anywhere we want to, or whatever. And a lot of people think that going to a ball game is going to relieve, it only relieves them if their team plays well and wins because it is a bummer if it does not, you know. And it is stress because you are playing every play with them, and I do not even watch the ball games on TV, I, it is distracting to me because they play on Saturday and I do not want anything gumming up my mind. And so, for what that is worth, that has helped me through the years to handle the ups and down, we are all, we are all going through this all the time, you know there is no straight line.

Speaker 1: That is good. You know, something that you said there, some of the research that comes from the precedent literature, there is actually a lady by the name of Christina Maslach and she is a secular researcher that has done a lot of work in this field. And she has created a formula, she says, this is what leads to burnout, and she says, it starts with emotional exhaustion, and she says, this is when you have, you give, and give, and give, and give, and give but nothing ever gets put back in. She says, that leads to what they call depersonalization. And so, interestingly, two of the top occupations that experience burnout the most is pastors and nurses, or therapists, people who are dealing with people's problems a lot, and they pour so much of their social energy into that. And she makes a very interesting point, she says, most of these people, the reason they got into that field was because of people, they wanted to help people, and then they get to this point that they become so emotionally exhausted that they actually turn, and actually see the people as the reason that they feel so bad, which then leads to.

Speaker 2: I do not want to talk to another person, I do not want another phone call.

Speaker 1: I do not want to see anybody else, I do not want to hear anyone's problems.

Speaker 2: I have been there.

Speaker 1: And then that leads to a deficiency in personal accomplishment, which she says, is where burnout begins. You get to the point where you feel like "I am just on a rat wheel; no one is going to listen to me, it is never going to get any better," and you just keep running through that. And you articulated most of those feelings to a tee.

Speaker 2: See here is the thing, you can either continue down that road, which leads to darker, darker things, or you can see that, you said, how do you know when you're getting to one, you can see, okay, I am getting a barrier here, I am skimming, I am not really paying attention to what I am doing, I am not interested in hearing somebody's problem, or whatever. If you get that as a warning, and turn around and go back and start working on the emotions, like I said, and maybe back away for a little bit, and catch your breath. But the truth is, most people who get in that state really thrive more when they are giving than they do when they are receiving. And so if they do not kick back into that, subliminally, I think we feel like we are not worthy, and that even makes the thing worse, if we are not worthy, we are not qualified, and you know, and then you want to quit.

Speaker 1: That is interesting because that feeds back to the statistics we were talking about, you know, the so many do not feel like they are qualified to do the ministry that has been placed on them. Very, very interesting insights that you have had. I want to talk a little bit about your family. How, over these years you have been here, have you seen your family impacted by the stress of ministry? And I guess particularly, have your kids or your wife ever had a season in life that they ever became negative towards the church? And how did you either protect them or help them through that to come to grips with it?

Speaker 2: I do not think any of our children ever went through it, cause when we moved here our oldest son was 18. He was graduating from high school that year, and so he missed out on his, and he was not a happy camper. It was not because of the church, he was not, he just felt uprooted and he did not adjust well when he first came here. But he is the kind of person who really likes to have 2 and 3 best friends, and he is a big outdoors man, hunting, fishing, and all that, and he found some people and they were just bonded like that. But as far as the church, he did not feel like the church was putting any stress on him or, now he did complain about the church we were in before we came here that there were some men who it see you as the preacher's boy, and you cannot do that, or you should not be doing that. And he resented that, that just because he is the preacher's boy, he cannot get out and do, and he was not doing anything wrong, he just, you cannot get out and run down the street and do whatever, you know, I do not even know what they were talking about. Our youngest son is 10 years younger, he was 1 of the more popular kids in the church. And everybody liked him, and everybody knew him, he was very personable, he is a people type people, and now he is a computer scientist. How do you figure that out? But our daughter in between, she was very gregarious and so she fit in. She was in the GAs and all that sort of stuff, and so they fit in pretty good. Now my wife was a different issue. She loved being in [location], and she wanted to stay in [location], she did not want to move to [location], she wanted to be a [state] girl. And yet she had said whatever you feel God wants us to do, I will do it. And for the first several years after we were here, it was just, she was always disgruntled in some way or other, not that she was bugging anybody about it, it is just that, if I got a call and I had to leave and leave something, the kids were fine with it, but she was not fine with it. She said, anybody calls you, you are ready to go and when we call you, you have got to go take care of them first. And so, I had to work with that, but an interesting thing happened is that we continued to stay here, she became more passionate about helping people that

were hurting. I mean, they were really in bad shape, like if they lost a child, but, it took until 1992 for her to get there, but she began to get interested in little children and people who were going through hardships, especially women. And she would go see them, and she would take them food, and she would do all those things. And so when she got into that, again, it is that thing, give, and it is coming back to you, she began to settle in, and people like her, they call her [name], and so. We did not have a lot of the stuff that a lot of people have, and that, I do not know why we did not do anything, I tell people, it is all by grace. And I just thank the Lord that we did not have that.

Speaker 1: Wow, that is amazing. Do you feel like that when things happen at the church, maybe even something personally towards you, that you have a responsibility to protect your wife from it? Or do you all have a relationship where you tell her everything that is happening around here and she handles it well?

Speaker 2: I do not tell her everything that happens around here because, she will worry about it, you know, it bothers her. And if it is something negative, she is going to go and want to take up for me. She is going to speak to them about it, but, and I am the same way, I am a confrontationist, I do not like to be but if there is somebody that has got a rub against me, or against the church, or whatever, I go straight to them as quickly as I can and I say, I understand you have got a complaint, and I want to know what it is. Because if I have done something wrong that is a hurt to you, I certainly did not know it and I want to get this straightened out right now. And so, that is when you find out that most people that stir the pot are cowards. They do not want you coming and sitting down, and talking straight to them, and saying listen, I am your brother, I am here to help you, if I did something tell me about it cause we are going to get it straightened out. But, if I find out... for instance one time I went to a guy, he is one of my best friends in the church for years, and he was spreading the gossip about that, I needed to leave the church, I had been here too long, you know. And so, and the reason was because I had invested some money in a time share, not a time share, but in a condominium with some other church members. Well, it just gave us a place to stay, you know, it really was not anybody's business, but, as a result of that he began to say that. Well, I found out about it and I went to see him, and he got really nervous and so I said, I am here because first of all what you are saying is a lie, it is not true, what you are saying is not true. He said, well I was told with good authority, I said, that is just it, you have believed a lie which has now made you a liar. When you tell something that is not true, it is a lie, whether you knew it was not true, or did not, or whatever, you have put yourself in a posture where you have driven a wedge between you and me, and you are going to have to go back and tell that person that you are sorry. The last one you said something to, you are going to have to go back and you are going to find out what it means to try to get those feathers back in the piddle again. And I said that, until that happens, we have got a problem here. And he kept saying, well, I was just going by what I knew. And I told him, I want to tell you something, you better not make a habit out of it.

Speaker 1: Did that guy hang around very much longer?

Speaker 2: He got straightened out in about a year, he is still in the church.

Speaker 1: Is he really?

Speaker 2: Yeah.

Speaker 1: Wow, that is pretty amazing.

Speaker 2: It is, because I am telling you, I wanted to get in the flesh real bad that day. And sometimes, you know, everybody loses their cool every once in a while, but if we can just not let it happen, you know, if we can just stuff it if we have to, I know that is not always a good thing to do, but we save ourselves a lot of problems in life.

Speaker 1: Yeah, that is good. Let me ask you quickly 2 things that I want to hit on before our time comes up, one is disciplines that you have in your life. Both early on in your ministry and maybe even some that you have developed because of going through some things. What would you say are the most powerful disciplines that you have spiritually and physically that you put into your routine, and you make sure you do these because they help you to minimize the impact of stress? And how many of them did you develop over the years because of going through it?

Speaker 2: Yeah, well that is a big question there. I would start, I guess with the, go back to the emotional thing, the discipline of stopping and getting into a relaxing situation so that you do not get to the place where your candle is about to burn out. The discipline of doing that is not as easy as people think because I am wired, if you give me a job I am going to complete the job, and I am going to do it the best I can. And if something is getting in the way, even my tiredness or, emotional strain, or whatever, that adds intensity to what I have going on so, I have learned by hard knocks to come to that wall when I begin to feel that, and to back away and say, you know, I do not have to do this right now. I can turn this back to them where I can, I mean, God has another way for this to be done because it is not healthy for me. And so, I will go do, think about, my little granddaughter, or whatever, or the beach, or my wife and I, we had a, we do not get to do it right now because she has got some physical issues going on but. Every quarter we would drive to [city name], or somewhere, maybe [city name], we would leave on a Friday, and spend Friday evening we would go out to some nice restaurant, not, you do not have to spend a hundred dollar plate, but a nice place that we enjoy. And we would spend the night, and we would be this, it was kind of a mini honeymoon just to get together with no distractions, we would talk all the way there, and kind of, anything that we have gotten crossed on, we can talk it out, or if it deals with the kids we can talk that out. And I can listen to her, she can listen to me, and we come back on Saturday afternoon, usually we drive to [name of shopping center], the big shopping center, and she get to go, and she likes to look around and things. And we would come home and I go to my study every Saturday at 6 o'clock to go over all my notes, and be sure everything is in place that I have not skipped something, and I know, people are creatures of habit, so people in a church normally sit in the same places every Sunday, right? Well, we had 2 services, which is kind of confusing to me but, I preach in the 9:30 service, and I know basically where everybody is going to sit, and I know if they are going through a problem. And when I look out there this coming Sunday, I know that there is going to be a doctor's wife sitting right over here whose mother just died, and I did her funeral, and whose son is giving her some trouble, and her heart is broken. So, I am sitting there on Saturday night and I am thinking, she is going to be there, and here is this guy over here, he has talked about divorcing his wife, here is a guy over here just got a promotion in his work. What is what I am going to say going to mean to them if anything? So, if I am just preaching a sermon to preach a sermon, I am asking questions, God, is this illustration really necessary or is it just, I like it? You know? And, so I go through a pattern of that, and I am thinking about those people sitting out there, and I do not preach necessarily just to meet their needs, what I am preaching is I want to be sure that what I say is that absolute truth, and that they understand it, that it is simple enough to grasp in an emotional state like they are. Because, it is like counseling to a thousand people all at the same time. And because, if this person has a problem, somebody else has another problem, same problem, it is all over the place, and that gives me an emotional high. Emotionally that makes me feel good if I think I am helping those people out there, I do not feel like it is draining, I think I am feeding them, you know. And that has been a very helpful thing, it is a discipline to, you know, not go somewhere on Saturday night, I mean, if somebody invited me to go out to eat, I would say, well, lets go at 4:30, and they would do that. But that is in the emotional area, and then there are some other things where you have to distance yourself. In the spiritual area, there have been times in my life when, I would fast and pray, a water only fast for like 21 days at a time. I would do that

and, I would do it for physical healing, I would do it for emotional healing, I would do it just to, just to get closer to the Lord, and it does pay off. As I develop through the years, I came up with a pretty bad thyroid issue, and so you cannot really fast, at least not that kind of fast. You can do a partial fast or whatever. And then there was a long period there where I fasted every Wednesday, I would just not eat anything Wednesday. And that began to get to me because I had to do Wednesday prayer meeting and I had not eaten anything all day, and so I was kind of drained, so I moved it to Thursday. I moved it one day over, thank you Lord. And, but the main thing I do spiritually is, I read the Bible for my own benefit. I read the Bible with the idea, that I have not discovered everything in there yet, and I, if God wants to say something to me, He is going to say it through the Bible most likely. And so, I read it first thing every morning, I want to read the Bible, I read it systematically, I read through the Old Testament, the New Testament at the same time, I read in the Psalms, and I know where I am going to be everyday, so if God wants to say something to me, he is right on time. I mean, it is unbelievable how I will be struggling with something, or have a decision in the church to make, and I will open up the Bible, and I will start reading and God is just nurturing me. Especially out of Psalms, he is just nurturing me, and saying, listen, I got you, I got this one. And, that is such a peaceful beginning of the day, and I learned from, Martyn Lloyd Jones, he said, "I always pray after I read." Because prayer, you can, your mind can run around but if you read and get focused, then you pray. And so, I have developed that as a good habit I do. Like right now, my wife is still trying to get home, and I have the house to myself, I come in after I leave the church, I got in yesterday at 6, and I just sat down in my chair, and I just meditate on the scripture, I read, I might read some more, and pray, and it is for my benefit. I am not doing it to study, or really to learn academic type things, but it really does pay off. And of course, another thing physically, as I always was able to get out and run, and that, everybody knows that helps you, that helps your emotions, keeps you balanced in certain ways. But, this physical problem I have has caused my heart to, I have congestive heart failure, and I have a little unit in here that keeps me going because the electrical part of my heart died in 2012. So, I am, and I cannot just get out there and run cause this thing is a little loose, boom, boom, boom, and the doctor said you need to walk, so I walked but then I sneak a little run in between, a little slow run. But, in the years that I was running, about 30 years I ran 1500 miles a year at least, and so I not only stayed in good shape, I had energy. Energy expended makes energy that comes back into you, again, give and it comes back to you.

Speaker 1: That is good.

Speaker 2: But those are the things that I have done, the thing of going off with my wife every so often, it is unbelievable what that does for your marriage. I mean, as a pastor, you mentioned this a while ago, a pastor deals with things that do not need to be said outside the person who said it to them and the person who heard it. I mean, I had a woman come in one time and admit that she murdered her child.

Speaker 1: Wow.

Speaker 2: And she needed, she wanted to get right, but she said I don't want to go to jail. And I said, well you have told me something now, I have got to say, I have got to tell this, I cannot keep this, and I told her ahead of time, you are going to tell me something that is a crime or whatever, do not tell it to me unless you want me to do something, because I am going to be honest. And that is the worst thing that I have ever had, and to say that, and even that came out all right. She did have to go to prison, but, she got the victory over it spiritually, and I do not know how you live with that in your life but, she was not even a member of our church, but, I have a degree in psychology and all that, and so the word got out, so she would not go to her own pastor. But, but here are things that people tell you, that they say "well, you know, please do not tell anybody else." Well, I assume that anybody else means, my children, my wife, my mother, my daddy, I do not

tell anybody else that, and all you have to do is violate that one time and the devil will see to it that somebody hears about it, and they will not come get any help because they cannot trust you. So, you have got to, you have got to stay with that 38 years in a row, you have got to shut that down. So, there are things that I know are going on, that are happening, and my wife does not know what is going on and happening, and my wife would like to know everything about everything, like, I guess most women are like that. And so, we are driving along, to [city name] or wherever, and she says, did you know so and so? And I said well, where did you hear that? And she said, well, so and so said that this person has got cancer and they are not telling anybody. I said well, I never tell her that I know, I beat around the bush somehow or other, because I slipped on it one time, I said, yeah, I knew about it, and she felt closed out. She feels like she is in the ministry here too, I need to know what is going on. And so, I just learned to, I did not tell a lie, I just ignored her question. That's just, a simple way to avoid problems, but I really do believe if they do not feel like they are part of your world, that hinders the intimacy. You know growing together emotionally and sympathizing with each other because nobody can comfort me like my wife. I mean, she says, it is going to be all right. Everything is going to turn out fine, and nobody can comfort her like I can. I tell her, I said, "listen, I know this is a bad experience." I failed when our son died because I assumed that she was handling it like I was handling it, and I do not have to tell you this on tape, but I found out during that process I was dead wrong and she did not need anybody telling her you need to read your Bible, you need to do this, you need to do this, you need to get out and walk, and get out and go some. She did not need anybody to tell her anything because, her 'doing' was shut down emotionally. It just shut down. She was hurting so bad she could not even express how bad she hurt. And, I would say, "lets go out and eat," and she would respond, "I do not feel like going." "Oh come on, it will make you feel better." "no." I learned that she is getting mad at me, "you just do not understand, do you?" And I thought I did, but, who understands how a woman handles things? You know?

Speaker 1: Yeah, I mean that is powerful.

Speaker 2: And I will tell you how I found out. I came in on my son's birthday, it was August the 3rd, I came over here to the office because I was working, August the 3rd. But I got to feeling bad about being here on his birthday, and her being at home by herself, and so, I just told my secretary then, I said listen, I am going to cancel everything for the rest of the day, I am going to go back home. It is [son's name] birthday. So, I go home, and we built a beautiful home when our family was there, and I came in on, I came in the garage, and I got on the main level. Our bedroom is built like a suite, off to the side, and there were two doors before you could even get into it, it was quiet in there, and I came in and all the lights were turned off and it was kind of a rainy day. And, I got to thinking, where is she? Her car was in the garage, and then I got scared, I said, she has done something. So, I walked into the foyer, I went through the first door, and I heard a noise in there and I could not tell what it was, it was not anybody talking, it was just kind of a low moan, I guess it was. And so, I eased the door open, and I looked at her, she was curled up in a fetal position, and she was shaking all over. And I said, what is wrong? She said, I feel like I am having him all over again. [participant begins to weep].

Speaker 1: Wow.

Speaker 2: [In a broken voice] That is when I knew I could not get to where she was. I just, took off, y coat and tie and I laid down beside her, and just held her for hours until she started calming down. But, there is something about the wife being on the same wavelength with you, that makes her feel like she is part of what you are doing. Now, if she does not feel like she is part of what you are doing, that is a big negative because you know you are not pleasing her, and it is not your deal to always please somebody, but you do need to make her feel like she is a part of the thing. And those two things are in conflict in the ministry, and I think it would be good if everybody sat down with their

wife and just talked about that. Because, there are some limitations to what we can do and do well, and it was after that that I started telling everybody who lost a child. I said listen, your wife is in a deeper pit than you. And, I just buried a little 9-year-old boy last December, he had Leukemia and they could not pull him out of it, and his little mother is just like my wife. Now, my wife can talk to her.

Speaker 1: And walk her through it.

Speaker 2: Yeah, I can ask her questions, she says, yes, no. But when my wife sat down beside her, and... she knew... she knows what has been her background, she started asking my wife questions about so many different things. And they started a conversation that did not have anything to do with the loss of her son, but she found somebody she could identify with, and that may be as how we minister to people, because they feel like, "Hey listen, this person is not just telling me what they think, they are telling me what they know, I mean, they have been there," you know? And you must go through some of those things Jack, you must go through some of them to be a good pastor. I mean, if the servant is no better than his master. If Jesus went through what he went through, we can go through the same thing because every negative thing we have in our life, whether it is going through a stressful marriage, or a child that rebels, or whatever it is, opens up a room in your life to host people that are going through the same thing who would never come in if they did not know. I was in a group meeting, a large group of people, a man, who was not even a member of our church was there and I walked up to him and I had heard that his son had died. And, I told him, I said, "I am so sorry for what your family is going through right now," he said, "thank you." I said, "my son died." When I said that, tears came to his eyes, he grabbed me, he is a big old guy, he grabbed me and he said, nobody understands. I said, I understand. Well, I did not volunteer to go through that, nor to help that guy, but, if God wants to do that, I need to acquiesce to his will. And so, some of the problems we have are training on the job. Now, I do not like problems. I do not like suffering. I do not like stress and tribulation and all that, but you have got to have some along the way. And I got this theory that there is somebody in your church, or my church, there is somebody that has been through something that another person is going through. There is hardly anybody in our church that does not face something that hasn't been experienced already by somebody. That is the reason we need that fellowship, we need that person sitting at their side. We do not need somebody that read a book about it, you know, even though we try to help. But that is the intimacy and the Koinonia, the 'bodyness' of the body you know? And, we have tried to develop that here. These are the most loving, gracious people I have ever been around, I mean, I am even going to stay here after I step down. I am going to be here for 5 years as the pastor emeritus, and by that time the new guy is going to be flying off, they say that you can be called to a church but you will not become the pastor, until about 5 years.

Speaker 1: That is very true. You have been so kind and if you could oblige me one last question and all you need to do is provide a short concise answer and I will be on my way.

Speaker 2: Okay.

Speaker 1: If you were to speak to a man who has taken his first ministry job, out of Seminary, he is walking into his first church, what would be, if you could only tell him one thing, what would be the most practical advice from all of your years of ministry, to tell him, make sure you do this? What would you say?

Speaker 2: That is an easy answer. I would tell him to get a list of all the people in his church, get a new one, if your church is growing, get a new one every month, and pray for every one of them by name, every week. Pray for them whether you like them or not, whether they like you or not, pray for them, pray for them, pray for them. I have been

doing that now for 38 years. I had people that I prayed out of the church, I had people that were on the edge and they became my closest friends. But when I walk down the street, and I meet somebody, maybe just a regular church member, I can say, I am praying for you and I love you.

Speaker 1: Wow, that is good.

Speaker 2: That has helped me more than anything else. I have seen more people saved, as a result of that, than any other thing I have ever done.

Speaker 1: Really?

Speaker 2: And anytime we have had an anniversary here, somebody gets up, we have children speak, we have teenagers speak, we have young adults speak, and so on, "What do you think about our pastor?" That is the answer to the question, an invariably, one or two of them will say, "he prays for me."

Speaker 1: Wow, wow, that is powerful.

Speaker 2: See, that takes time, you have got to organize it, you have got to work at it. We have over 7,000 members now, and I do not get to pray for all of the people that live all over the world out there, unless they are in the military. But, there is still a pretty healthy list of people there, and I think if you do that, that is where you connect with them, so when you preach, you are not just preaching to them, you are communicating with them, "hey listen, I care for you and I have been studying this stuff so you could understand it better." I mean, I do not expect them to go take Hebrew and Greek, and all that, but they should expect me to take it, and not to get somebody's sermon off the internet and read it to them.

Speaker 1: Yeah, preaching sermons they pulled off somewhere else.

Speaker 2: And the deacon, I mean the elders at the Presbyterian Church, they went to the guy and said, listen, we can read the things you read too, we do not, if you are not going to study, you know, that means you are cutting edges in other ways, and they warned him. They said, you know, we are going to give you like 6 months or whatever, he went right back to fudging on that, and he had some guys that knew how to, were on his computer, and they were checking him out.

Speaker 1: They found where he was kind of running?

Speaker 2: Yeah.

Speaker 1: Wow.

Speaker 2: And so they had to dismiss him, he is out of the ministry.

Speaker 1: Wow.

Speaker 2: That is so sad.

Speaker 1: That is, that is sad.

Speaker 2: Cause the degree you are getting, of course it is a teaching degree too, a PhD and you can do anything once you have got that, mine is a ThD, which is a PhD in our language today but, I did not get that to go teach in a college somewhere. Now, toward the end of my life I may be a guest lecturer or something like that, I have done that in a few of the Seminaries and so on, but the truth is, I did that because I felt like somebody needs to study, and be sure what we are saying is really true, because God will not bless

something that is not true. He cannot do that and be God. And, sure, we may make a mistake in some area, and we may gum it up, but we have a responsibility to search it out for ourselves, and when you step into the pulpit, and you know you have done the best you can to get ready and you are trying to, you are not trying to preach the whole Bible in one day, but you have got, I got this area covered and you can apply it to their life, you leave out of there feeling good, you know, you know.

Speaker 1: That is so good! Thank you, and that is it. I really appreciate it, you have been so kind and generous with your time!

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Speaker 1: I think I want to start with this question, “In what ways did you experience stress, where did the stress of your ministry come from the most? Could you identify a certain source?”

Speaker 2: Yes, I think so. First, I have to say this, every church is different, and every size church is different. Probably the hardest church to pastor is the small church. A large church, and I've pastored every kind of church. My first church was open country church, there wasn't a store within 3 miles. The people lived on multiple hundreds of acres, half mile apart houses, and that's from a small town of 365 people and I buried 21 of them through the years. So, a small town, rural town, dead, dying town. My next one was in a town of about 40,000, and then moved into the large cities at that time, [city name], and then [city name], back to [city name], and [city name], and [city name]. That's the hardest kind of church to pastor. Because a large church, someone asked me how do you direct them, I said it's kind of like an avalanche, you just kind of hope you don't get buried by it but it'll run itself. And so, that has to be, at least in the thought process as we answer these questions. The smaller churches are difficult because you can see everybody. I used to visit everybody in my church for a while. When I went to my first church, and I had several families, I'd visit them on Saturday and they'd be in church on Sunday. If I didn't go by on Saturday, they wouldn't come to church on Sunday. So, when the churches are small you have a different dynamic. You can actually be in everybody's home, you can actually sit down with them and build a relationship with them. The key, though, in every size church, is building strong relationships. And to do that, you have to value people. It's sad that many pastors look at people as problems they have to overcome instead of saying these people are important people, they are significant people. I have something, and my job is to help them. I have something I can share with them. You value people, if you don't value people you can always have problems. If you look at people, and particularly negative people, there will always be somebody at the church who is negative. Win them over, don't just assume because they gave the last 4 pastors difficulties that they're going to give you difficulties. If they seem to be, take time to minister. I had a family, I'll give you an illustration, I had a family in one church that were really sweet people. We were neighbors, but she was a preacher's kid, it was a second marriage for both of them, he was one of these guys that if he was a hunter he would shoot first and then aim, you know, type A personality. Wonderful people, but they were always on the edge of being mad. What did I do? They had a daughter, the two of them, second marriage, they had a daughter that we arrived just after she was born. That girl, loved the girl, we watched her grow up. Every time I left town I wrote her a card, didn't matter whether I was going to Israel or Germany or South America or just to another state, I'd write her a card and say thinking about you, praying for you, so proud of you. I did that through her whole life. She's married now, has a family, and told me the other day because we had a special tribute to her Dad. He was a city employee, on city council, and she said I kept every one of those cards. I didn't know that. She said I have every one of the cards you sent me. The point is, they became, and still are, I get emails nearly every day. They're one of these people that's always sending stuff out. But the point is, if I had tried to keep them happy, I never could have done it because she had her ideas about what a pastor ought to be because her Dad had been a pastor. Of course, you never live up to somebody's Dad. But I won them over because I ministered to their daughter. Really, every card was to the daughter but it was for them. I'll give you another illustration, I had a guy in [city name], he's dead now so I can speak about him, I can name him even. In every business meeting, whatever was spoken of, he was against. So, I set out to just get to know him, and so every time we'd have a business meeting and something would come up, he'd raise an objection. I said [man's name], come on up here, I want to be sure everybody hears what you want to say. He came up on the platform and he gave his objection, then sit down every time. So, we got to be good

friends. In fact, he took me canoeing down the Illinois River in the middle of February, and we camped out that night. I mean it was quite a deal. So, on that trip I said [man's name], you're always negative on things, tell me about that. Well, he said, you know, I'm using his words, you know, he said, I just feel like God wants me to look at the other side of things and give it another viewpoint. And he said I voted against you, I wasn't against you, I just figured if one vote would cause you not to come, you shouldn't come. So, we got to be such good friends, I was here in [city name] and my secretary came in one day and said there's a guy out here wants to see you, he wouldn't tell me his name, he said to tell you there's a canoe attached to the top of his car. Well I knew immediately it was [man's name][laughing]. And so, the point is, you're going to have negative things, don't view that as somebody's against you. They're not against you. Do you know why the average small church pastor has somebody that's always cantankerous? It's because they lose a pastor every 3 years, and they've got to live with whatever that pastor starts. So anytime a pastor tries to do anything significant, he's going to have people that are pulling against him, not because they're mean or because they're against that or because they're against him, but because they know they've got to live with it when he's gone. So, if you understand that, here's the thing, opposition is never against you personally. You can't take criticism and opposition personally. If you do, then you're going to be stressed out all the time. And so, if Jesus was a pastor he'd be getting the same criticism. If you value people and realize your job is to minister to them, love them, then you're not going to get all bent out of shape when there's opposition. That opposition just tells you, you need to take another run at this, you need to give more information. When we went to dual Sunday schools and dual worship services, we took one year, one year, to go into every adult department, every group of workers and utilities, and preschools, and youth, and we took a year of telling them why we were doing it, what the goal was, and to do that you have to split down the middle. You've got to have 50/50. If you have 60/40 or 70/30, you're going to have trouble. But if you can go back to back church service and Sunday school, just flip flop, if you can split down the middle, you don't count the nursery because they're there both times. But, then it's going to be successful. It took a year. When we did it, we split it right down the middle. It was perfect. We took time to inform the people. The problem with many pastors is that they think that all opposition is against them personally and that people are attacking them and challenging their leadership. What they don't realize is leadership is not about authority, it's not about manipulation, it's not about getting what you want. Leadership is about influence, it's about helping people achieve the goals that you want them to achieve and that they need to achieve, and thinking it's their idea. And as their idea, they'll go along with it. You can't just say my way or the highway. A pastor friend of mine got in trouble because every criticism he thought was an attack on him. He never understood, and his attitude was "my way or the highway." He had said how dare you challenge me. Well, duh, sure they're going to challenge you but don't take it personally. The challenges, I was talking to, I took a young man to the airport this morning, he lives with my son who lives next door for 6 years while he was growing up. He played professional football, now he's a coach, and he needed a ride this morning. Of course, I took him to the airport but I told him you learn more from your negative experiences than you do from your positive experiences. You learn more from failure than you do successes. The coaching business is tough business, he's had a job offer down at Texas A&M, and they've offered him the job and he's accepted, but he hasn't heard from them. So, he said I don't know whether they're lying to me or not. He said there's so much in the sports and in the coaching world that you don't really rest until you've got a contract in your hand. And he said he has a good friend that wanted to come be offensive coordinator out of South Carolina, they talked about it, they played ball together, they've been friends forever. He said just about 2 months ago, I stopped hearing from him. He won't return my calls, he won't answer an email, he said you know, if he's got new plans and doesn't want me, that's fine, but why didn't he just tell me? And so, that's hurtful. We're all going to experience that, but that's a good thing. And he made the statement, he said the most I've learned

coaching football is things I don't want to do. And so that goes back to what I'm saying, if you have a bad experience, don't take it, don't get bent out of shape about it, it's a challenge.

Speaker 1: Let me ask something specific. You said, I want to pick up on, you talked about how pastors coming in, and maybe a previous pastor, losing a pastor every 3 years creates this. Do you think there's a wall that you come to in ministry that, you know, you have to push through to achieve the longevity? And could you identify that wall?

Speaker 2: Well, yeah. As a pastor, I can tell you that periodically there are times when you can either get a new call to a new church or a call to the church that you're at. I'm afraid what many pastors do is that they come to that spot and they opt to just bail out and go somewhere else without realizing that every church has its challenges, every church has its negative people, every church has things that, I mean there is not a perfect church. There's not perfect pastors. One of the best advice my Dad told me was son, you're not going to always be right. But he said when you're wrong just admit it. I can't tell you how many times I've had to say to my deacons, when I went to the [church name] the deacons literally told me in a deacons meeting, all the deacons there, we'll follow you anywhere you want, we'll just ask you not to make the same mistake twice. And I can't tell you how many times that I had to, when I was at [church name], I had to come to the deacons and say guys, that didn't work and I apologize, but it won't happen again. So again, I don't know if I'm answering your question, but to say that there are problems and challenges in every church. If you get hung up, if you focus on that, you're going to burn out. Ministry is a terrible vocation. But, it's a wonderful calling. What I do in my book, the first chapter in the book deals with the call to ministry. Boy, if you're not called to ministry, you're going to burn out because the basic cause of burn out is doing the work of the ministry in the strength of the flesh. There are a lot of people, talented, gifted, but they've got good talent but they're doing the work based on their talents and not on God's call. It's God's call that's going to keep you there. It's knowing you can go back, I can go back and show you the spot in the choir in [city name] where I, Saturday night when I surrendered to preach. I can go back to that time and it's as vivid as if it happened yesterday, and it's been 66 years, 67 years now. But if I couldn't have gone back to know God called me, I wouldn't have made it. And I will say, I'll just tell you another quick thing, I don't believe that wife's name] and I ever made a mistake at where we served. And the reason was, it's a long story and I won't bore you with the story, but before we were married, we were listening to records one day at a friend's house. Her parents had brought her up, we courted by mail, basically. We were listening to Frank Sinatra, a love song, and he had a song called *You Are My Everything*. We got to listening to that song and had one of the most meaningful moments with God we've ever had, because we realized that the distance had caused us to focus on it. We wrote letters every day. I was still preaching on the weekends some, I'd get to see her once or twice a month. We met in August and I bought a ring in November, gave it to her in December, and married her the next July. So, I mean things were going fast. I nearly flunked out. The worst grade I ever made was a D in French because I was writing her love notes instead of learning French. But, we realized that we'd really wrapped our lives up in each other and I thought if something happens to her I don't know what I'll do, and she felt the same way. So, we got on our knees on an old couch, at that little white house, and we prayed a prayer something like this. Lord, if something happens to [wife's name] I'm going to keep on preaching. And she prayed Lord, she said if something happens to him I'm going to keep serving you. And then together we said Lord, we want to, for today and for the rest of our lives, we want to commit that our answer is yes. It doesn't matter what you say or where you send us, all you have to do is say this is your will and we've already decided we'll do it. And I can tell you this, after being married now for 60 years, we've served in several churches, plus [business name], and I don't think we've ever made a mistake. I told [friend's name], and our experience in Dallas was a tough experience because the, well it's a long story, but anyway, it was not a wonderful experience but it was a wonderful

learning experience. I told [man's name] just before he died, I was visiting him with him and said Pastor, if I had to do it all over again, I'd still come because I know God sent me there to help you, even though it's not pleasant. I did not come there to be the next pastor, that's what he had said and I told the personnel committee I can't come on that basis. I told him, I said the church has the right to choose the next pastor, you don't. I said I'll come help you but I'm not coming to do that. But I love people too much. I mean I'm not a book worm, I don't want to spend all my time studying sermons and writing books and all that kind of stuff. I don't believe [church name] was a mistake. It was one of the best experiences of our lives because of what we learned, much of it negative, much of it positive. And so, if you know you've been called, and if you've already agreed, "God, whatever you tell me to do my answer is yes," you don't negotiate with God, you don't debate with God, you don't try to make a deal with God. No, you've already answered yes. If your answer is yes, then you're always going to live in the sense of you're being obedient to God. My Dad put it this way, he said wherever you go, assume you'll spend the rest of your life there. He said, "you probably won't." This is back when I was 19 years old, 20 years old, went to my first church. But he said if you assume you'll be there the rest of your life you will give it a lifetime kind of effort where you serve. Burnout comes from you beginning to struggle and trying to make something happen. You feel like everybody is against you and you get preoccupied with the problems rather than with the glory of God, and the calling of God, and the anointing of God. You do that and you're going to burn out. A pastor has to learn to go to bed every night knowing that there are 100 things he didn't get done. Just think about it, and think how many times he has a chance to screw up. I mean, he may, in one single day, preach a sermon, have a baptism, have a wedding, have a funeral.

Speaker 1: How do you see stress in ministry.

Speaker 2: Here's the thing a pastor needs to realize. It can never be his ministry, it has to be our ministry. I remember [pastor friend] was down in [city] at that time and he said you know, [self-reference] and [wife's name] you know, you never can think of [self-reference] without thinking of [wife's name]. That's wonderful because, you know, having said that, what I started to say was, whatever affects the pastor affects the wife more. I told my young friend that I took to the airport this morning, I said now listen I know you understand that the coaching business is a tough business, and criticisms and disappointments roll off of you like a duck, but it doesn't roll off your wife like that. I said you need to be sure you give her a lot of TLC and keep her in the loop because whatever is very easy for you to accept, it's not easy for her to accept. Same way in ministry, you know. I think the pastor needs to realize how important his wife is, and I deeply believe a pastor's first line of ministry is his family. I think that's why the scripture says if a man can't control his own family, how can he lead the church. If he can't lead his own family, how can he lead the church? Now, you can't press that to the extreme. I like the way Chuck Swindell says it, Chuck said, don't feel like you've failed if your kids don't turn out well. Because, he said, in the beginning God only had 2 kids and they were both in love. The point is, a pastor might have kids that fail and that's not saying that you have to have successful kids in every realm of their life in order to be a pastor, but it's just the principals of leadership start with your family. And just like you can't control them, when the time comes you have to let the kids make mistakes, same thing with you in church. I tell everybody don't make changes the first year you're there. Get to know the people. You're not the pastor just because your name is on the stationary or on the sign out front of the church, you become the pastor by earning the right to be the pastor. So, don't make sudden changes, just get in there and love the people, build relationships with them, and once they trust you they'll follow you anywhere. But the trust factor of pastors over the years, when I was a young man, the pastor was the prominent man in the community. The church was the center of activities. You probably know this, but schools would never plan anything on Sunday or Wednesdays, those were church days, church night. Nowadays school is the biggest competitors that churches

have. That wasn't true 60 years ago. But, neither is the pastor still the most respected man in the community. The most respected man in most communities is the pharmacist. And so, the attitude toward pastors has greatly changed. If pastors think just because they voted you to be the pastor you can go in there and everything is going to be hunky dory, it's just not going to be that way. There are challenges, and the only way to overcome challenges and to deal with stress is to value people, build relationships with people, respect people, pour your life into people, and don't take things personally. It all starts at home.

Speaker 1: Do you ever feel like there are ever things going on in the church that you felt like you had to protect your wife from, or did you feel more like you tell her everything?

Speaker 2: Well, that is a very good question, better than you know, because that has been something [wife's name] and I have talked a lot about. Of course, the concern that most wives have is that husbands don't talk. Women need to talk 10,000 words a day and men don't need that much conversation. But, you ought to be free to tell your wife everything, but there's some things she doesn't need to know. She doesn't need to know every time you get a nasty letter or ugly phone call, or every time somebody challenges you about something. I'll give you a good illustration, when we were in another city, our church had, back before the schools had kindergartens, we had the largest kindergarten in the city, [city name], big city. We had 125 kindergarten kids, very successful. The treasurer of the kindergarten, she's dead now, too. But that was [wife's name] best friend. Well, I'm a young pastor, I was 26 years old when I went there. One of the deacons was chair of the kindergarten committee and one day the director came in to me and said you know, the teachers have been going down to H and B to cash their checks, and last week they wouldn't cash their checks. They said it was because the checks had been bouncing. We got to checking and I made the call to [man's name] of the Chairman Committee, (a dear friend until he died, great family), to tell him about it. We got to checking into it and found out that [wife's friend], who had the kindergarten account, handling lots of money, she had no accountability, plus complete access, no supervision, no accounting, no auditing. And in the process, she had stolen over a 30-year period, we didn't go back any further than that, enough to buy her a new Buick. I did not tell [wife's name] about it until it was a done deal because I knew how painful it would be for her. And it was painful, but I didn't come home and tell her at first what was going on. I think you have to make sure you're at a point where you need to tell her. Knowing how things hurt her worse than it hurt me, you don't want to therefore dump stuff on her. Now, from her perspective, she'd like to know everything. I just say hon, there's some things that it's best for you not to know. So, I don't have a way to say what you should tell her and don't tell her, but if there are things that impact you emotionally, if there are things that make you be moody and distant, and uncommunicating, then you need to tell her those things.

Speaker 1: What about your kids?

Speaker 2: You know, the greatest compliment I've ever had is my kids have said that Dad was always the same in the pulpit as he was at home. They said what you see is what you get. I had, in fact, this is not what I would recommend, but as a young pastor I was so sensitive to my wife and kids that the first 4 churches I went to I told the committee my wife is not my associate pastor. You do not get 2 for the price of 1. I said she is not going to do any more than your wives do, but she will be active, she'll be supportive, she'll be involved. I said my kids are going to be just like your kids, they're going to kiss girls and get in fights. I said if they are any worse it's because they play with your kids. I said I'm not going to let you make weirdos out of my family. Looking back on it, that was pretty arrogant of me to do that. That was one of the things that God had to work out of me, because I probably shouldn't have done that. But I do believe the principle is right. Your wife is not on staff. You need to always include her in everything so that people see her, but she should not be under some expectation that she'll do more than the deacons wives

do, or any other wife does. And your kids certainly ought to be well behaved. They ought to be normal kids. I remember when my kids were in school, junior high school and up, especially I tried to be home when they came in from school. Then I could shoot baskets with the boys, throw football with them, talk to my daughter about her National Honor Society, or choir concert, or whatever. They knew that every night I'm going somewhere, so you have to be able to focus on your family. Gotta be able to do that. I remember one time [former senior pastor he served under] sent word one day he wanted to see me at 4 o'clock in the afternoon. He never came into the office at 4 o'clock. He was always politicking and he would meet with different people during the day, after all that, he ended up at the office at 4 o'clock because he was doing something every night at [church name], it was unusual. His secretary said [pastor's name] would like to see you at 4 o'clock, which I usually did see him. I said well, is it an emergency? She said I don't think so. I said you tell him my son, [son's name], has a football game and I'm going to be at that football game at 4 o'clock, I'll see him tomorrow. He never understood that but he didn't yell and he didn't fuss at me about it. I put my kids on my calendar and it was just as important, bar an emergency. I would say look, a pastor is always available in an emergency if it's a true emergency, but you can't let everybody's emergency become your emergency. Now, if someone dies, has a heart attack, commits suicide, obviously, there's certain things that you're going to stop whatever you're doing and you're going to take care of it. So, there are several reasons that they're not all just being nice. If you minister to your family, then when you're gone your wife won't say I don't know why your daddy is never here. She'd say you know Daddy would rather be here than anywhere, what he's doing now, most nights he's here at 5:30 for this dinner. So, I'm just saying your family will protect you if you minister to them. So yeah, your family, the beginning point of ministry is with the family. Everybody is different. I'm a people person, I just like to be around people, I like to visit the people. That's just me, not every pastor is like that. I'm not saying that you need to do it like I do it. I'm just saying there needs to be a mindset of ministry to your wife and your children, value them. If your wife and your children feel like they're not important to you, nobody else is going to really feel like they're important to you. That's where it all starts. You build an attitude and a spirit right with your family, and everything plays off that.

Speaker 1: In your experience, your longevity in ministry, is there ever a time when you feel like stress may have impacted your physical health?

Speaker 2: You know, I think, yes, I think there are times that it does. A lot of it is self imposed. For instance, I struggled with my weight my whole time. I'm 50 pounds less now than I was when I retired.

Speaker 1: Wow.

Speaker 2: What happens when you have a high stress, high intensity position, most guys respond by being workaholics. I rarely took vacations, where we just cut loose and went on vacations. If we did take some vacation time, we'd go home and visit the parents. [wife] and I never really had a vacation, just the two of us, until we were married 25 years. Even now, we don't even think of vacations. I mean, I'm my own secretary, I'm the worst one I've ever had, so I have no one to blame but myself. When you push yourself like that, something's got to give. My salvation has been that I can sleep any time. [wife], she doesn't sleep well on airplanes. When I travel, that trunk right over there is full of boarding passes we've had since 1992. I had them in a jar, we just decided we'd just start saving our boarding passes. Maybe our grand kids will wonder what we did and they can see where we've been. So, I had a tall table there with tall chairs, and I had some people here working to get the library put together, and I kicked it with my foot and it broke. So here I've got all these, and I counted, in 2010, I counted the boarding passes we've had in the last 18 years. There were over 4000 of them. My salvation has been, I do one of two things when I'm on an airplane, I either read and study or I sleep,

whichever seems to be most important. If I'm really tired, I'll sleep. So, that's been my salvation. [wife], I don't know how she does it, she's my prayer woman because she spends about half her night praying. I don't know how she stays awake, I couldn't do it. I've never needed a lot of sleep. I mean, I've worked on five and half, 6 hours sleep my whole life. I was always in the office by 6:30 because I'd get more work done between 6:30 and 8:30 than I could between 8:30 and 5:30. Of course that was my time, the mornings were my time to spend with the Lord, to prepare messages, and whatnot. But yeah, so I think that there are times, most of it is just fatigue. I can't say that I had any, until when I resigned from [church], the night I resigned at [church], my heart went out of rhythm. I called my doctor the next day and he said, I'll send you to a cardiologist, you've got to promise me to do what he says. Well long story, they put me in the hospital. It took 24 hours of dripping IV's to get my heart back in rhythm. It would go in and out for a while, I was on medicine for probably a couple of years to try to regulate it. I could always tell when it went out. And then after a couple of years it just went out and stayed out, and I now don't know, it's been out 20 some odd years and I'm never aware of it because I don't have any concept, I don't have any feeling associated with my heart racing, but it's always irregular. That happened, but it was not necessarily because of a lot of problems. It was the emotion of leaving the place I thought I would retire at. I never left a church that I felt like I wanted to... As [wife] says, I'm a good comer but I'm a bad leaver. There have been times, but I think most of the times with pastors, burnout doesn't come because you get kidney problems, or heart problems, or high blood pressure, it comes because you're tired and fatigued. That's why I tell pastors sometimes the most spiritual thing you can do is take a nap, just rest. You know when Elijah was running from Jessabelle, what's the first thing that God did? He brought in some food and he got some sleep and something to eat. You know, he had to get a little rest and get a little nourishment. So, there have been 2 times in my life that I felt like I really hit the wall. Both of them at [church]. One time I was President of the Convention and I just hit a wall. I mean I was gone basically for 2 years, and always between Sundays. I didn't miss many Sundays. In fact, I missed fewer Sundays those 2 years than I did most of the time because I would normally miss anywhere from 6 to 8 Sundays in a year. We had our 2 biggest years of growth while I was president of the Convention. We had 1500 decisions one year. We had 2200 or 2300 in the 2 years, so, 700 or 800 the other year. I wasn't even here during the week, that's a whole other story. I asked my deacon's permission. I said it's going to change what you do, it's not my decision, it's our decision. So, we talked about, I was first approached in September before I was elected in June. Every month at deacons meeting they'd ask me what's the status of you being nominated president? In May, before I was elected, they said what's the status. I said well, if it were today I'd probably be nominated. They said well, would you go home? So, they dismissed me. They came out with a wonderful letter that basically said Pastor, if God leads you to be nominated, and if you're elected, we will step up and assume some of the responsibilities that you had. We'll take care of hospitals, and we'll take care of emergencies. That became, instead of getting financial reports and detailed discussion of finances and that kind of stuff, they'd just, deacons meeting, and they continue to this day. They would get a simple statement, well we've got so much under budget, over budget, we've got money in the bank, or whatever, and no detailed report. The deacon's meetings consist of a meeting of their deacon ministry teams and reports of those ministries. And so, we had 2 of our best years. But, during that time I was traveling so much. I had been up to [city] and preached at [university] on Wednesday night.

Speaker 1: [school name]?

Speaker 2: Yeah, Chapel at [school name]. I'd been up there and I had come back to preach a revival in Atkins, Georgia. I mean I just was, I was on fumes. What I did, I took some time off on traveling and instead of coming on over to Nashville, [friend's name] is a good friend and the church was right out at the airport, and so I spent 3 days at the motel at the airport, airport hotel in [city], and [church] was just around the corner and

they had a racquetball court. I just, I didn't watch television, just read and prayed. We got snow, I mean it snowed probably 10 inches while I was there. But, it was just time to get away. I talked to [wife's name] every day, but just got away from what I was doing, just stopped what I was doing. Another time, I got to the same place probably 5 years after that. One of my dearest friends, he was active and deacon of the church in [city], and came down here and was Chair of the Personnel Committee. They just surprised me and said we want you to take sabbatical. I had never had a sabbatical, hadn't had much vacation because that just wasn't my thing. So, they gave me a 2-month sabbatical. We spent a month in Hawaii, which was good. I read through the entire Old Testament, didn't get to the New Testament, but just time away. We were there from November 19 to December 19. Honolulu may be one of the most beautiful cities at Christmas you'll ever see. They decorate unbelievably. It was hard getting used to Santa Claus in flip flops and jams, but nevertheless. And then we came back, my next-door neighbor, my best friend here, was Chairman of the Service Committee, died, and I needed to be here for that. I came back and preached his funeral, and then some other, I think maybe Desert Storm, I don't know the year but something happened next, I don't remember now but I felt like I needed to be here for the Sunday. So, I came back and preached a Sunday and then we spent the rest of the next month in several places, some of it in Lynchburg. One of the members had a condo timeshare up there, we stayed a week or 10 days there. So, that was something, you know, it wasn't a physical thing, you just run out of gas. And a lot of reason for that, I mean you do that and you get very vulnerable. I'm convinced the huge problem we have with pornography, the internet, pastors, every survey I've seen over the years indicate that 35 percent of pastors admit they have a problem with pornography. You know, you get those, that's when you're tired. I mean if you're feeling good, if you're touching people's lives, and you're building relationships, you're a soul winner and you see people saved, you're not going to get into pornography. But when you just get wore out, you get tired, you get discouraged, that's when you're most vulnerable. There are 2 times when you're most vulnerable. One is when you're deeply depressed or discouraged. The other is when you're highly successful. That's why I like to ask young guys when I'm on the ordination council, can you stand the pressure of praise and criticism, because both are dangerous. If you believe everything negative someone says about you, you're not going to make it. If you believe everything they say positive about you, you're not going to make it. I've always felt good, and back in 1979 I just felt blah, so I went to my interns, a deacon over in [city], great friend, still is. He said my blood pressure was out of sight. I had no idea. My doctor here, it took us a year of experimenting with medicines to get my blood pressure into normal range. I mean, strangely enough, I found out there is one little pill that's about that big that was a diuretic that if I didn't take that diuretic, my blood pressure would go out of sight. It didn't matter what else I was taking, but I mean I had blood pressure medicine, but that was the key. You do develop physical problems under pressure, but it really grows out of it, too. If you don't manage your time, it will manage you. I write notes, people say I don't know how you have time to write notes. Nobody has any more time than anybody else. I write notes because it's important for me to write notes. I've written several this morning, I'll mail 5 every day. My father trained me to do that and that's part of building relationships with people. If you write a note to somebody, email is okay, I use email and send. I type 125 words a minute so it's easy for me. But writing a note, when you get a note from me you know that I took the time to address that envelope, I took time to write you a note, and while I'm doing that I'm praying for you, and I took time to put a stamp on it, and I took time to get it to the post office and mail it. People still like to get things with their name on it, their name is the most important thing in their lives. So, remember names. Pay attention, remember names, you can do that. So, I think fatigue is at the root of physical problems. I don't think that stress, by itself, brings physical problems, I think it's that stress coupled with a failure to get adequate rest and to be wise in how you, what you demand of yourself is what opens the door for that.

Speaker 1: What would you say is the biggest disciplines that going through stress helped you to develop? Habits, disciplines, whatever you want to call it, that as you began to experience those negatives of stress you thought I've got to be more consistent with this. Rest if one of them, obviously. Were there any others that you, either spiritual or physical?

Speaker 2: Well, I think, to me none of this is rocket science. I tell people in my book, it's not rocket science, it's just practical common sense. I think one of the key factors in stress is in the relationship at home. I mean if your home is in turmoil and your wife is unhappy, and your kids are griping, if you don't have the kind of relationship that can allow you to face challenges and problems and do it in love with a harmonious family, that's debilitating to you. That's why, I know it's a small percentage, we tracked this while I was at [company name], Southern Baptists still fire 100 pastors a month, so we fire about 1500 a year. Plus, a lot of them we don't know about, but we could document that much. Only about 9 percent of them are because of moral problems, but moral failure is a reality. If you've got a healthy, wholesome family, you're not going to have a moral problem. It's just not, it's when you don't pay attention to what you're doing is what results in your vulnerability. I'll give you an illustration. When we were in Kansas City back in the 60's, hairstyles were bouffant, even on into the early 70's it was that way. The fad at that time for women was wigs. Now, for a woman to wear a wig she's got to take her hair and screw it down, like the remnants, and put a bobby pin or something like that in it to hold it and basically flatten her hair out. Well, [wife] wanted a wig, so I got her a wig, and she wore it and then she wouldn't wear it anymore. I thought that's really interesting, she wouldn't say why, she just never wore it. So, I asked her best friend, I said you know I don't know why she doesn't wear that wig. She said you don't know, and I said no. She said well I'll tell you, because you have to basically flatten your hair out, she said she would rather look good for you when you come home than to look like she looked when she wore a wig. So, she wouldn't wear it. Now, her hair is getting really thin now. She's worried about that, her mother had the same problem. Of course, we've reached the age where her hair is going to thin out. You don't have that problem yet. She's really concerned about that, so she's at the place now where she would probably wear a wig. It would be much easier for her now. But the point was, our relationship is such it was that she knew that the pressure, every pastor is going to have moral temptations, and she knew that she needed to look good when I came home so I wouldn't look for somebody else that looked good. You know, so if your family is healthy, you're going to avoid a lot of your temptation. We made a decision that there's certain things off limits for us. We're putting some fences out here, we're building some boundaries. We have renounced our right to do anything shameful, sinful, secret. Every one of us, when we got married, basically gave up our right to have a relationship outside of marriage. I mean we don't talk about it, but that's what it is. When I say till death do us part that means that I'm not going to have another girlfriend on the side. We gave up our right for that. And when I was 12 years old, I can go back, I didn't know anybody divorced until I was a teenager. I remember how shocked we were when one of my friend's parents divorced. I'd never been around anybody that divorced. Now half of marriages end in divorce. So, when it comes to temptation, we decide now we're not going to do that. I'll talk more about that, but that's basically, I think that we make mistakes when we get tired and when we get distracted, and we have not renounced our right to do certain things. Consequently, we stumble and fall into sin. I'll say this about our marriage. People say what's the secret behind a 60-year marriage. Well, there's a lot of secrets. Probably the most practical and basic secret is we give each other the benefit of the doubt. I know that she would never deliberately hurt me. She knows that I would never deliberately hurt her. So, if I do something, or she does something, that is hurtful, whether it's something she says or something she does, or I say or something I do, then we know we misunderstood because she wouldn't do that, I wouldn't do that. So, we give each other the benefit of the doubt. If problems come up or pain is experienced in our marriage, we just know we

misunderstood it. And so, we've never had an argument, this is really true. She won't argue. It takes 2 to argue. I'd argue in a minute, but she, of course, she says "but I know you're right, why argue about it." But the point is, marriage is a lot like life. There are just certain things you do and certain things you don't do. That's the basics of life. Nobody has it easy, nobody has it without challenges, but there are some decisions that you have to make that you don't have to make every month, you make them and they're made.

Speaker 1: Last question.

Speaker 2: Okay.

Speaker 1: You've been so gracious with this, it's been amazing because I really haven't had to ask a lot of questions because you're hitting every one of them as you've gone through it. But the last one is this: You're talking to a man and he's just finished seminary and he's about to take his first pastorate and you know in his heart he wants to stay there long term and he wants to have a fruitful ministry and you could give him a ton of advice, we could spend a lot of time detailing it but if you could only give him one piece, what would be the one thing you would tell him?

Speaker 2: Again, there are some assumptions in the question. We'll assume he's going to maintain a good relationship with the Lord. We assume that he's called of God, that he's following God's call in his life. There are a lot of things I could say, but I would say that there is one word that is basic to all pastoral leadership in ministry, and that's the word "relationships." You don't exist in isolation. You live with people, you're among people, and the secret to ministry, the secret to leadership is building strong relationships. And you need to make, your goal in life is to build strong relationships with the people you serve, with your friends. If you have 5 friends, and I would say we use that term a lot, you're really fortunate if you have 5 real friends. A real friend is somebody that, you know, if you had a moral failure or you had a critical issue, something you couldn't tell anybody else, you could tell this friend and know he wouldn't judge you. He'd support you and stand by you and he wouldn't ever say anything about it, you could trust him with it. If you have 3, 4, or 5 people like that you're very fortunate. We have a lot of acquaintances, and I'm a people person, I have a lot of friends. No question about that, hundreds of them. But to have 3 or 4 friends, that's huge. How do you develop it? Well, you don't develop it, it develops you. You treat people right, you value people, you connect to them, and you minister to them, and you're consistent with them. Not everybody that you meet is going to develop but, you'll develop some that you can trust your life with. One of the guys that, and we're rarely ever together now but we've been friends now for 50 years, he called me one day years ago and just sounded terrible and I thought, something is wrong here. The more he talked, he shared the crisis he was facing and it was, I mean it was a critical thing. I was at [business] and I was able to, it involved marriage counseling and somethings, and so he asked me if I would preach for him for a whole month to let him deal with the issues, and I did. I went down there every Sunday. Now, the point was, no superficial friendship, nobody's going to call you and share something like that, but he did, because that's the kind of relationship we had. So, you're going to have some friends like that, and you can't plan it, you can't strategize it, it just happens. But if you value people, and if you treat people right, and if you genuinely care about people, and you want to bring the best out in people, and you realize that you don't use people to accomplish your goals, you lead people so they can be the best person that they can be. Of course, you're always out there, not in here. Nobody owes you anything, God certainly doesn't owe us anything. We're so self-centered and so wrapped up in our own needs that we, become more concerned about somebody else's problems so that we don't have to deal with our own. So, build relationships. You've got a lot of ways in the book, 75 things in there of suggestions. Learn to listen. My mother always told me you're not learning anything while you're talking. You never to listen to anybody, or you just

like the sound of your own voice. That's part of building a relationship. Forgiving people, nobody gets up in the morning and says I think I'll screw up today. Nobody gets up deliberately to plan failure, but they all do. So, be quick to forgive mistakes because you'll need to be forgiven someday. So, I've got some funny stories on that. I'll tell you a real quick funny story. When I got to [business], we had a satellite connection. I think it was Telnet, which started back in the 80's. It was before it's time. It was a great idea but it was premature, it just didn't have the interest to make it work. But we had television capabilities, satellite capabilities, and we were the only non-television station in town that had that, so we had all kind of entertainers. Nashville is a big country music town and they'd come in and they'd tape things. We had certain ground rules, they couldn't say certain words, they couldn't promote alcoholic beverages or anything like that. So, they'd been doing this for a number of years. So, I went down there about 3 months and my phone rings, it's a guy down in the studio and I didn't even know him because I hadn't been there very long. He said I think I need to tell you something. I said okay. He said we had Hank Williams Junior in here the other day and said he said he's come in here a lot over the years and this time we were doing a live feed, no two second delay, you can't back it up now to cut something. He said he knows the rules, he overstepped, but he was right in the middle of this and he started promoting his Budweiser beer tour. He was talking about Budweiser beer. He said he knew the policy against that. Well, I had a choice to make. My predecessor at [business name] was a micro manager. I'd known him for years and he was a good friend. But he was one of the guys that nothing moved until he signed off on it. I had been there just a few months and I got something on my desk that had taken 73 days and 16 signatures to get to me that somebody had proposed down line somewhere to do and they couldn't do it. So, I signed it. I told somebody, I said what is this, why should I sign this, I don't even know what it is. I said look, the people ought to be making these decisions, not the president. All the people who are doing that ministry, they ought to be able to get approval down there, they don't have to come up to me. Well, I had to change that. And so, had that happened under my predecessor, that guy would have been fired probably. And I told him, I've got a great question, by the way, that you need to hear. When someone makes a mistake, I ask them well did you do that on purpose? Well no, they'll say. Okay, it's okay, I'll take the heat for it, just don't let it happen again. It's a wonderful question because every time you get in a real tiff and someone is apologizing say, "did you do that on purpose?" I was getting on an airplane, long story. I had delays in the airport and they found out I was a flying colonel for Delta, which that was pretty high up. Didn't have any frequent flyer miles back then but they made me a flying colonel. The manager saw it and said oh I'm so sorry, [name], that you had to wait an hour to get with us. I looked at him and said did you do this on purpose and the guy looked at me and laughed and said, "well no." I said that's okay, that's all right. So, you know, we need to be quick to forgive people. That's all part of your relationship. Some preachers, it seems they're looking for a reason to be unhappy and come at somebody. I don't want to do that. You don't use the pulpit to beat people over the head, you just preach God's word. If the Bible is God's word, and it is, and God meant what he said, and he does, then our job is not to come up with cute sermons and clever ideas, our job is to tell folks what God said. We apply it to our local situations. You know, if a pastor builds relationships and uses his pulpit to strengthen people's convictions about life, there's consistency, then it's going to be all right. So, I'd say from a non-spiritual standpoint, build relationships.

Speaker 1: That's good.

Speaker 2: God made us shepherds, not cowboys. You know, build relationships.

Speaker 1: Perfect. Thank you for that.

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Speaker 1: First of all, how do you see stress in ministry? Where is it coming from the most in your experience over your years here?

Speaker 2: I think probably stress is coming from outside sources and feeling like, and possibly not for everybody but for many guys, I think, and probably me as well, coming from the outside of thinking, I have to keep up with the Joneses or other churches. What are they doing that I'm not doing? How should I be able to change the way we do church? So, I think probably, for me, and for a lot of the younger guys that I talk with, mentor, it's the whole thing of keeping up with what's happening in Christendom or at least the perception. It may not be what's happening but the perception of, I've got to be the latest, greatest, hippest, coolest, most contemporary, whatever that term would be. I think that probably adds as much stress as anything, at least in today's culture. When I came here 20 years ago, it may not have been that way. I don't know if I even remember that far back. Or maybe I just didn't care at that time as much as I do now. But I think that probably is a lot.

Speaker 1: And do you think that is put on you by yourself? Or is it the culture of the church? Denomination? Or just the culture of Christianity in general? Where do you think that comes from the most?

Speaker 2: I think it's probably a little bit of both.

Speaker 1: Okay.

Speaker 2: For me, probably, it's as self-induced as anything else, but I think the whole church culture is such that, again 20, 30 years ago, there were no TV preachers. There was no web. There was no live streaming. Your congregation got you. If you were good, bad, or indifferent, that was it. Now, you know, they can turn on whoever they want or whatever. Not that that's right or fair to even judge by or compare, but I think that's probably a lot of it as well. And I think it, again, it causes guys to become self-induced, that you begin to look at, man, Jack's church is doing great. What's happening here? And given the seasons of life in church, you know? That sometimes you're on top of the mountain, then you're in that valley, and I don't know if there's ever a place, and there shouldn't be, I don't think, that you plane out. Obviously, unless the plane is going down. But yeah, I think it's more self-induced, especially in my life.

Speaker 1: Yeah. Okay. Tell me about how do you recognize stress when it's coming at you, when it's developing. You talked about these seasons, maybe even hills and valleys. Is there something that you notice that you actually recognize stress? Because a lot of what the literature points out is that some people become overwhelmed with stress and don't even really realize how stressed out they are, and they keep piling their plates with more and more, not realizing what they're doing to themselves. Is there a way that you identify, I'm going through that season of stress right now?

Speaker 2: Yeah. My answer would be that one, that I think personally, for me, yeah. My bent is workaholic, anyway, and before I actually became "full time" quote, unquote "in ministry," I worked in commercial banking and the legal field for a while, and my bent's always been that, and it was insecurities, I think, as a poor kid growing up that I wanted to change something, and so I've had to deal with that one, and I don't deal with it well. My wife's probably the barometer that keeps me there. What I do recognize is when I wake up and don't want to go to church. Then I realize there's a problem.

Speaker 1: Ah.

Speaker 2: You know? I don't want to go preach today. I don't want to, and that's the

extreme of it, and it's probably, that's a bad place to get, but when I finally get there is when I realize, okay, it's time for some time off or a couch session or something.

Speaker 1: Okay. Let's talk about that a little bit. Number 1, how do you think that you get to those days? Where you wake up and you're like, I don't want to go preach today. I don't want to go see the people. I don't want to be in front of people. I don't want to have to answer questions. What do you think gets you to that mental perspective of your job?

Speaker 2: That's a good question. I think probably, at least again from my point of view, I don't realize. My vision is more tunnel when it comes to me than it is maybe even for my congregation. And I'm so busy loading the wagon that I don't realize I'm getting tired, and before I realize what's happened, I am wore out. Or so tired that I don't want to answer the phone or see anyone else or what have you. My life has been, I don't know when to back off and disconnect and take that time away. As I said, my bent's been workaholic. I've said, and I've quit saying it, I realized it's not a good thing to say, but I thought it was a cute saying. You know, for years, I would say, I love my wife, but I love the church, and I could put my bed at the church. And that was my, I thought that's funny. But the truth was, and it wasn't that I loved [wife] less, I just loved, and I do, I love ministry. But I allowed that. If you ask my kids, they'll tell you that we never went on vacation, or if we did, somebody died, and we'd have to come home. Just always, classically happens that way, you know? But I think for me it was hard to realize how deeply I had allowed myself to get in stress and strain and tension until I got to that point. I wasn't good at recognizing. And maybe it's a generational thing, too, that my generation's not going to admit that there's fallacy or frailty or a chink in your armor, you know?

Speaker 1: So, you mentioned that, when you do feel that, you mentioned a few things of, it's time for this. So, you wake up that morning. You don't want to go. You recognize that you don't want to go. And you know that you're dealing with stress and that you're maybe even on the verge of burnout. What are your actions after that? What are the things that you say, okay, I'm going to do this within the next week or so?

Speaker 2: Well, you know, being a Pentecostal preacher, some things I don't guess I could do, but I have a friend. I'll give you his version, and I'll give you mine. And you would know him, probably, if I called his name. But when he was pastoring here in town, every so often, my phone would ring, and I would answer it, and he would just begin to say some words that he couldn't say in public, profanity, about his vestry, about his, and then he would say, thank you, [self-reference]. I needed to unload, and I knew you would listen. That's a true story. So, I probably felt like that, but my theology wouldn't let me do that. You know, Jack, I'm not a real good model for that, man. When I get to that point, now that I am older and I realize I can't handle as much stress, I don't think, physically, as I did 20 years ago or even 10 years ago, now I just disconnect. I mean I don't walk away or leave my job or leave things undone, but I've got a great staff, and I just take off. [wife] and I will go spend a day somewhere. I love to fish and get on the water, so I'll just, you know, it's a small reprieve. And it's not enough, but at least it helps me be able to clear the cobwebs and somehow put things in their proper place, so I can see a little more clearly, and I probably haven't answered your question really good.

Speaker 1: No. That's good. Yeah. You know, I guess when you go through those stressful times, over the years, obviously, you've kind of pointed that you've grown in that, in recognizing it, number 1, and then maybe also dealing with it. Do you think that there are any positives that stress has produced in your life?

Speaker 2: Yeah. I think stress has made me, I'm not a, by nature, disciplined person, and stress has made me learn some disciplines of study or time management. There have been some good things in there. Or driven me to the point of going to say, let me see what Jack

Hester does and what he says about researching and doing what I can do to try to make my life a little better. When we get to that final question you're going to ask me. That will be part of my answer, too.

Speaker 1: Okay.

Speaker 2: But I think that's the good part that it's done. There's been the futility of that. But there's also been the teaching moments that somehow, in the middle of that, I realize, "you know what? I need to rest more. You know what? My time management needs to be better so that I've studied and prepared and I'm not freaking out on Saturday afternoon and can't enjoy my family time because I'm thinking my message is not finished." You know, those kinds of things. So, I've been a slow learner, but that, it has taught me some of those things. Or at least driven me to the point of saying, Jack, teach me how you manage your time or guys that I look to as my mentors.

Speaker 1: Good. Let's think about this for a minute, switch gears, and I would be really interested. You mentioned you wife earlier. How have you seen the stress of ministry impact her?

Speaker 2: Positively, it's helped [wife] to realize that she had to step a little bit beyond my life as a very quiet, reclusive person by nature. And it's helped her to realize I need to step out but that there are things that I need to do, not to save my husband or rescue him, but to come along side him with the giftings that God has given me. So, it's caused her to have to, where I couldn't, you know, and earlier in life, I tried. You know? And it didn't work. But it's caused her to see that there was a part that she had to play. Not that she had to pastor the church, but that God had brought her along side, and with her giftings, everything she could do that I could never do or accomplish, or we could accomplish together much more than just either of us. And it took probably, it probably took [wife] 20 years before that really began to happen. Of course, those 20 years, the first 20 years were spent raising kids, so our priorities were somewhere else. But since the kids have gotten older, to understand now I have time and, yeah, it's been the pushing her out the door that I could never do, so yeah, that has been positive. I never thought about it like that, but it's been a positive thing.

Speaker 1: When you are dealing with stress in ministry, say someone's made an accusation against you or you've done something that's offended them for whatever reason. Is there a way you process what you tell your wife and what you don't tell your wife about the stress that you may be going through because of ministry? Do you share everything with her? Or do you see yourself or your role as, I have to protect her from some things.

Speaker 2: You know, as a young preacher, one of my mentors said to me you don't ever tell your wife the problems of the church. And tried to really embrace that. And I did at that point protect her. I wanted to be a good husband and love her, and I'm not real good at hiding things, but I did, at that point, try to, and I did probably fairly successfully. But even then, she would know me well enough to say, what's happening? Now it's a little different. She knows me so well all I have to do is look, and she knows whether I'm going through that time of pressure or if things are well. But I think if I were trying to give someone advice or speak to someone, yeah, I would protect my wife as well as I could. Now, maybe all couples are not like we are. [wife] has been involved in ministry actively with me, so just by the nature of that, sometimes you can't keep things away because she knows just by what's happening, but I would say to a younger guy or what have you, yeah, some of those things you just need to leave at the office. Let God take care of that.

Speaker 1: Has your wife ever, through those experiences, that you can recall, ever had, maybe for a short time or even maybe a long time, a negative view of the church because of something you may have been going through?

Speaker 2: Yeah.

Speaker 1: Okay. Can you elaborate on how you dealt with that? You don't have to tell me the situations or circumstances but what that was like for you and your relationship with her and how she eventually overcame that?

Speaker 2: You know, probably, again, [wife], my wife, is a very quiet, introverted person by nature. She's, again, learned somewhat to be different, so she would internalize some things before I realized it. Again, as we've gotten older, she's more vocal. And maybe it's different as a Baptist or an Episcopalian, but as a Pentecostal, by nature, maybe it's what we've been taught, again internalizing a lot of that and being angry maybe inside and not allowing that to be defused in a good way. Disagreements with us probably it would come to a boiling point, where it would either cause an issue with us, where I would finally or she would finally, it would end up in an argument, or a very heated disagreement. But then, once that was, it was like, you know, okay, I got it out. Now we can talk. And that probably has been, and I'm probably being very vague there. That was what she would do. And it caused us issues at times. With me probably more so than her. And I don't know how far you want to go into that. But actually that kind of problem drove me out of the ministry at one point and cost us probably 10 years of me running from God. And I actually got out of the ministry. And it was because I didn't know how to handle it and she was young and naive and didn't know either, and we didn't know how to talk about it. It was like the elephant in the room that both of us knew, and it really did drive me to a place of finally one day literally taking my Bible and saying you can take this and shove it. I'm through. And I did, I walked away. And it was, that was probably 99 percent stress induced.

Speaker 1: How did you get past that? How did she get past it as well?

Speaker 2: You know, in that time period, I was bi vocational at the time. And I just walked away. We even briefly separated for a year and almost divorced. Except for her and the grace of God, we would have. For me, it was almost a 10-year struggle, being angry with God, angry with people, you know, some of it self-induced, some of it probably even, you know, was a figment of my imagination, even. But I just, I really, for literally almost 10 years, just ran from God, said I don't want to be around church people. I don't want to be there. And then it led to, you know, one extreme to the other, so it let me go do everything else and I really became a functional alcoholic and was in the business world and very successful. I stayed away from ministry, but I was miserable. And that induced stress, too, you know? You know, I've often said that the most miserable people on the face of the earth are people who are Christians who don't like God and don't like the world, either. And that's sort of where I was. So, within that time period, it helped [wife] process who she was and what she was, and it helped her. You know, it was tragic that it happened like that, but it helped her to grow in her perspective and understanding of ministry, even though she didn't think we would ever be in ministry again. And for me, it was just, God had to beat some things out of me. Or allow me to beat my head against a wall for that period of time, until I could say, I give up. So anyway, I've gotten off the track there a bit I guess.

Speaker 1: No, that's good.

Speaker 2: But that's really what, it was really stress of a lot of things and not allowing them to get the better. I didn't know how to deal with it, either, so I just ran from one extreme to the other of being a successful business guy, to hell with church, you know? I

can live this life. I don't have to have that. That's my mama's religion. And that kind of thing. But obviously God wasn't finished.

Speaker 1: Yeah. So, coming full circle into that, getting back into the ministry, obviously, there was a lot that you and she had to overcome and maybe even were skeptical of as you got back into ministry. Would you say there was anything specific that you can think of that you learned from that experience that, when you came back into it, you said, okay, I'm going to go back into this. I feel the Lord calling me to this. But I've got to make sure to keep this thing from happening again. Was there anything? Or did you just walk back into it giving it another chance blindly?

Speaker 2: No. I think, I don't know if you remember a guy named [singer's name] who was a contemporary singer years ago, [band name], that kind of thing. I heard him say one time, he said, "I didn't know God but I'd heard about him, so in a self-induced LSD trip, I finally said to God, you know what? I think I like you." He said it was Christians he didn't like. And I think when I came back, when we came full circle and came back, I had, by that time, I had said, look, God, just let me go to church. Just please let me go to church. I will give. I will clean the toilets. I'll help the preacher. But I know I'll never preach again. I don't deserve that. And don't have a right to. But when God finally realized I was to that point, the Holy Spirit said to me, I think you're okay now. We can use you. And I guess then my mantra, if you will, Jack, was "God, I don't know how to deal with people and I know that was part of my downfall before. You've got to teach me how to understand people, their nature, who they are." But where I had been in my experiences has also taught me a lot about grace, so I think maybe that was biggest thing. That God would restore me, that God would allow me to do something sacred as that was after what I had done. I didn't deserve that. So, I think that probably helped me, and was the beneficial part of my running from God or whatever you want to call it. That now reminds me that I have to extend grace, you know? Because of all that was extended to me. And that probably was the difference. Because before I was a classical Pentecostal guy, you know? Looking down my nose at everybody and going to be the savior of the world, going to change it all, but that mellowed me out, if you will.

Speaker 1: That's good. We talked about your wife. What about your kids? Did they come later on, after you had begun ministry again? Or were you raising young children during that time period of transition?

Speaker 2: Yeah, we were. [first child] actually came 10 months to the day after we got married, so you know, we began as parents and then often say, thank God she didn't come early, or [wife's] mama and daddy would've killed me. No, we actually became, you know, within the first year, and then 3 years later, our son [son's name] came, so we were raising kids when we first got in the ministry, and as I laughingly said, people wouldn't let me preach, so I had to go get a real job. So, I was working and then being bi vocational, too, and helping in the church I grew up in here in [city name], so yeah, we raised kids from the get go.

Speaker 1: Were they ever negatively impacted by the stress of ministry to the point that maybe they even had a negative view of the church at any point? Or were you able to kind of shelter them from that whole experience?

Speaker 2: You know, [daughter] has always been like the perfect child who loved God from the moment she was born, you know? And yeah, there were some sad things I think that, later on in life, she looked back and said, okay, now I understand what that was. But at the moment, yeah we did try to keep them from the strain or what was going on in ministry. [son] probably a little bit different. I think he saw some things, but his nature was a bit different, too, and so he wasn't as involved in the church as [daughter] and he actually stepped out of church when he got college age for a bit. But they were impacted.

I think the impactful thing for them was that dad was just never around. I was the absentee father. And again my thinking was wrong thinking because I was dealing a lot with teenagers and youth and youth ministry and what have you as well. My kids were with me, you know? But I didn't realize, you know, yeah, they're part of the youth group. That's what you're teaching them. But you're not taking the time at home as dad. You're lumping them in with the other group of kids here. So probably that was a bit of a negative and laughingly sometimes now they'll say that to me, but they've forgiven me, I think. And it had some negative effect but not, again, God's grace is amazing in that I was somehow made up for that.

Speaker 1: Wow. That's amazing. What about your physical health? Do you think that you ever experienced any negativity, maybe a physical sickness or a time where stress induced some kind of physical ailment that you had to go through?

Speaker 2: You know, for me, no. Most of my life, I've been very, very healthy. Rarely sick with a doctor kind of thing. The last couple of years, and I think it probably is somewhat church induced, I have acid reflux pretty bad now. Never had ulcers. Never had any of that stuff. And just discovered this just a couple of years ago. And I don't know if it's just all the coffee I drink, but I think some of it probably, that was one of the results of stress to me. Because I've asked my doctor, well tell me, and he of course couldn't or wouldn't, but other than that, no. I've always tried to stay active and those kind of things, so I never had to be off with the flu for weeks at a time or just so physically weak. And I don't mean I'm a superman by any means, but it just never, that part never seemed to cause me to have to back up.

Speaker 1: What would you say are the best or most useful physical disciplines that you have created or embraced to help you to deal with stress in ministry? Like running, walking? Anything like that?

Speaker 2: Yeah. For a lot of years, yeah, I did run, and that was part of my relief. I was athletic when I was younger, in school and played sports and that kind of thing, so it was a natural for me, and then again, when I ran from God, I got in the Y downtown for years, and so yeah. That part was a lot of help. And I love to fish, although now I'm not doing that as much as I need to. But those things, yeah, helped me relieve some of the stress, certainly not all of it. Even though when you're reeling a fish in, somehow it's still in the back of your mind, so I've never been able to completely get away from it. But those 2 things, yeah. The exercise and being able to spend those moments on the water.

Speaker 1: What about spiritual disciplines? What, over the years, have you found are the key spiritual disciplines for you to be able to manage your role as a pastor?

Speaker 2: Probably the greatest one for me, and this was one, probably part of my answer to you in the last question, that I was very slow at disciplining myself, knowing I should, and of course everybody, this may sound like a classical cop out, but the discipline of rising early and spending quiet time with the Lord just like Jack Hayford used to say. You may have heard him some years ago. When I roll out of bed, I put my knee on the floor and say, Holy Spirit, what are we going to do today? You know, for a lot of years, as I rolled out of bed, I was already at church, you know, trying to be the savior of the world and take care of everything, maybe because, again, of my workaholic nature. But what I've learned in these last years is rise early and spend a couple of hours. I'm not always successful, but trying to just spend that time very quietly in the word of God and then in other books as well. And for a lot of years, when I first, again as a young man, that was, it was haphazard, you know, and I would be interested to hear the rest of your results from other guys. I spent a few minutes, but it wasn't what I needed. And I don't think I really understood the relationship with my Father, you know, until these last 10 or 15 years, the understanding that I need to spend that time just listening. And again,

as a Pentecostal, maybe Baptist folk are like this. I don't know. But we spend a lot of time talking to God rather than listening. So that's probably part of the discipline that I'm learning is just be quiet. You know, again, our model and what we're taught to do as we pray boldly, you know? And there is a time for that, obviously, but just learning to be quiet, to listen, to sit, to let God speak into your life.

Speaker 1: That's good. The last thing I want to kind of touch on before I ask you that last question and wrap up. What about the organizational structure of your church, with your staff. Would you say that your staff, and by staff, I'm not sure exactly how you have things organized, whether it's deacons, elders, how it's all structured, but everything included, the organizational structure, not just paid people. Do they cause stress for you or do they relieve stress for you?

Speaker 2: They cause stress.

Speaker 1: Okay.

Speaker 2: There's some that don't. And this is probably one of my weakest points in my leadership style is helping people understand their role before they get into it, which means I cause some of the stress that they cause on me. Yeah, overall, probably as a leader, I would say, and it's a terrible thing to say, but I would say I probably had more stress by leadership than them taking stress away from me. Now I don't know if I'm a bad leader in that respect or if that's normal. Help me there with your research. But yeah, again, and being a workaholic, saying, I can do this. Not taking the time properly training people and understanding that they need to understand and know. Again, I'm better at that now than I used to be, but that's been a big one. I've probably caused that problem more, but yeah, leadership probably overall that I have to say, in all of my ministry, the last few years the staff caused me as much stress as they took off of me.

Speaker 1: Yeah. Would you say that, in your leadership style, are you more of a delegator or micro manager? Do you know where you fall in that in dealing with your staff? More specifically, probably, paid staff in that.

Speaker 2: Yeah. You know, again, because of my workaholic attitude, for a lot of years, I was a micro manager. You know, I thought I could do everything. Or at least they had to run it by me. But now, again, this may not be a good answer for you. My last 5 to 10 years, I've realized, number 1, I can't physically handle it any more and, number 2, I don't want to anymore. Because I'm learning that I need to spend this time with God. And spend some time again doing other things as well. So my mode now, yeah, is delegator. I think my guys would say that. They're pretty free now as long as we can pay for it. We're okay. Yeah.

Speaker 1: That's good. All right, so my last question. What do you perceive is the most important thing that a young or new pastor needs to know about dealing with stress? What's that one piece of advice that you would share with him from your own experience?

Speaker 2: Well, I said to you earlier, and maybe because my dad died when I was 13. He was an alcoholic. And so I never had a lot of time with him. A good man, but I never had a lot of time with him. So at the risk of sound real introspective, the father figure in my life was really never there. My older brother really became my surrogate dad, and he did a good job at that. But I don't think I ever understood the dynamic of a father son relationship, so when I stepped into ministry and went into it, I really, I knew God wasn't an alcoholic, obviously. And I knew he loved me. But I didn't understand that he really would like to spend time with me. And so, those years of my ministry, probably the weakest part of my life was my quote "prayer life" or my "personal time with God." So, what I would say to a guy now is what I said to you before, and for me I know some guys

can do it other times, but if I was going to train young leaders, I would say early. Rise early, and I think scripturally if you look you can see there's a lot of guys that did that. And develop that relationship with your Father, your Heavenly Father, more than just Father, Dad. And he really becomes your Dad, and that he really will listen, and he really will speak, you know? Not all of it's telling you what you want to hear. But there is a relationship. You know, Jack, for a lot of years, I didn't realize that. Even though I knew in my mind God was here, I think psychologically I thought he's really up there, and he has a lot to do, and I know I'm busy, so he must be, and I know he would speak, but probably I have to make these decisions. But these last years of understanding that God does really love me. And he cares more about me than I could ever imagine. And he cares more about this church than I could ever imagine. So, if I were going to teach a guy anything, and you know, going back to college and those days of school, there were prayer classes, but either I didn't get it they weren't saying it that way. But today my point would be to a guy, first of all, you've got to study God's Word. You've got to do all those things, but you've got to have a relationship with the one's who's preaching where you are, and that doesn't happen in 5 minutes a day. I don't know if you've found new stats, but the ones that I found say most preachers spend 7 minutes a day in sharing or listening to God, and that was the average. Man, I was classic but not anymore. So yeah, that would be the first thing I would say to a guy. Also maybe running parallel to that, spend that time with your spouse with the intention to develop that relationship. Learn who your Father is.

Speaker 1: All right. Anything you would like to add that you thought of through that stress, something you learned, something that you feel like you haven't covered yet.

Speaker 2: You know, man, take a day off.

Speaker 1: That's important.

Speaker 2: For some guys, but for me, and it wasn't, because I really, I loved ministry, and when I finally decided, God's going to let me do this, I was like a kid, but then, you know, it became self driven rather than God driven. And I never really, for a long time, didn't learn to relax. So, I would just, you know, again, I'd build that into my calendar now, some time to get away. I'm still not as good as I ought to be. But I'm getting there.

Speaker 1: That's good. Well, thank you for your time.

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I'm very interested to see how you perceive stress and how you've dealt with stress in your ministry in. How many years have you been here now?

Speaker 2: 37.

Speaker 1: 37 years. In those 37 years, what ways, as you reflect on that, what ways do see stress coming at you the most, or maybe even what segment of ministry does it come at you? Is it from staff, is it from the parishioners, is it more from the community, or is it something that maybe it was more internally for you?

Speaker 2: That's a good question. I've always accepted stress as just a part of what I do. It's kind of like if you can name the bear, the bear isn't so big and bad. I always felt like, who was I to think that I shouldn't have stress? Everyone has stress. I remember a man one time saying in a seminar, don't complain to me about your stress level. You're the only one that can control your stress level. I kind of took that to heart early in my ministry. One of the ways I, so called 'control' my stress level was to accept the fact that it is a part of what I do. But really, it's a part of everyone's life, not just a pastor's life. For me, accepting it as just a part of what I dealt with was an important thing. To be honest, I can't say I remember a lot of truly stressful moments. I'm someone who feeds on the energy of change. For most people, change is stressful, but for me, change always represented, at least in my finite time, progress, it always felt like God was calling us to do new things, and to do them in new ways and to reach as many new people as we possibly could. I always knew that there were prices to pay to do that. The one price that I guess is uncomfortable for many people is change. Change is stressful for a lot of folks, but once again, for me, I kind of thrived on that. It wasn't that I thrived on stress per se, but I did thrive on the excitement of reaching a new level. Reaching new people, doing a new ministry in a new way. Part of that has to do with who I am and how I'm wired. I'm not a status quo kind of person. My seminary friends all kind of kidded me. They all got appointed to churches, and I got appointed to a piece of land. They said that sort of defined what the bishop really thought about me. I was fine getting that piece of land, because I'm not a status quo kind of guy. I wouldn't have been happy probably serving a 2 or 3 point charge with 2 or 3 or 4 small churches who just wanted to sit there and exist. Now the only pressure I really felt like I have felt through the years is the financial pressure of all that change and all that progress. I'm a golfer, and sometimes folks say it's a lot of pressure to have to make a 2-foot putt to win a golf match, especially against some of my Baptist preacher friends [laughter].

Speaker 1: Because they'll cheat, won't they?

Speaker 2: They will. That's the only time I've ever heard a Baptist preacher quiet, is when I had a 2-foot putt for par. They couldn't say "that's good" or give it to me. Pressures not a 2-foot putt for par. Pressure's having to have a 100,000 dollars every Sunday to operate the ministry. If I felt pressure and stress, it was usually because of the financial demands. Not personally, but of the organization of the church.

Speaker 1: Okay. In the process of building, and the excitement that you said, it sounds like the excitement overweighed whatever stress that would bring. I would be curious to say, in the process, so maybe there is a Sunday that you didn't get that money or things weren't going exactly the way, or maybe...

Speaker 2: Which was often.

Speaker 1: ...which was often, yeah. Maybe even the cost was going to be higher than what you originally anticipated, those kinds of things. That would have obviously raised that stress level quickly. How did you deal with that when it hit you out of the blue?

Speaker 2: Yeah. Well I would always try to remember that it's ultimately not my responsibility. It's a pretty foolish fellow that thinks so highly of himself that he thinks he's responsible for making things happen or providing enough funding or whatever the issue might be. I always had this simple faith that because God had done what he had done for me and for our church family in the past, that he would continue to do that in the future. You don't take yourself too seriously and you don't feel all the sense of responsibility personally. I often would pray to God and say to Him, just sort of a walking prayer. God, you created this monster, know you have to feed it. He and I always had that kind of relationship where I would talk about the fact that He had put all of this together, that He had led us to this point, and I was trusting that He would continue to lead us into the future.

Speaker 1: Wow, that's good. Now as it grew, because literally, like you said, you started this church from the beginning, and as it grew, obviously you wore a lot of hats in the beginning, but you couldn't continue to wear those hats as the ministry grew more and more. You were adding staff constantly. How did you deal with that stress of that particular growth? Would you say that the staff alleviated stress, or created more stress?

Speaker 2: You know the answer to that question. [laughter] I think for a church to continue to reach people, which was always the dominating power, the dominating factor that drove us, that drove me at least. My primary goal in the ministry was to reach people. It wasn't to build a building, it wasn't to have the largest church in [location]. It was literally to reach people. I have an evangelist heart, always have had. To reach more people, there are always prices to be paid. One of those prices is you can't wear all the hats. You have to give some things up. John Maxwell used to say, if you've got to have your hand on everything, the church will never move beyond your reach. I remember specifically at the 10-year mark, every one for the first 10 years, which is about 2,000 people, that had come into the life of the church, I had sat in their living rooms, and I could call them by name when they walked down the aisle to join the church. If the church was to continue to grow with that mark, I would have to give that up. I paid a price to turn that over to a full-time staff person who did nothing but reach out to new people, and try to assimilate them into the body of Christ. The price I paid for that was significant for me, because it now meant that I would not know everyone who became part of the congregation. I had no choice. You have to develop staff, and you have to let go of things that you love holding onto. It wasn't that I felt that I did that better than anybody else, as far as reaching out to new people, it's just that's what I love to do. I was having to give up something that I really loved, and to this day for me, church is still about relationships and getting to know the families who become a part of your church family. To not be able to do that was difficult, but it was a price that had to be paid.

Speaker 1: Was it a hard, very difficult thing for you to be able to hand things over and let them go? Or did you find yourself still being involved in those things? In other words, in your leadership perspective, when you brought on another person, do you just give them free reign and you just check in every once in a while, or did you kind of still...

Speaker 2: That kind of evolved through the years.

Speaker 1: Did it? Okay.

Speaker 2: In the beginning, I would have a little more difficulty letting things go because this church was a baby that I had helped birth. Letting go wasn't always easy for me. Besides in my mind, I thought no one did it as well as I did. I had pretty high standards. Some would call that being a perfectionist, being anal, being whatever. I think if you put a high level of excellence into everything, you have to have a little bit of that perfectionism. It became easier as the years went on, out of necessity and out of practical application. To where in my later years of ministry, I was very comfortable in not having

to know everything, and be in touch with everything, and trust in good effective staff people, and good effective leadership. Some of them even got to where they thought I didn't even care, but it wasn't that at all. It was simply an evolution in maturing on my part of where I didn't really have to have my hand on everything. Now a little caveat there, is that when you're the founding pastor, you have some caveats in collateral and trust level that a new pastor just coming in isn't going to have. I had the luxury of the collateral of trusting my finance committee and my personnel committee and the trustees. I wasn't worried about, is this new associate pastor going to have more influence or less influence? I never worried about those things, because as a founding pastor, you have collateral and trust level that's different than any other typical church setting.

Speaker 1: Yeah, good. Let's move to your family. Obviously, you can't help, from the experience that you have here at the church and the role that you have here, to impact your family.

Speaker 2: Correct.

Speaker 1: How many children do you have?

Speaker 2: I have 2.

Speaker 1: 2 children. They're adult children now?

Speaker 2: They are.

Speaker 1: Okay. They grew up here, I would imagine?

Speaker 2: They did.

Speaker 1: Was there ever a time your wife or your 2 children would experience negative views of the church because of what was maybe happening to you, or because of your position, maybe what was being required of you, or maybe even what you were doing on your own that demanded your focus was always there. Was there any negative that you would say that created stress for them?

Speaker 2: I'm sure there was. I wouldn't be naive enough to think that there wasn't. But it was never any kind of major issue. It was never anything they talked a lot about to me, and said Dad, why aren't you home more. Because if, once again, the evolution of my time management, if I worked all morning, I would take the afternoon off and pick up my daughter or my son from school. We'd spend 2 or 3 hours together after school. Then I might have a meeting that night back at the church, but I never was a workaholic to the extent that I felt like I didn't have time for my family.

Speaker 1: Good. In the very beginning, did you make that priority as soon as you had your children, were you cognizant of that? Said you know what, I've got to make sure that I cut out time for this from the beginning.

Speaker 2: Yes. Now before we had our first child, the first couple of years in the life of the church, I was in somebody's house until about 9 o'clock every night. I would go door to door in neighborhoods. If someone would walk slow, I would talk to them about the church. They didn't have to stop. I was anxious and eager to talk to anyone about the church and about Christ and about how it could impact their life. My wife paid a price those first couple of years. But you know, husbands aren't nearly as much of a joy to have around all the time as they think they are [laughter].

Speaker 1: Be careful what you wish for.

Speaker 2: She probably enjoyed me being gone some of those hours. I'm sure there were times that there was a negative impact. To be honest, we haven't had a lot of internal church conflicts through the years. We've been blessed. The reason we've been blessed, Jackson, is because we always kept our eye on the prize. The one thing I did that I have no regrets about, and that I know that I did effectively through the years, was to keep our purpose in focus. I had a saying through the years, and this I taught leadership groups and other pastors, that you only have troubles in your church when the line gets really slack. It's sort of the image and metaphor of a rope. If you don't keep the rope taught, you get a lot of tangles and knots. Mission keeps the rope taught. Mission keeps you focused on the future. It's when churches don't have a mission that they're clearly pursuing that you get a lot of slack in the rope and you get a lot of knots and tangles. Lot of inner conflict. This is what I saw as I did consultations with other congregations. They'd become internally focused, because they have no passion for a mission. The mission keeps the line taught, and keeps you from getting internally conflicted. If you're carrying out the mission, you're going to experience growth, and growth also keeps internal conflicts at a minimum. If you have new people coming in all the time, the old people can't say, preacher if you don't do this, we're going to take our group and leave. I always had the luxury that that had never happened. Of saying well we'll pray for you. Growth keeps those power cells from developing.

Speaker 1: As you built the buildings that you have here. I'd be interested to hear how you kept that vision from the people. Because I know a lot of times when churches, as soon as you built something, they think it's for them, and they take ownership of it and they forget about the community around them. How did you keep people focused on that?

Speaker 2: Well you staff for growth, not maintenance. Most churches staff for maintenance. You have to staff for growth. There were times when we would hire someone just because they were an effective person that we knew we wanted on our staff, even though we didn't know at the time what they'd be doing. That's staffing for growth. You staff for growth and you keep that mission out in front of everyone. You have to tell them what the mission is every week. You can't think, because you're on the staff, have talked about the mission, and have declared the mission, that the whole congregation now has heard it that one time, and they're on board. You have to keep lifting the flag of the mission, every week at every opportunity, until they get sick of hearing it. Because when you think they've heard it, many of them still haven't. So you keep the mission at the forefront, you staff for growth, you remind people that the church is one of the only organizations in the world that its primary insistence is for those who have not yet become a part of the organization. And if you keep that mission at the forefront, it saves you a lot of heartache, and a lot of stress, and a lot of trouble. Most pastors have stress because they're trying to untie knots. They're trying to dissolve conflicts. To be honest, most of them are petty and senseless, and a waste of time to deal with. My experience has been that that's primarily because of a lack of vision and mission. You can't reach everybody in terms of, not everybody going with you on that mission. Some people join the wrong church. I tell people in our starting point class, which is for all new people thinking about becoming a part of the church, I say to them honestly and up front, if you're looking for a place where it's just status quo, and you're not going to be challenged to serve in ministry, and to give for ministry, then you're probably at the wrong place. Not every church can meet every person's needs. But we felt like we were honest with people that way, so that they didn't cry foul when we really challenged them to be a part of a small group, or to give a tithe instead of just 2 percent of their income. Or to add more staff. All the battles that churches usually battle, at least historically. So I felt like we were fairly transparent with people, and honest with people. And every time you get serious about your mission, some people will not go with you in that mission, and you will lose some people. You have to not be afraid to lose people to move forward, because not everybody will go with you. That was one of the mechanisms and one of the beliefs that I held dearly, that freed me up from a lot of stress, because a lot of pastors really

stress about people leaving their church. Don't misunderstand me, I don't celebrate that. Every shepherd who can call his sheep by name wants to hold on to every sheep. It is liberating when the mission is bigger than my need to have all the sheep in the fold. In that sense, staying focused on the mission, alleviates a lot of stress.

Speaker 1: That's good. What about physical and spiritual health, in what way is the stress, in your position here, affect you physically, either for the positive or negative?

Speaker 2: Well, I'm dealing with Parkinson's now, so I have no idea, as the researchers have no idea what actually causes Parkinson's. But I'll tell you this, if ministry had anything to do with it, it was well worth it. I never really felt, mentally and physically, that stress. Maybe it was that guy who told me early on, don't complain to me about your stress, you're the one in charge of it. That probably helped me more than anything else. If I needed time away for 2 or 3 days, me and my family would do that. Once again, being a founding pastor, you have a little bit of freedom, that maybe the guy following me might not have had. I always did what I had to do to take care of myself. Whether it was time away, or daily devotional time, exercise. I've always been athletic, I played a lot of basketball and continued to do that with men in the church through the years. I'm a golfer, which, by the way, simply increases your stress. I can't really say I ever reached a point where I felt like I was about to go over the edge.

Speaker 1: Really? Do you think it's because you had those already in place, and so you already had this one in place that was minimizing your stress, and your perspective of stress, like you were saying. You were already controlling it and had a good perspective of it, so you weren't going to let it overtake you, and maybe those are the things that helped minimize it to the point that it was controllable.

Speaker 2: I would like to think that that's exactly what happened. And you know, when you're getting fulfillment, you can deal with a lot more stress. My heart goes out to the guys who have all the stress and don't see a lot of fruit, and are in places that are very limited in what kind of quality fruit they're going to see. What kind of growth they're going to experience. Although, I've had many people say to me how lucky I was to have the church planted in a place where there was a lot of growth. But there were already 2 or 3 churches started around us when we started, and they're now mostly out of business. It had a little more to do than just being in the right place, at the right time. But I do feel for those guys who deal in churches that have very limited growth, and even a limited potential for growth. Although, I could talk a long time about the fact that I believe any place has potential. Growth and selling out to the mission eases a lot of stress, or at least makes stress tolerable. If you're seeing fruit, you can deal with the stress. If you're not seeing fruit, then stress quadruples, and its overall impact. We've had 37 years of net growth each year. That's hard to do. So we've been blessed. You usually reach attrition levels where your losses are greater than your gains. But we've been blessed through the years. I just believe that if you stay focused on the mission, take care of yourself, do the things you know you need to do, physically and spiritually and emotionally, deal openly and honestly with conflict, accept that stress is a part of the equation, it's manageable. One of my favorite stories if I can remember it, it's not that important. I'll tell it another time.

Speaker 1: Okay. What do you think are your strongest spiritual disciplines that have helped you to maintain an even perspective of your stress? And maybe even, is this something that you have done from the very beginning, or maybe something that you developed over the years of ministry that you had here?

Speaker 2: Well, I guess I'm not the most spiritually disciplined person that's ever lived. I have conversations with God ongoing, and always have through the years. It's not that I don't have those early morning moments when I spend significant time with God. I think

the disciplines that have been tried and true over the years and over the centuries still work pretty good. Prayer and scripture. I enjoy worship. I've always been able to be a participant in worship, and not a disconnected leader of worship. I thrive on being with God's people in worship. And it's always, even with its stress of having to have a sermon prepared, Sunday morning is always my favorite time of the week. I've always fed off the fellowship, the joy of sharing in ministry with people. So worship has been primary for me in helping me through my stress. I guess that's the answer I would give you.

Speaker 1: Good, and my last question for you today is what I prefaced before we began our interview, if you were to sit there and speak to that man, young man who's about to enter into his first church, has his education, maybe even done an internship or whatever, but he's about to take the role as the head of that church, leading it, from the pastor, what do you tell him? If you don't do anything else, make sure you do this, and that will help you achieve longevity in ministry. Obviously there are a lot of things that he would need to be, but what would you say is the one key that you've learned has been the most beneficial for you in this 30 years, 35 years?

Speaker 2: Figure out the mission and proclaim it, consistently. And let the mission dominate the life of the church.

Speaker 1: Good. That's the most practical, and I would you say even too that the mission, not even the life of the church but even your own life that it has to be the center of what he does every day with his family and his own disciplines that he lives it out as well as life in the church.

Speaker 2: That's right. Doesn't it seem odd that I would say something that simple?

Speaker 1: Yeah, it seems very simple, but I bet it's a really difficult thing to stay focused on, because you could get distracted so easily. There's a lot of temptations to distraction.

Speaker 2: It is, but I think I articulated through the interview that the mission has such positive impact. Giving you energy to overcome stress, because it's not a matter of if you're going to avoid stress, you're not going to avoid stress. It's just a matter of if you're going to overcome it or not, manage it or not, give into it or not. And to me, the one thing that keeps stress from overcoming you is staying totally involved in the mission.

Speaker 1: Good, thank you very much.

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Speaker 1: Where do you see stress most prominent in your ministry, coming at you?

Speaker 2: My primary stressors would have to deal with relentless performance. The creative pressure of preaching to the same people for 25 years. The stress that comes in crafting new materials that would be Biblically solid, but culturally relevant. It's a lot of pressure. So, you've got to always be coming up with something fresh, and then when you're in a church like this, there's not only the stress of just the people there, we have a large television ministry, so there's a high expectation that the message is going to go out to another 25 to 50 thousand people, so inherently, it's a big spotlight. It's a very bright spotlight. So, there's a bunch of stress. As Adrian Rogers said, the blessed burden of preaching.

Speaker 1: So, it sounds like that's a week in, week out expectation, and that's what creates a lot of the stress.

Speaker 2: Final exams coming up, always. And it's relentless. Sunday's always coming, as they say.

Speaker 1: Yeah.

Speaker 2: Sunday is always coming.

Speaker 1: In your week, would you say there's days that are more stressful than the others? The beginning, the end of the week? Which one?

Speaker 2: Oh, no, Monday is just like a holiday for me.

Speaker 1: Is it? Okay.

Speaker 2: It's just, whoa man, it's like Disney World. Sunday's done, we got it in the barn.

Speaker 1: Oh, wow.

Speaker 2: So, we put an immense amount of time and effort, money, resource into it. You're always just thrilled at what God does, and what doesn't happen. You know, any time you have 8 thousand people in your place, how many people are going to make falls, is somebody going to vomit on the pew, have diarrhea, everything that is gonna need cleaning up. Put it up, you take it down. You get 500 volunteers who pulled it off. I'm the rover. I'm there. I'm a very engaged pastor. So, that's inherently stressful, but that's who I am and what I love.

Speaker 1: What does it feel like on Tuesday or Wednesday when all of a sudden, there's that new expectation? Is it something you look forward to, or is it something at the beginning that creates a sense of dread?

Speaker 2: You know, not really dread, but just responsibility. I'm very much driven by responsibility and I let Hebrews 12 guide my mantra. My anchor is Hebrews 12. Run the race with endurance.

Speaker 1: Okay.

Speaker 2: Philippians 3. We press on. I'm a perseverance guy. I've been through an awful lot. You just press on, and you do it in Jesus' name. You run the race for Him. But that's, if you just want to get down to the heart of it, that's what is my driver. I'm a press on person who says, Lord Jesus, I realize what you did for me, and I will depend on you.

Speaker 1: What is it that drives that perseverance? Obviously, I would a lot has to do with your calling.

Speaker 2: My calling. Yeah. That's it. My calling is like a log chain attached to a bulldozer.

Speaker 1: What do you, when you're going through that stress, and it's building up on you, maybe even there's a, I don't know if this scenario's every happened, but maybe you have a couple deaths, and you had to do maybe a couple of funerals in a week, and you still have a message to deliver on Sunday, and that begins to overwhelm you. Is there anything in particular that you do in response to acute stress?

Speaker 2: I had a funeral on Tuesday, I had a funeral on Wednesday, I had a funeral on Thursday.

Speaker 1: Did you really? This past week?

Speaker 2: I have a wedding tomorrow.

Speaker 1: I have full out, all services Sunday.

Speaker 1: Wow. And you're giving me an hour for an interview, here?

Speaker 2: What am I doing? [laughter]

Speaker 1: That's amazing. I know.

Speaker 2: I thought secretaries did this stuff. I didn't. [laughter] No, I wanted to meet with you. But no, that's my world. And then on top of that, I had my sister here visiting. So, I was entertaining my sister for a few days, Monday and Tuesday. And then one of the guys that had passed away, a very close friend of mine, yesterday. He was 63 years old. One year older than me. He died of esophageal cancer, which I've had some [experience] with.

Speaker 1: Wow.

Speaker 2: Yeah. That's, and he was my neighbor.

Speaker 1: Really? Wow. That's powerful.

Speaker 2: It was time. But you press on, brother. That's about it. And when you're called to serve the Lord, I have an immense sense of duty and responsibility to serve the Lord who served me, faithfully and dutifully. But that's it. If it was just for entertainment or a paycheck, to have people adulate me or whatever, I would have been out of this a long time ago. I also have a whole lot of personal wealth. I came from a family with a lot of personal wealth.

Speaker 1: Oh, okay. You don't need the paycheck.

Speaker 2: A small fraction of my total income is from the church.

Speaker 1: Oh, wow. Well, when you get into that stress, when you articulated pressing on and pushing through it, can you describe what that entails? In other words, is it just a mental perspective, or are there things, disciplines, that you have created that push you through and persevere when things get overwhelming? What kind of things do you do to persevere?

Speaker 2: Well, I've had, developed systems, or tracks, that you run on. My system would be having an allotment, in the sense of, Monday is kind of, in general, a relax day, in the sense of a wonderful weekend, generally, and I take a deep breath. Tuesday is a staff meeting, and try to meet with people in hospitals whenever. Wednesday is preparation day. I set aside Wednesdays for writing a Beacon article, and doing a devotional. I have a sermon outlined that I turn in. So I don't generally have any appointments until about 3:30 on Wednesday. You know, systems. I track. Then I'll have some meetings, do a Wednesday night prayer meeting, another meeting last night. I'll get through right about 9. Like most pastors, I do have a very high level work ethic. Thursdays, I do take a day off, unless we have a funeral. I do a whole lot of recreation. I'm into hunting, fishing, racket ball, tennis, golf. I do a lot of recreation fun things. A lot of times, I mean, for years, I played racket ball probably 2 or 3 times a week at lunch. I would skip lunch and meet some guys for a de-stressor. Exercise I think is a huge part of it. If I got stressed, I'd get out, walk, run a little bit, most every morning. Then Friday morning, I have a Bible study that I've had for, since 1992, just a group of guys that come in, and it's a real disciple thing, you know, that people say as a pastor, gosh, pastor, would you have a Bible study with me? Sure. I've got one on Friday mornings. Show up at 6:45, you can be in my Bible study. But I don't lead it. It's rotational.

Speaker 1: Okay.

Speaker 2: And all we do is read a chapter. We have breakfast, prayer, then we read a chapter of God's word. Very simple and communal. I stand up for it probably 3 times a year, but otherwise, whoever brings the food leads the study. It's very sharing oriented. What did you get out of this, how can we apply it? It was Promise Keepers before Promise Keepers became cool.

Speaker 1: Yeah.

Speaker 2: I actually started the prototype of this in 1984. In a church in [city, state].

Speaker 1: Wow. And it's been going on ever since? That's amazing.

Speaker 2: Yeah. Nothing fancy, but probably, actually, I didn't even count this morning, but we average about 30 guys. I also do; [business name] is headquartered in [city name]. About once a month, I speak. About 200 people would come here for a manager's meeting, every month. So, every 20 plus years, I speak at that. So, it's really neat.

Speaker 1: Oh, wow. That is.

Speaker 2: You don't expect it in the corporate world, and they have tons of people that aren't [business name] that are here. [business name] a big corporation, so.

Speaker 1: Yeah.

Speaker 2: It's a great way to connect, and just attract. I'll be with you on Friday, you're my fourth appointment. I had lunch with a guy, and he is my physician and is one of my best friends.

Speaker 1: Wow. That's a busy schedule.

Speaker 2: I'm a very big people person.

Speaker 1: So you enjoy it.

Speaker 2: I'm an extrovert. Yeah. I enjoy it. But I also enjoy myself. I enjoy quiet time. I love hunting. I have 4 fabulous children that run from 34 to 24. And so, I've always been very engaged in their lives.

Speaker 1: Wow.

Speaker 2: I've always been kind of, I'm a 2 for 1 guy. Golfing, I've done a tremendous amount of outside stuff, outside speaking, and I'm a trustee at the [school name], I'm a trustee at [school name] for 14 years.

Speaker 1: Okay.

Speaker 2: Trustee at the hospital here, our Baptist hospital, I've done that for 23 years.

Speaker 1: Wow.

Speaker 2: So there's a lot of things I've done.

Speaker 1: That brings me to another question. Let me name a few things, and think about the requirements and stress that come from them. Parishioners, staff, coworkers, the community at large, your own personal issues, or the organizational structure of the church. Which one of those would you say produces the majority of the stress, or the larger amounts of stress, for you personally? Any of those that are more so than the others?

Speaker 2: See, I've had a lot of health problems in the last few years, so.

Speaker 1: Okay.

Speaker 2: The health problems would definitely, in the last 9 months, I've missed 9 weeks.

Speaker 1: Wow.

Speaker 2: Getting pretty close to dying. Last November, I had a huge bleed.

Speaker 1: Really?

Speaker 2: Yeah, just an ongoing health problem. It's kind of had an insularly features that attach to it.

Speaker 1: Would you say any of those health issues are at all stress related, or are they something else, like hereditary or anything?

Speaker 2: I've had a disease achalasia, and it's a very unusual problem with your esophagus, I've had it since I was 10, and the last 5 years, 6 years has gotten to be really bad. And so, when you're throwing up all the time, 4 times, 5 times a week, and then I threw up enough to tear my esophagus on November 7th. My daughter's a nurse practitioner so I was very blessed. My wife's in California. My son's wife had a major stroke. We had a giant stressor years ago when my 26-year-old daughter in law had a major cerebral aneurysm.

Speaker 1: Oh wow.

Speaker 2: She stroked out. She was runner up Miss [state], my son was in law school, but they have just been through hell and back. 2 years in a rehab hospital. She was just totally wiped out. She could've died. Have a little baby, 6 months old, so my daughter was training for an LPN, she comes home for the funeral, she ended up staying to take care of the baby. My wife is out there 168 days the first year. Super stressful stuff. I was in California 12 times. So, I'm running back and forth trying to just be there with my son.

Speaker 1: Wow.

Speaker 2: We've had a lot of fatalities and things like that. So, you start to wear that in. I've got an 187 year old church, and you do 40 million dollars worth of building programs. And all of it's paid for. Bunches of things that are major stressors. I'm sure, in 14 years, you've done some fund raising. But it wasn't in a church that has a history of 170 years. So, you've got you some strong currents. Friends that don't see you, people leave, you know. It's hurtful, it stings, but, all the things you listed, I could say all those create stress, but they pale into almost insignificance compared to dying.

Speaker 1: Yeah.

Speaker 2: Being in a hospital for 5 days, thinking you've got esophageal cancer that's driving it, stuff like that.

Speaker 1: Would you say that, through all that stress, that the stress ever brings something good in you?

Speaker 2: Oh, it's fabulous, the stress? The fabulous deal about stress is it disabuses you of the notion that you're in control. It drives you to intimacy with God, and depending on Him. That's a very, very huge positive. It puts you the Word, and makes you utterly dependent on God's grace to get you through it. So, yeah, stress is very positive. You know, if it doesn't kill you, it makes you stronger.

Speaker 1: Yeah.

Speaker 2: That's what the Marines say.

Speaker 1: That's right. There's a lot of truth to that, especially when it comes to stress.

Speaker 2: Pain is weakness leaving my body.

Speaker 1: That's right. I've heard that. Is that from the Marines?

Speaker 2: Yeah. You look like a Marine.

Speaker 1: I'm not a Marine. I wish.

Speaker 2: Special Forces.

Speaker 1: That's right. Tell me about your family and how they experienced the stress of your job. Your wife, your kids, growing up in a church. Obviously, there are people that, you know, from time to time, don't like you, or may say negative things about you. What is your policy on how much you tell your family, or don't tell your family, or is it an open, you tell them everything that's going on, or do you feel like you have to protect them from certain things. How do you handle that?

Speaker 2: Kind of a combination play. My wife and I have been married 39 years, and she's a tremendous life partner. Very intelligent, very Christ centered person. Grew up in a house of 6 kids, so you know, she's not selfish, not self-focused, but a really great partner. Our deal is, she's my partner, so I tell her pretty much everything. I filter some things, in the sense of, you don't want her to have super negative views of people because they found out something that's really sad about somebody, and they're stepping way out of bounds. I don't necessarily share all that, but I download my day on her so that she knows she's my partner. Now, when our kids were little, and now they're 24 to 34, so this is different now, but when the kids were little, growing up, and traveling all these roads, oh yeah, we'd share an awful lot. You want your children to understand. But to me, they grew up to understand ministry, but one thing about being at [church name] is, this is a very encouraging, loving church. And see, you of course know the stat is, every 3.63 years, there's a turnover on churches. [former pastor] came here after being the

associate pastor for 4 years, and then he served 10 years from 1980 to 1990, I came here after being the the associate pastor for 3 years with [former pastor]. I've been here for 25 years, so I've been here for 28 years total.

Speaker 1: Wow.

Speaker 2: So, since 57, the church has only had 3 pastors.

Speaker 1: Wow.

Speaker 2: So the average is 20 years apiece. So that says something about the church. The old question, does a great church make a great pastor, or does a great pastor make a great church? I would think, easily, a great church makes a great pastor. And that if you have lots of people in the church who are snipers and grippers, if you have that kind of stuff, then that wears you thin. And yes, this church, oh yeah, there's some of that, but think of it as a business meeting. I'm the personnel committee. This church has a real high regard for their pastoral leader. I mean, I'm the beneficiary of this in the past, no one slept with the secretary, no one's stolen money, the other pastors, very honorable, Christ centered people. And so, we don't have a history of negativity. So, there's a lot of trust, an immense amount of trust. So, I've always had to be really careful about what I propose, because it's going to probably get done. Very encouraging, loving matrix of the church. I've not had to come home and say, well, yeah, they're talking about firing me tonight at the deacon's meeting. And our deacons are servants, it's not a board of directors. They have a really loving group. More than parishioners, you have staff issues, you know the old cliché, staff infection. And over the years, you have some people that you don't necessarily mesh with, so you let a few people go, but by and large, I've kind of gone with hiring people I know. You know, the devil you know is better than the one you don't.

Speaker 1: Yeah.

Speaker 2: We've really been very careful, in a certain respect, on who comes aboard, and we've had some quality people on staff, so it's a good team. Super good team. Lot of longevity. Lot of internal people that we hire. I've almost stopped hiring from resumes, and it's kind of like, you know, the home team.

Speaker 1: Yeah. That's good.

Speaker 2: So that takes a lot of the stress out of the last few years. Our staff team has just been super harmonious. We do a good job. We trust each other.

Speaker 1: Would you say your leadership style is more of a shared leadership?

Speaker 2: Collegial? Very much collegial.

Speaker 1: So you work with them?

Speaker 2: Yeah, we all work for Jesus, and we work with each other. I'm the first of equals. I am the first of the equals.

Speaker 1: Oh, okay.

Speaker 2: So yeah, I'm the head coach. So, when something happens, I know the buck stops with me, but I don't micromanage anybody, I trust people. We've got really good folks. I'm very engaged, I'm aware. I'm aware of everything, but I run nothing.

Speaker 1: What does that engaged look like? Do they come to you, or you're kind of moving through what's going on with them?

Speaker 2: I do a lot of walking around on Mondays, you know, make the rounds.

Speaker 1: Okay.

Speaker 2: It's good. Just kind of engage in the process. I mean, I know everybody really well, all their kids, wives, everybody. And so, it's a family. I engage with the people. I'm a very aware person. In the staff meetings, you know, we always have some fun, but we just get down to the nuts and bolts of it, so we dig down into it.

Speaker 1: That's good. Let's switch gears, and think about your spiritual life, spiritual health, as it relates to stress. Here's a question that I would be interested to hear your response to. How do you perceive other people's problems that are brought to you for answers? And, two prong question. First of all, how do you see those problems, and your role in helping them? And how has that changed over the years that you've been here? Maybe the way you saw it early on, to the way you see it today.

Speaker 1: That's a great question. Now, I'm going to say, I am not a pastoral counselor. I do not see people for multi visits. We've had counselors on our staff before, we don't right now. But I'm quick to say, man, if you've got a marriage problem, I'm like the guy at the car place. You go to the service manager, he listens, and says, you've got a transmission problem. This is our transmission department. I'll do that, but as far as kind of courting ongoing counseling with people, in a church with 6,000 members, you don't do that.

Speaker 1: Yeah.

Speaker 2: Plus, it's just not my forte. I try to know what I'm not, and so, I try to say, you've got [another pastor's name] over here, he's fantastic. You've got an eating disorder, [another staff member] is the perfect person for a teenager or whatever. But I do not meet people over and over again.

Speaker 1: Okay. Have you always done that, from the very beginning?

Speaker 2: Pretty much. I'm not a counselor. I mean, I'm the pastor.

Speaker 1: That's good.

Speaker 2: I've always had a real clear understanding that I do basically 4 things. I do the preaching and teaching, I do leadership, I do all the ministry things, and evangelism. Those are the things. I'll do weddings, funerals, I'll talk with people, but if I sit with those 4 things, that's pretty much what I do, but as far as being just a pseudo counselor, that's not what I got my degree in. I would prefer somebody go somewhere else to do that, because they'll get a lot better help. Now, has it changed over the year, of course. You do ministry for 40 years, you raise 4 kids who do love the Lord, who are serving Him in really tremendous ways, that gives you a different perspective than when you had one child, and you're a young pastor, and you're trying to figure things out, and you grow and get some experience from your life. You learn a lot more of God's word, you see things that work and don't work. And I think you have a lot more empathy. You develop a lot more empathy when you see good people who are hurt, and when you see people trying to raise their kids right, the kid goes prodigal, and you see broken hearts. And it brings tears to your eyes. We had a young kid that just went off the deep end and killed himself. So, you just think, "goodness, Lord help us."

Speaker 1: When you come through those stressful experiences, what are disciplines that have maybe developed in your life because of going through stressful situations? Obviously, there are definitely disciplines that you have in place, that when they come to you know, they help you get through. Is there anything you can say, when I went through

this, I developed this, and that's become a pattern in my life since then?

Speaker 2: Yeah. Well, you've got to have a great support system, and I do. I have a phenomenal wife, really great kids. I have a ton of best friends. I have 30, 40 guys that would show up at 2 AM and be there to bring me their wallet. Maybe 50 or 60. Just really deep, deep relationships. Which is, when you let the roots of your life, kind of like a friend, go down in the soil of the community, you're required to have roots. And so I'm just a very relational person. I've got a great set of support, and friendships that provide tremendous support. They will tell you "Don't have your best friends in the church." All my best friends are in the church. We just do life together. We're a community.

Speaker 1: So you'd say your significant relationships are right here, in this church.

Speaker 2: Oh, a hundred percent.

Speaker 1: That's good.

Speaker 2: And not totally, exclusively. I have some friends that don't go here.

Speaker 1: Yeah.

Speaker 2: But by far, all my closest friends are here. You have family members, you have fellow pastors. But by and large, it's the friends here. My life is deeply embedded in this church. When you feel disappointed, or drained, or just wiped out, all those things come your way, you engage the Word. The Word of God is a creative force like none other. So, you know, hardships, struggles, challenges, all those things. Stress drives you deeper into the word and your walk with God. Sometimes journaling and exercise is good. Sweat it out.

Speaker 1: Yeah.

Speaker 2: Talk it out, sweat it out, cry it out.

Speaker 1: That's good.

Speaker 2: Those are the things that I do that have been helpful.

Speaker 1: Those are 3 areas I really wanted to hit on, spiritual, physical, and organizational structure. You hit every one of those. I have another question. A lot of people get into ministry because they want to help someone, but then it gets to a point in that burnout process where, the very people that you got into that field to help, now you see them as the problem, and the ones creating the stress in your life.

Speaker 2: Your enemies.

Speaker 1: Yes. And then it leads to a lack of personal accomplishment, where I feel like I'm just spinning the wheels, this guy come in and ask me this, I told him what he needs to do, he doesn't ever do it, and so that's the process that leads to burnout. And you've articulated many things that become roadblocks to keep you from getting to that point. Is there anything else that you could think of, with that kind of articulated, that helps you to keep your view of your parishioners in the right focus? To keep the demands of ministry from you turning negative on that, and seeing it differently than maybe the reason you got into ministry to begin with? Anything that you would add to what you've already said?

Speaker 2: To keep things moving and fresh, you know, this is where I think evangelism comes in.

Speaker 1: Okay.

Speaker 2: I'll give you a thought. Matthew 28:19 and 20. Jesus said go, and make disciples; baptizing and teaching, and everything I taught you. But what does he say at the end? I'll be with you as you do that, as you obey me, as you take seriously my last command. If you make my last command your first priority, I will be with you. So, I've always been a personal witness, extremely consistent in my personal witness. I kind of just, almost, I was on staff at [previous church served]. During that time, I read a ton about George W. Pruitt, and he made a statement that I felt was so profound, he said, if you're not given to personal witness, you don't deserve to give a public witness. It's disingenuous.

Speaker 1: Yeah.

Speaker 2: And so I thought to myself, I want to give many private invitations for people to come to Christ, so that my public invitation for people to come and receive Christ is not disingenuous at all. So, what I'm saying is, I have always shared my faith a lot. And somehow, in doing that, it gives you fresh fire, fresh sense of dependence on God. Brings in a lot of new people. There's energy and excitement in seeing new. I guess that's probably kind of your world. You're starting. You've seen a lot of new people come aboard. In a way, when you stay in place awhile, you become everybody's first pastor. I've done a lot of funerals, but I've done a lot of baptisms. It's really neat to see all these new people come. So, I mean, I've seen thousands of new people in our church, so that's really cool. That kind of keeps a freshness to it. There certainly is pressure to keep a church like this growing, oh man, it takes a lot. You're going to have significant attrition; people die, they move, they get mad, they feel left out, whatever. So, you're always going to have this sense of sadness with people leaving, but then the joy of people coming aboard. I will give you a kind of unique thought. I doubt if you're going to hear this one from anybody else. I think one of the things that's kind of kept me running strong is an ability to do emotional transference. For instance, we're in the middle of a building program. Probably had, I don't know, 200 people leave during that out of a 12-year process. Really long process. An old church facility, you can't just put up another building, you have to match it. Bunches of money, I'm super frugal. You know, the hard things. So, during the middle of all this, somebody says, well, I just don't see it. I think we're an old downtown church. We just need to take care of our own. Whatever. And I'm out of here. So, when you hear somebody say that, it can take all the wind out of your sails. Or it can fire you up, if you can do the right dial in your head. And my ability to transfer those negative emotions into positive motivation, to say, you know, I hate to see you go, but I'm going to find 10 to replace you. I'm going to translate those negative emotions that would take the joy out of ministry, into positive motivation. You know, you're a great friend, and I love you, but my goodness, none of us are irreplaceable, so let's just go find 10 more. I've always been able to do that. I'll get on the phone, I'll say, come join us. I've been a telephone salesman, so I do a lot of evangelism on the phone.

Speaker 1: That's amazing.

Speaker 2: Yeah, it's a really handy thing to be able to do, if you can flip that dial.

Speaker 1: That's a great perspective to have.

Speaker 2: It's transference. Like how I tell it. It also allows you, instead of going home and just being sour, and taking it out on your wife and kids, just to have a, maintain a positive attitude as an act of your will and volition, a sense of joy that you know what the bigger picture is. I don't have to do this, I get to do this. I get to serve the Lord. I get to build His kingdom. I get to make a difference with my life. That's a huge factor for me. I came from a very secular family. My dad was a big time entrepreneurial business man, so I get to do this. I don't have to do this.

Speaker 1: That's awesome. I have one last question for you, wrapping this up.

Speaker 2: Sure.

Speaker 1: This one's more of a summary of your ministry experience and dealing with stress, you're talking to a man who has just finished seminary, he's about to take his first pastorate. You're allowed to tell him one thing. Now, obviously, we assume this man's called of God, that he has a relationship with the Lord, and he has a prayer life and all this kind of thing. So, a lot of that is assumed. Aside from those things, what would be the one thing, if you had one thing that you told him, if you're going to make it here and stay long, this is the one thing that you need to make sure that you do. What would be that one piece of advice that you would give to that guy?

Speaker 2: It's impossible to limit it to one.

Speaker 1: Yeah.

Speaker 2: I would just say, trust in Jesus, everywhere, everyday, and everyone. You know? Be a Jesus fan. There are guys that kind of flop over into that mode of being a CEO, and there are other people who can flop over into the mode of being a chaplain, they spend all their energy getting up at 4 AM, and getting there when someone comes in, and forever holding their hand. Maybe that's your calling, but is that for you or them?

Speaker 1: Yeah.

Speaker 2: I would say, just be a real Jesus person. Have a deep love for Jesus, have a deep love for His word, have a deep love for His people. And if you're a Jesus person, that's the pull, that's the log and chain attached to a bulldozer that pulls you up the hard hills of ministry. The disappointments of people, it's always sad when you discover somebody's getting a divorce, or you just can't believe it, or, they commit adultery, and you just can't believe it, or a secret drug problem, and you can't believe it. You think, wait a minute, this is somebody I've invested in. Again, what makes you press on? Just because you know that God is calling you to do it. Even Jesus had a Judas, nobody bats a thousand, and you just press on.

PP17

Speaker 1: When you reflect on your 23 years of ministry, how have you experienced stress in ministry?

Speaker 2: When I came here, we had, 22 and a half years ago when I got here, I had only been married not even a year yet. So, newlywed, when you get here and get into ministry. My wife grew up in, she grew up in [city], urban setting. And then we met at [University], we were in seminary. And then going from a big city, going to the school where you're around all your friends, and then you come out here in the sticks. You know, so there's a life change in that. You know, I could get in, go right to work. She, okay, you can only clean the house so many times. You know, just trying to find her little niche there. So, early on, just her adjusting and finding that balance there. So, wonderful, wonderful, wonderful, supportive wife. We're in this together through that, but that's an adjustment that, that was an adjustment that really affected her, thus, it affected our whole family and all that. I've got something I can drop in to do but there's not a set job description for a pastor's wife. So, I guess that's early stresses. One of the things a little different for my story is the family dynamic I have of my special needs daughter. I have two girls. I have a 20-year-old, she's a senior at [school name]. My youngest is 16, she has special needs, Down's syndrome and autism. The last 2 years, we've been dealing with epileptic seizures that have just kicked in, that never have before. Also, I was in between at school. I started my doctoral work, that's when [special needs daughter] came, and I ended up taking about a 2-year break. Church was growing, it had a lot of growth at that point. So, we're like 6 years in, probably, when [special needs daughter] was born. A lot of growth at that point, and then she came, and she was having multiple therapies a week and all of that, so I just kind of had to step back from school for a while. Then it got to a point that either I'm going to do it or I'm not going to do it, so I just jumped in and finished it up. But, that's a whole other dynamic of, you know, stress and strains in ministry. Wonderful, very supportive, church in all of that. But, when you look at, you just talk about stresses and strains on marriage and all of that. If you look at the kind of subset of family dynamics, families that deal with special needs, there's much higher divorce rate, and all of these other things in all of that. But you know, we deal with it. [special needs daughter] is doing great, doesn't have heart issues like a lot of kids with Down's and autism have, but she's got a number of other things that we deal with. But that's just another dynamic of the stress, the type of stresses that you deal with in ministry. There's the ebb and flows of various years in ministry. I'm just talking, maybe there's some other questions, there are certainly other questions you'll get to, but I think it was really about a 6-year push, and then there was another about a 10-year kind of a thing that I had a lot of church, a lot of, let me come back, I'll come back to those numbers. Homer Lindsey Junior, at First Baptist, Jacksonville, I don't know if you know who he is or not, but he was sort of like, my wife grew up in that church and he was sort of like her grandfather. He really took me under his wing, spent a lot of time with me. He used to say you're not really the pastor until you've been there 7 years. You can be the preacher, but it's, you know. The dynamic here, the church was 10 years old when I got here, but I was the 3rd full time pastor, they'd pretty much run everybody else off. And so, so you're in, they're in a 3-year cycle of we were here before you, we'll be here after you. You know, you kind of do that. And then a lot of new growth, and you kind of get at the 6-year mark and some of them are like hey, I don't have the control I used to have. So, there's kind of a push back off of that. Again, around about that 10-year mark, just, it wasn't a big thing, but it was by some simple things, and then you kind of move on from there. But, those are various strains that kind of, I've heard from other people with longevity in ministry that those tend to be not abnormal at certain road marks like that.

Speaker 1: That would be understandable. That's interesting. What source in your ministry produces the most stress for you?

Speaker 2: You know, when you first get here, you kind of grow through the structure. As the church gets larger and you kind of walk them through, it's not a little bitty church anymore, so, you can't handle things that way. You just grow through that. And so, the way we're structured and the way we handle things with finance committee meetings and deacons, that's really the only two we have now. But those things aren't a stress at all. Maybe early on, when you're having some of that push back, some of those kind of key people, those were a little more stressful then. But you know, you just kind of grow through some of those things. One of the other things that Dr. Lindsey used to tell me, when you're dealing with some of those stresses, he talks about if you're plowing and you come to a stone, you've got 2 choices, you can either plow around it, or you can blow it up with dynamite. But he said I've seen a lot of preachers get blown up with their own dynamite. And so, sometimes you just learn to plow around. It smooths out over time, just be patient.

Speaker 1: Yeah, that's good. How has stress impacted your personal life?

Speaker 2: I don't know.

Speaker 1: Positive or negative?

Speaker 2: Yeah, I mean I think I'm pretty even keeled, kind of, so I don't feel like there's, I've really been worked up over a lot of it, you just do what you do and just keep plowing. I don't look at it as, I don't look back over my time and say the stress has been this huge factor issue in my ministry. I mean it's hard work and you've got things you deal with, but it hasn't been an overwhelming issue for me.

Speaker 1: Okay. Have you ever seen it have a positive impact in your personal life?

Speaker 2: Well sure. I mean, the first good thing, we see it all with sports, the championship on the line, you reach down and, yeah, you know, the pressure, the stress to do your best, you want to do the best for you, you want to do best for the Lord, you want to do the best in ministry, and making an impact. So yeah, there's certainly a positive to it as well.

Speaker 1: Has there ever been maybe a discipline or something that stress has created or enhanced in your life because of going through something that was very stressful, it pushed you in a direction and actually developed something that was positive because of going through something stressful?

Speaker 2: I'm pretty disciplined in some different areas. I try to exercise regularly. My normal daily routine of what I do in my quiet time, those kind of things I think that the Lord's developed some of those disciplines in my life along the way Therefore it has helped me kind of stay more even keeled through the stress. So, I think those are, so the answer to the question is yes, those are some of the things that the Lord, in college and early years of ministry, just kind of developing all of that. I guess in between, yeah, the Lord used that in developing some of those disciplines in your life really helps kind of keep you sane when the stressful times do come.

Speaker 1: Yeah. How do you identify stress when it begins to surface in your life?

Speaker 2: No. My wife calls it my business mode, but I don't know that that's, you know, it's stress. I've got to get focused on what I'm doing. Okay, you're in your business mode here. I don't feel stressed at that point but I'm focused on what I've got to do there. I mean not really, I don't sense a physiological response or something or other like that.

Speaker 1: Okay. Tell me about your family. How has the stress of ministry affected your family?

Speaker 2: I think we're doing well. I talked about my wife, and it's a little different with [special needs daughter]. Some of the things that we would often maybe like to do together, or whatever, we just, [special needs daughter] got some personal life safety things. She can't talk, she can't swallow, she can't just chew so you have to be very careful with anything that you feed her, puree kind of whatever. My secretary is watching her over in the other room right now. They're out of school today. There are very few babysitter kind of things that we have. The one that we have regular, all of the time, she just moved and so it's, for us, as far as [wife], I just finished a 2-year term as President of [state] convention, and she actually was able to come over and spend one night. It was in [city], and so she was able to come over one night and be there during the day. So, she spent Monday night, she was there when I preached on Tuesday afternoon, and drove back Tuesday night. But one girl who used to keep here, who's now living in Alabama, drove back over to keep [special needs daughter] that one night while we're doing that. So, those are kind of things that maybe not having some of the breaks that maybe some other families do, we kind of learned that here that is what is normal for us. We've really got to work hard. [special needs daughter] is easy, I say easy to take care of, you've just got to be careful. We go on dates and she comes with us. I mean you've got to do what you can. When she's with us there, I like that. I guess because of the family dynamic, there's some things that we have to do more separately that we might normally do together just because of her. My oldest daughter, she is just wonderful. She's not negatively been affected by the stress of the ministry or the stress of having a special needs daughter. As a matter of fact, that's really kind of shaped her. So, she's at the [school name] studying to be an occupational therapist. She's gone to [special needs daughter] therapy all her life, therefore it's kind of second nature to her. She just loves doing that and wants to help people that way. And so, that's kind of the family dynamic for us there.

Speaker 1: Yeah. You mentioned your wife, originally, when you first came here, adjustments that she's had to make. Through the growth of the church, and even presently, do you find things that are going on in the church create a lot of stress for her, or do you intentionally protect her from things like by not saying things that are going on?

Speaker 2: You know, she's very perceptive. I mean I certainly don't come unload everything on her. She's got enough going on to manage without me just unloading all of that. But, she's perceptive. I think that's her wanting to be protective of her husband, and other things, you know, like that. Yeah, but she deals with all of that fine.

Speaker 1: Is there anything, a way that you can articulate how something passes through to her, or something that you say no, this is going to stay with me, I'm going to keep this here?

Speaker 2: No, I don't. It's pretty heavy duty. She's got a lot of wisdom and insight there, so I don't intentionally keep, some big kind of stuff, yeah, get her perspective and all of that on it. It's just kind, you know, this anonymous letter I got this week, that kind of stuff I don't worry about.

Speaker 1: You mentioned you exercise. How do you think stress impacts your physical life? Have you ever had any kind of sickness or difficulty you think may have been related to a stressful event that's going on in the church, or are you aware of the impact it has and that's why you discipline yourself to exercise?

Speaker 2: Well, it's more, you know, there's a biblical side of it. We need to take care of our bodies. My dad had a heart attack at 34, died of a heart attack at 58, and so there's the

side that you can do and then you've got the genes that just is what it is. But, I grew up in [state], everybody smoked. My dad carried a lot more weight. Those kind of things that self-inflicted kind of things, so coming back, no, I don't have a certain physical thing that's just stress related.

Speaker 1: Have you ever, that you can recall, increased your physical regiment because of something that was going on, or do you just maintain the same thing all the time?

Speaker 2: I'm disciplined, I do something every day.

Speaker 1: You know, like something real heavy, I've got to go run for 3 miles and process this as I run, something along those lines?

Speaker 2: Yeah.

Speaker 1: You do that, then?

Speaker 2: Yeah, you know, yeah.

Speaker 1: It's a physical response.

Speaker 2: Yeah, yeah.

Speaker 1: And do you think that's impacted you positively?

Speaker 2: Oh sure. That's an outlet, for sure.

Speaker 1: Yeah. What about spiritually? How do you see stress impacting your spiritual life?

Speaker 2: Yeah. Well it drives you to prayer and all of that. If everything was a mountaintop all the time, we'd get pretty comfortable in all of that. And so, it does keep us needy and dependent, which is a good thing. And so, you know, yeah, stress and continuing. I think it keeps you humble and how the Lord does come through and help you, help you work through, and what successes you've seen, it's been his grace in your life that has worked and done it and not just pat yourself on the back and all of that.

Speaker 1: How do you perceive other people's problems that have been brought to you for answers? How do you see your role in answering their problems?

Speaker 2: As a friend, encourager, kind of assessing my spiritual giftedness, it would be in that encouragement, that kind of a thing. Just to be there with them and walk through and try to speak some Godly wisdom into their life, not try to fix it all, but just try to speak into it and encourage them in the process. That's part of my role as a pastor. I don't just see it as somebody else telling me. I'm their pastor, I'm the shepherd in the way that Johnny Hunt says, shepherds smell like sheep. To be with the people and hear what's going on, and just do what I can and encourage them in the midst of it.

Speaker 1: How do you protect yourself from feeling emotional exhaustion?

Speaker 2: Well, you know, this whole thing, ministry would be great if it wasn't for the people. I think that's a stupid, I mean that's what you're saying right there and I've never really felt that way. That's just.

Speaker 1: Is it because you are able to create some kind of boundaries?

Speaker 2: Nothing necessarily written out. I do try to delegate. I try to fix everything, you know. I don't have to be the one. If there's no pastor or staff member that you can go

talk to, my worship leader when I got here, the pastor previous to that, to him, like one of the first hospital calls or something. Anyway, the previous pastor reamed him out because he got to the hospital before he did, and so he was like he's trying to sense through that well if you can get to the hospital before me, fantastic, you know, go for it. I don't have to, you know. I think that's, I don't feel like I have to be the one, but I don't have kind of a spelled-out kind of a process of what I do that or not.

Speaker 1: All right. In kind of drawing this to a conclusion, what are the most effective ways that you've learned to mitigate the negative aspects of stress? What are the, as you look at your life, what are the things that you have developed or that just through the experience you've developed, whether intentionally or unintentionally, that have become pretty much your protocol for when stress comes into your life, here's the thing to lean on or to make sure that I'm doing right?

Speaker 2: I think really trying to work on things with my family and all of that. I don't have a bunch of outside hobbies and other things. Nothing wrong with that, different people do different things, but I don't. What limited extra time that I have, just hanging out with my family doing whatever we do. I think that helps keep me in balance. I do tend to be more of a workaholic, just all the time, inadvertently, just working and doing kind of that intentional focus. Hey, I've got to work on things and spend time with my family and do other things like that. That kind of helps keep everything balanced. Maybe that keeps the stress from getting to an overload part of it. So, just kind of an intentional focus of "I've got to address my family needs as well." We've all seen folks that have been more concerned with the church needs than their family needs and then, as it ends up, they don't have their families, and then really, what do they have left? And so, I've seen that and I've really tried to guard against that throughout my marriage as well.

Speaker 1: Last really, the point of things, organizational structure that you tell your staff, how do you use that or how have you been intentional in developing that to deal with stress in the ministry that inevitably comes up?

Speaker 2: I do try to delegate. I try to find the right balance in that, not total hands off kind of things. There's several things I like, and I'm a kind of detailed person, and trying to help them see that, and train them to look for some of the details and take care of some of the things, but give them space to learn throughout my ministry. Like you said, you're an intern when you got there. Spend a lot of time with younger guys as younger interns, younger staff. I was trying to teach and train them, give them preaching opportunities. We had some guys that, take for instance my children's pastor we brought on 2 years ago. He had served in two much, much larger churches and so he had been in ministry 6 to 8 years at that point and had only preached just a handful of times. When he was a children's pastor at the really large church he was at, he never went to church. Any time they had a church function he was off with the kids and there wasn't a Sunday night option. So, they didn't have Sunday night church and he just did the two morning kinds of things, so there was never a time that he was fit in. So, I try to be intentional pouring into those guys, but even them developing that, that's a win-win to me. I mean all those early years of the ministry, preaching 3 times a week, Sunday morning, Sunday night, Wednesday night. You go from not preaching any a week, an occasional here or there to doing 3 a week, just the amount of time that it takes for each message, that's an overwhelming task right there. Trying to be intentional with them, so I do that, that frees up. So, we do that regularly in some different things like I don't always have them preach on Sunday, I'm pretty much preaching always on Sunday morning, but like on Sunday nights we did a 'through the spirit' series and I had them rotate. We kind of rotated around some of the different ones. And then I did it for a while, and then we came up with another one doing the parables, and I kind of did a bunch of them and I kind of spread out to all of them some various parables that they were going to hit. Just kind of giving them some opportunity. I think it helps. This kind of goes back to the other of

everybody having to come to me for everything. That helps them see that they're part of the ministry team, they're the pastors, they're the pastoral team. It's not, "well that's just the youth guy, I've got to go talk to the pastor." They get to see them in that realm so I think that helps. The delegation, I've got a wonderful, I've got [assistant], whom you met, office manager. She just handles so much that I don't have to, she kind of knows and filters what needs to come to me and what doesn't. She's able to handle that. I've got good staff. My music guy, so I've been here 22 almost 23 years, and he was here 3 years before that so he preceded me. We've been here the whole time in ministry and have a real good working relationship there. So, he's able to manage and help a lot too. I have a good staff around here, really. Having a loving, supportive family and a great staff around you really helps kind of keep the stress level down. If you don't have a healthy family situation, or if your staff situation isn't helpful, that can really hurt, I think as far as longevity goes. I had another friend who was pastor at [church name] for a long, long time and somebody asked him what's the secret of his longevity. He said "Well, when I wanted to go nobody wanted me, and when I wanted to stay that's when people came." He said that sort of tongue in cheek but that's how it happens sometimes. There is some truth in that. Coming back to [pastor/mentor], having him as a mentor, that whole thought that you're in one place for a long time, kind of just ingraining yourself in the community. This is a wonderful, wonderful community here to live and raise a family. And so, kind of having that as a model, as a mentor, that helps kind of going in. You approach it, everybody says I'm different, but not everybody really means that. Just kind of planting in and growing through it, it's really healthy and helpful.

Speaker 1: That's good. Last question, and this is really kind of a summary from your experience. What do you perceive as the most important thing that a young or new pastor needs to know about dealing with stress, and what is one piece of advice that you would share from your own experience? If you had to bring it down to one thing? I would say that there's a lot of things that you could say but what would be the one that you'd point out and say here's the most important thing you need to do, say, think, coming into this?

Speaker 2: The reality is stressful times do come, so don't be surprised. God has called you and God will equip you. Don't be delinquent on that. Keep your eyes on Jesus in the midst of it and depend on him and he'll give you strength and enable you to do what you need to do. The stressful times are going to come, they are. Just remember where your strength comes from and keep your eyes on him.

Speaker 1: All right. Well, thank you very much. I appreciate your time.

PP18

Speaker 1: How have you experienced stress in ministry? Where do you see it coming at you the most?

Speaker 2: Well, I find I experience stress by dealing with people who are disgruntled, or upset, or angry, or hurt. That creates a lot of stress. Hurting of broken relationships. I experience a lot of stress when I feel like we're not progressing as we should be progressing as a congregation. I feel stress at times, in leading a staff, and feeling confident enough to stay ahead of them, and to lead them, and guide them, and to be a good leader, not only for the staff members, but to be the example for their family members, as well. Encouraging to family members. I feel stress when it comes to dealing with my life, making sure I'm a good husband and a good father, and a good grandfather. All those kinds of things. And then, I think there's the stress in regarding big decisions, you know... Am I doing the right thing? Am I leading the right way? Then here, at [church name], we've had some really traumatic experiences. We've had some [natural disasters] to deal with, where we've lost everything. So, we've had, there's always stress. I do think that our growth has helped us to some degree, because that's one component we haven't had to stress over, but the growth brings a lot of stress with it.

Speaker 1: It does. Where would you say the majority of your stress comes from?

Speaker 2: Well, a church our size, it's not so much from the parishioners anymore.

Speaker 1: Okay.

Speaker 2: When I first began as a pastor, my first, I think my first 18 months, the honeymoon period of when I began as a pastor in my previous church, but then I ran afoul of the church boss, who was the largest giver in the congregation. He gave 20 percent of the church income, and we were, I thought friends. I led his brother to the Lord, and helped his son come back to the Lord. We had a good relationship, and I wanted to give our youth pastor an 800 dollar a year raise. He didn't think that was the right thing to do.

Speaker 1: Wow.

Speaker 2: So we actually had an open conflict on the church floor, in a business meeting, where he stood up and said, you're going to suffer, this church is not going to suffer. I was a young pastor, brand new to the ministry. Didn't know what to do. So, that was a really stressful time for me. Actually, prior to that, my father died of cancer at an early age, and that was a very stressful time for me, as well. I became bitter and angry toward the Lord. I didn't even know if I wanted to continue in the ministry. I was in seminary, getting my master's degree, and so, it was a difficult time. Following that situation, with the guy who was the church boss, who actually, I pursued a relationship with him for the next 2 years. He had a farm, and would let me work beside him all day long, and worked me until the end of the day, and I'd tell him I was there, not for his money, but for his friendship. And, at the end of my tenure as pastor there, we'd actually reconciled our relationship. I came here as pastor in 1989, and that was a lot stress there because I really had this vision, burden, dream God gave me while I was in the PhD program. We'd been studying evangelism in the early church, and God really spoke to me about starting a new kind of church. I'd never heard of the latest church planting books or fads, if people asked me what book did I read, I'd say, the book of Acts. It's basically what I read, and we started. But of the 10 people I went to seeking direction and confirmation, the first 9 said it was the craziest thing they'd ever heard of. That church where I was is growing, so, wanting out was a big deal. The Lord blessed. Then early in my ministry here, I had a, I guess I developed a tendency, a habit of being vague with people when they asked me direct

questions, we drew people from all walks of life with a name like [church name]. We didn't have anything that was typical Baptist, so people would ask me questions, I'd say, we might think about that, or something like that, and that created some issues, but I also had some leaders rise up that had some particular agendas. One wanted to be the worship leader of the church, and I wasn't going to let him be the worship leader of the church. And one wanted me to fix his wife, and I couldn't fix his wife, and I wasn't about to even try, when she told me she'd had an affair with a previous pastor.

Speaker 1: Oh, wow.

Speaker 2: Which I didn't know when he became a leader. And so, we actually have elders who are spiritual advisers in council of the pastor and an administrative group that oversees our finances. We have deacons who serve as leaders, but the elders, these two guys became elders, and are having secret elder meetings. Insinuating that I wasn't trustworthy because I wasn't always clear with my answers and responses. So, we had to have a come to Jesus meeting, and we actually had a former associate pastor who wanted to preach half the time, and all that kind of stuff, so he was sort of goading these guys. He'd left by that time, and gone into another ministry. So, I really struggled with anger that summer. We had 2 services, one at 8, and one at 10:45, and I had to have the staff gathered around me to pray over me so I could preach that morning. The Lord blessed, we saw lots of people come to faith in Christ.

Speaker 1: Wow.

Speaker 2: We went through lots of other stressors in 1998, we found out that one of our associate pastors was having affairs with a leader's wife.

Speaker 1: Wow.

Speaker 2: That almost killed me. We had to deal with that situation. In 98, I also sent my daughter off to Liberty University, which I thought was like the safest place in the world, and she met another pastor's son there, and she wound up getting pregnant, out of wedlock.

Speaker 1: Wow.

Speaker 2: So that was... actually, when I discovered she was pregnant, I came back and submitted my resignation to our elders.

Speaker 1: Wow.

Speaker 2: And then, they rejected that resignation. They said, you've led your home well, and your house well, and this is an unfortunate situation. And so, we shared that with our congregation, I think we did it on a Wednesday night, and I think everybody there came and hugged our necks, and told us they were going to stand beside us, and prayed with us. They did. They stood with us.

Speaker 1: Wow.

Speaker 2: Later on, in 2003, we had a guy who had started the church with me, one of my associate pastors, on Monday, we found out he had leukemia, on Thursday, he was in Heaven.

Speaker 1: Wow.

Speaker 2: So, he had some health issues, but we had no idea. That was a big, big, big stressor for us. Then, it came 2005, Hurricane Katrina.

Speaker 1: Yeah.

Speaker 2: We lost everything in Hurricane Katrina, this building was probably underwater for 2 and a half weeks. We had the highest amount of flood insurance recommended to us, which was a half million dollars, and we had a 16 and a half million dollar rebuild. Fortunately, the Lord had led us to acquire another Baptist church that was about to go bankrupt. Their pastor made a lot of bad decisions. He had called me 6 weeks prior to Hurricane Katrina, and asked me if we were interested in buying their property for 8 million dollars, I said, no, I don't think so. He called me back 5 days and asked, would you guys consider taking over our indebtedness, which was about 3 and a half million dollars. And we prayed about it. We didn't need 3 and a half million dollars in either building. The Lord told us to do it. Sort of rescue the testimony and the legacy. We've never heard anything about multi campuses and now we had 2 campuses. What we didn't know, it took us 4 weeks to vote, meet with the leadership, both the congregations, and all the legal things. That in itself was amazing, between two Baptist congregations. What he didn't know, what nobody knew, was that a hurricane was heading that way, so God was actually providing for us a new facility 2 weeks before Hurricane Katrina. It was smaller than this one, but it was just the right size, because we lost 60 percent of our congregation permanently.

Speaker 1: Wow. So they moved to other areas?

Speaker 2: They were displaced to other cities and states. Never came back. So, we had 2,051 people the weekend before Katrina. A month later, we started out with 550 people. We had about 800 total that came back. But considering the fact that there was no hope of rebuilding this facility, actually, we found out the other church had lied to us. They didn't have insurance on the building. We had to raise a million dollars just to fix everything. The other campus flooded as well, but it was a rain water, and not the salt and sewage canal water we have here. So, we had to get in there, we just started back, and focused on serving the community. I opened up a relief center, and we became the largest relief center in the area eventually. And we just served people, led them to Christ, and God regrew our congregation. Took us 5 years to rebuild this campus. By that time, we had 2 other campuses. And so, we rebuilt this campus in 2010, so we've been growing since. We average about 9 to 10 thousand weekend worship attendants. We have 9 campuses now.

Speaker 1: That's amazing. Well tell me as you walk through these very stressful experiences, how did that play on you, emotionally, each one? Did you find that, when the next one came, you were more prepared for it because of the ones before it, or was every one of them so different that it was just a completely new experience, of all those things you listed?

Speaker 2: Well, in the early years, they were very different. We also had a hurricane in 2012 that put our [campus name] underwater.

Speaker 1: Really?

Speaker 2: We lost everything there.

Speaker 1: Oh, wow.

Speaker 2: And some of our people who had moved out of [city] moved to neighboring city], to the west, and lost everything a second time.

Speaker 1: Goodness.

Speaker 2: You know, I think in the early years, honestly, I still struggle when there's broken relationships. It keeps me awake at night. We just recently had a pastor, we had over one of our campuses on the west make a stressful situation for us. The campus was over a thousand but had not been growing under his leadership. We've been coaching

him, working with him. He's just at his capacity. So, we were going to reposition him to another position in our ministry. Same salary, in some ways, more influence with other pastors in our region, but his wife wasn't for it. So, he, unexpectedly, while we were talking to him about this, and he seemed excited, pulled out, took half of our givers there, and started a new congregation out there.

Speaker 1: Wow.

Speaker 2: And so, that happened last September. So, we promoted our associate pastor, we've gone back to reaching people. But I've been pursuing him for reconciliation, because while what he did was wrong, he has admitted that his tactics were wrong.

Speaker 1: Okay.

Speaker 2: You know, we're going to spend eternity in Heaven together, when I go to a function, I don't want him to avoid me, and I'm not going to avoid him. I want to be able to walk up and hug him as we've done for 5 years together in the ministry, and I was with him previously when he was the leader in our church and he went through a divorce. So, he went and switched denominations, you know, to Assemblies of God, so I went and set it up to meet with a leader from Assemblies of God, he was accountable to it, and I committed myself accountable to it, and we met a couple of weeks ago to reconcile our relationship, and just say, we're going to put this in the past. We're going forward, and we're not trying to get those people back, and we don't want you poaching on the rest of our people. But, in the early years, those kind of broken relationships still cause me to struggle with insomnia. The bigger things, what I've found for me, personally, is it's like everything slows down for me, and I see things more clearly. So, I think I have learned to be a leader in the midst of a crisis. I really seem to see things clearer. I don't get, even though I've been overweight most of this time, my doctor say it's amazing, my blood pressure, and my heart rate, all that kind of stuff. So, stress probably, unless it's people stress, the other kind of stress doesn't affect me as much as most people. I think I do so many great and mighty things, it's like the first Sunday after Katrina, I stood up before our people, and said, listen, the ones who came back, first of all when I stood up to preach, they stood and cheered for 5 minutes, even though they'd lost everything.

Speaker 1: Wow.

Speaker 2: Not for me, but for the Lord, and I knew, we're going to make it because their faith in God was greater than their fear of the circumstances. But I said, you know, we've lost everything, there's no hope for us rebuilding, but the good news is, this is God's church. This is His problem. And so, I think the big things, I weather pretty well, because definitely faith is a gift that I have. But people issues still get to me.

Speaker 1: Tell me more about these people issues.

Speaker 2: I have to go to one as soon as we finish this meeting.

Speaker 1: Oh really? Wow. Tell me, physically, how does it play on you? What are the feelings that you go through, and then how do you deal with that? It sounds like what you're saying is that, immediately, when you're starting to feel whatever that is you have to do something about it, I've got to start a road to reconciliation, or I've got to make some contact.

Speaker 2: Not necessarily immediately. First of all, I don't do anything right away.

Speaker 1: Okay.

Speaker 2: I make sure I go to bed at night before I make a decision, try to reconcile a broken relationship. It's amazing, when I get a little bit of rest how much more proficient I am. Now, the struggle is when I start waking up at 2:30, 3 in the morning, and then to try to figure out how to reconcile this broken relationship, or resolve this issue, and solve this problem, because at the end of the day, I'm whipped, because I didn't sleep. So, I still struggle at times with insomnia, because this morning I woke up at 3:30, thinking about, man, we got this, this, this, this, this, this, this. I typically only sleep about 4 to 5 hours a night.

Speaker 1: Wow. So, your mind races the rest of that time, with things to do?

Speaker 2: Sometimes I think my mind races when I'm sleeping. I don't think I'm like Rick Warren. Rick Warren has this particular illness, I think, where one part of his brain never shuts down.

Speaker 1: Oh, really? Wow.

Speaker 2: Never. There's only a few people in the nation that have this thing where, even while he's sleeping, his brain is working.

Speaker 1: Something's going on.

Speaker 2: I don't think I'm like that, but I'm just, my brain's always worried while I'm awake. I'm the kind of person, I don't drag out of bed, I leap out of bed. I have big energy in the morning. It may be something physiological, I don't know. 3:30, I wake up, and I'm up.

Speaker 1: So you go ahead and get up.

Speaker 2: Get up. Go after it.

Speaker 1: Wow.

Speaker 2: I'll probably be in bed an hour earlier. I usually get up at about 4:30 in the morning.

Speaker 1: Oh, okay. Is there anyway when stress comes in that you identify and go, okay, I'm stressed out, because I feel this way, or something's happening. I'm stressed out and I need to do something.

Speaker 2: A long time ago, I was studying the story of Elijah, 1 Kings, 19. Where, one day, he was calling down fire from Heaven, next day, he was running from Jezebel, praying to God to die. What I learned from that story, one, is that God took care of his physical needs before he addressed Elijah's emotional and spiritual needs.

Speaker 1: That's good.

Speaker 2: He was fatigued, he was on the run and the angel came, and prepared him a meal. He rested, got some rest, and then, you know, he talked about how I'm the only one alone who's serving you. And God met him in the mountains and spoke to him. You know that story. But, God took care of his physical needs, then he calmed him down emotionally, and then he could give him the spirit he needed, the direction in his life. And by the way, God already had it taken care of. There was over 7,000 people God had reserved for himself who had not bowed to the false gods. So, I think I learned from that story, many years ago, that when I start feeling stressed out, I gotta do something. I gotta go work out. I gotta, sometimes, I just have to go have fun with my wife. Do something with my wife. I don't, you know, I'm very much a believer in spiritual warfare, and so, I get up every morning, I pray on the armor of God and ask the Lord to protect my mind, and so those

negative thoughts that just, you know, that drive you crazy, I just try to take those thoughts captive and get rid of them. And so, I don't find myself, if somebody tells me something horrible has just happened, I'll stop and pray, turn it over to the Lord, and then I'll go off and do something else, until I can go to bed at night, get up refreshed, and tackle that thing in a fresh, new way.

Speaker 1: That's good. When you see stress approaching how do you approach it?

Speaker 2: I really, I don't think about it. I think problems are a part of life.

Speaker 1: Okay.

Speaker 2: Definitely a part of the ministry. We laugh about it here. Every church is supposed to be allotted a certain number of crazy people. We have an extra allotment from the Lord. And so, we have craziness all the time. You know this. The larger the church, the more problems you have. And we've got more people, and people have problems.

Speaker 1: That's right.

Speaker 2: So, I don't think about it. That's just a part. It's like one time, Saint Patrick was baptizing a king in the river, and he had a stake, and he had a pointy thing, and he went to put it down into the river, but he put it through the king's foot, and he didn't know about it until, after, when the blood came up in the water. He said, my child, I'm sorry, but I hurt you. And the king said, I just thought that was part of the baptism. We just feel like, dealing with problems and suffering is a part of the baptism.

Speaker 1: It's part of it.

Speaker 2: It's a part of it. We've decided to take on the mentality that we are privileged to get to deal with all these people's problems. Because, everyone is a gem in the making.

Speaker 1: Wow. That's good.

Speaker 2: You know, two of our campus pastors, I can think of right now one of them, we're very transparent. One of our pastors will talk about being sexually molested by his grandfather when he was young. One of our campus pastors, when he first came here, he was a thief and a drug addict, and had multi colored hair. He's one of our pastors today. And so, we're all pretty transparent with our stories, and our struggles.

Speaker 1: That's good.

Speaker 2: So, that, in itself, being transparent, takes a lot of the stress away.

Speaker 1: I think you're right on that. I would be interested to hear, you spoke about your daughter, you spoke about your wife a couple of times. In relation to the stress that your ministry has brought on you, how much of it has gone to them? And how do you see that? Were there times that they went through very negative feelings towards the church because of something that was going on? Something maybe even directly toward you, and how did you walk them through that, or help them through that?

Speaker 2: Well, I raised both my children, we raised both of our children the very same way, and one, our son, is a pastor on our staff, loves the Lord, single guy, never drank, never smoked, never used drugs, never had sex, loves the Lord, got saved when he was 5. And I'm not saying he always lived for the Lord. He lived to play ball, for awhile, and all that kind of stuff, but he lives for the Lord. Our daughter's very different. She's very successful. She's a CPA. I think for both of them, I was gone so much in the early years, building the church, that it definitely negatively impacted them. I was gone almost every night. Casting visions, starting fresh. You've been there, you know how that is. And I

didn't. I tell people my wife, one day, read the book, Boundaries, and messed up my life. So, I didn't have any boundaries, really. I was just running and gunning. And then, I grew up, I'm the oldest of 4 boys. My dad was like a boy, my mom was a tough lady who understands boys. So, I really didn't understand my daughter when she got to be 12 and 13, so I basically said to my wife, I didn't actually say it, but I said, I'll take care of our son, we've got the ball thing, and all that kind of stuff, you take care of her. I think she felt a sense of rejection in that. But, what happened, for her, is when she went away to Liberty, she got pregnant. She came back, to the Lord, walked with the Lord, and we had a need for a leader in the singles ministry. And she wanted to be that leader. So, she was already leading, but I wouldn't let her be that leader, because my perspective was she had to redeem her testimony. So, she really pulled away because of that. And so, she went off, and put her focus on becoming very successful in her career.

Speaker 1: Wow.

Speaker 2: You know, well, it was up to one of our associate pastors to make that decision. And he was struggling, because he wanted to please me, so I took the burden off of him, and I said, no she can't. I told her what she didn't want to hear. Since she got pregnant out of wedlock, and stuff like that, you're on fire for the Lord, I'm grateful for that. But she didn't handle that well. I think it was the shame of being pregnant, and feeling the rejection that just, she's not close to the Lord. I wrote her an email this morning. I sent it to my wife first, before I sent it to her. But I was just telling her how proud I am of her, and tell her husband how proud I am of him, and how much I love them. But this is one component in their life they are missing out on, is a passionate relationship with Jesus.

Speaker 1: Yeah.

Speaker 2: And they'll tell me about how they know the Lord, and trust the Lord. They'll go to church when I'm down there. And so, but I think my being so busy in those early years, and not having any boundaries affected her, and not understanding females affected her, and then the fact that I wouldn't let her move quickly into leadership in our church was what happened.

Speaker 1: That's powerful. What about your wife, through these things? How did she handle that?

Speaker 2: Well, she's been, my wife's been through a lot of trauma. She was molested as a child. Her dad was a real jerk kind of guy, always running around on her mom, and she felt a lot of rejection from him. Her family didn't go to church, they brought her to church. We got married young, had a child. I came from a drug and alcohol background. So, everything I did was spontaneous. And so, I think that we went through things where, early 90's, she was in a traffic accident, and 2 boys were killed and she wasn't guilty, but she felt like she was guilty. Our daughter getting pregnant, living with me, and I was always on the go, her brother was killed in an accident, in 2000. Someone pulled the wrong lever on a crane and dropped a ton of steel on him, so he died instantaneously. Her father got Parkinson's disease, he died. Her mother had a stroke and a fall, and she died. Her other brother died.

Speaker 1: Wow.

Speaker 2: So, she has been through a lot of difficult circumstances in life. But, I think, she already had her walk with the Lord, but she's really dependent on me to help her through those crises times, and I always seemed to know what to do. I went through a time when I was in a head-on collision, and couldn't walk for a long time. Our church really collected during that time. I had the pastor's moral failure, my injury, my daughter's pregnancy, and her brother's death, simultaneously, basically.

Speaker 1: Really. Wow. Would you say, going through that, obviously there was a lot of negativity. Was there any positive that came out of it on the other side?

Speaker 2: Well, you know, we've got great stories, and God's redeeming grace, and the Lord's presence and strength in our lives. That's, I think, helpful for us and helpful for others. Definitely made my wife and I closer to one another. You know, for me, every day I get up at 4:30 in the morning, and I read the scriptures, and I pray. Reading the scriptures gets my mind back in gear. I've been reading the one year Bible for 30 something years, and I find something new every year.

Speaker 1: Wow.

Speaker 2: And so, I get up and do that, and I pray, and it just kind of readjusts me every day. Helps me to know God's got this. I don't have to be afraid, I don't have to be anxious. And so, when I wake up at those 2:30 or 3:30 times, I try to figure it all out. On my phone, or on my computer, then it's like, it's time to pray. So, I pray and read the scripture, and let the Lord tell me I'm okay. We pray together, my wife and I pray together, and we have from 12 o'clock noon on Friday until I get ready to preach on Saturday is her time. [wife's name] time in my calendar.

Speaker 1: Okay.

Speaker 2: We've always had a day date, a date night, and a time on Saturday morning for us, for me to do stuff around the house and everything. So, I've maintained that kind of schedule.

Speaker 1: Is there anything you would say about, in relation to your wife, that when you experience something here at the church, and it's pretty stressful and heavy, is there some things you won't tell her?

Speaker 2: Yeah. I don't tell her half the stuff. I certainly don't tell her the people who are displeased with me.

Speaker 1: Okay. So you feel an onus to protect her?

Speaker 2: Yeah. I think I became aware as a pastor that there are many pastor's wives, and pastor's children who are very bitter towards the church. More so than the pastors, I think. My wife goes to the annual pastor's wives things, the SBC convention, and she comes back, and she's like, oh thank God for [church name], because all they talk about is how badly the church is treating them.

Speaker 1: Wow.

Speaker 2: Which I think is a huge problem in the smaller churches, and even medium sized churches. It's just a huge problem. In fact, she likes to take our young pastor's wives there, so they can appreciate what they have.

Speaker 1: Oh, wow.

Speaker 2: When we started [church name], we had a traditional church Sunday morning: Sunday school, church service; Took a church family or a prospect family out to lunch; Sunday afternoon, we'd have a deacon's meeting, and we had church training, and we had Sunday night service. That's all before your time. It was our schedule on Sunday, so I never saw my family much on Sundays. And we had Tuesday night visitation, Wednesday night church, Thursday night something else, it was hospital visitation. And we had Saturdays off. But you know, you're getting ready for the sermon on Saturday. So, when we started [church name], we started new. There was no Sunday night service.

Part of that was for me to have more time with my family. No Sunday night service. We just did things differently then. And then also, we've never expected my wife or our staff wives to be at every service. I have friends who pastor large churches that, man, the wife has got to be there for all 3 Sunday morning services, and the Wednesday night service, and so we've not expected our wives. The good thing about being in a church like ours, is our pastors don't have to deal with irate people. Well, they may have to deal with them, but they don't have to be bullied by them, because they know they can always kick it up to me and to our elders. And their wives don't have to live in a glass house.

Speaker 1: That's good.

Speaker 2: And their children don't have to live in a glass house. So, we try to remove that stress from our family. And my wife, I would say, before Katrina, half the people didn't even know who my wife was. Never saw her. Now, I visualize people when my sermon takes off, of people imagining who she is, what she looks like, or they'll see her when I go to the back door to greet people, they'll see her there, but you know, it's just, I've tried to keep her from feeling a lot of stress.

Speaker 1: Yeah.

Speaker 2: My first day as a pastor, a lady came to see me. I think she was chairman of the deacon's wives of that church. She said, I'm glad you're our pastor now, and now we want your wife to head up the WMU, and do this, and do that. I said, no, my wife's not going to do that. She's caring for our kids, she sings in the choir, and she leads the youth class. She was mad, but I kind of set the boundaries, I could set boundaries for my wife, even though I didn't have boundaries for myself.

Speaker 1: That's interesting. What do you say is the one thing you had to learn as the church grew? So, in other words, you had small, you probably had a lot of things that you did, and the bigger it got, you can't do those things anymore. What's the one thing that you had to adjust in yourself, your own personality, as the church got bigger?

Speaker 2: I didn't have to be the Superman pastor for everybody. They want me to do every funeral, every wedding, and respond to every crisis, and I don't. Most of these other pastors do the funerals and the weddings. Somebody calls and says rush to the hospital, I say, I'll call your pastor who oversees that. He'll follow up with you.

Speaker 1: That's good. Was that a hard thing for you to do, at the beginning?

Speaker 2: I think. Just because I was confident in my ability to help people.

Speaker 1: But you knew that you just couldn't keep going that route.

Speaker 2: Right.

Speaker 1: Okay. Well, I mean, you've covered almost everything I have here, and I guess I'll end with that last question which is, if you're speaking to a young man who's just got a seminary degree, fresh in hand, he's about to set off, he has visions of grandeur in ministry, obviously hasn't experienced all the pitfalls it has, so there are a lot of things you would probably tell him. But what would be the one key thing that, if you only could tell him one thing, that he needs to make sure that he does or thinks, or puts in place, what would be that one thing you've learned through all your years of ministry?

Speaker 2: Well, I'll tell you 3 things, and the third one is the one you're looking for. Number 1, don't neglect your quiet time.

Speaker 1: Okay.

Speaker 2: I'm really on our young pastors about that. The whole social media thing, on the phone, I mean I love social media as well, but that drives their life. And so, it's a great struggle for them to have an hour alone with God. Great struggle. I'm on them about that all the time. Number 2, keep a close friendship with your wife. The year following Katrina, I was gone almost every week, raising money. I was at [church name], I was at [church name], I was at churches around the nation. I was raising money. But once a quarter, I'd say to the church, and people wanted me to come speak because God was doing such great things, and you know, if the church takes up a love offering, they love to get a report back about what God's doing, so I'd come and do that kind of stuff, but about once a quarter, I'd say, I'm coming with my wife, if you'll pay for my wife to come with me. And so, we'd go and spend 3 or 4 days of vacation time, whether it was in Orange County, California or Virginia Beach, Virginia, or in the mountains of Tennessee. Something like that. So, you've got to maintain a friendship with your wife. And the third thing I would say is, all along the way, I've had some older pastors that I've turned to, and been transparent with about my struggles, my fears. I'd been a pastor for about 3 weeks, and a couple had a baby die, that I was friends with, and nothing in seminary prepared me for that. I went and found a Church of God pastor not far from where I was. Kind guy, and he took me to 2 Samuel, chapter 12, in the Bible, and it had a preset message for how to bring some kind of comfort to that family. The first time we were going to buy a building and go in debt, (it was a really young congregation, me in school, I didn't really want to do that) I was afraid it would never end. I got up in 2 o'clock in the morning. I went and saw my pastor, my pastor in seminary, and he was in the whole debt-free thing. I went to see him, and he said, [name], I think I held our church back. Because we'd never build without having the money, and he said I'd probably hindered the church growth. So, I called every man at my church at 2 o'clock in the morning, and they met me at 3, and we prayed so I could get relief from that. I think, all throughout my ministry, I've turned to older pastors. When my daughter got pregnant, I went up to see a pastor in city, state], and said, do I need to step out of the ministry and tend to my family? So, all along the way, I've always sought out counsel from older, wiser pastors. And they probably kept me from making some big mistakes.

Speaker 1: Is that something you continue, even to this day?

Speaker 2: This day, I might be the older pastor.

Speaker 1: You are the one? Well, do you find yourself doing the opposite, if some guy, I guess like me, you made time for me on really short notice. Do you regularly do that?

Speaker 2: I met [pastor friend] for breakfast the other day, and so, yeah, but I still find myself, [older pastor friend] and I had breakfast the other day. I said, let's talk about this whole racial thing and how we can help in our city, because [older pastor friend] is a little bit older than I am. But I think young pastors need the counsel of older pastors, but what I discover is they don't seek it. I don't see them seeking that out as much as they used to. Even when I first became a Christian, I came from the codependency world. I found two older pastors, I'd be Tuesday night at one's house, and Thursday night at the other one's house, and they had education and a lot of experience in the ministry. They just really taught me how to love God and love people. And so, yeah, I still call an older pastor from time to time, and say, I'm thinking about this, praying about this, would you pray along with me and give me any counsel you have? Of course, they always remind me, God's bigger than all that.

Speaker 1: Yeah. That's good. Well, I appreciate your time. That was very valuable information!

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Speaker 1: I'm very interested to see how you deal with stress and how you recognize it.

Speaker 2: Wow. I'm glad you're here. I'm glad I get to answer these questions and I know that you're not going to lead me, but I don't want to frustrate you because yes, there is stress and it is always there, but I think there's positive and negative stress. Positive stress is exactly that. It's something good. I think any pastor, when I came to [church name], we had 200 people. It was stress. We've got a lot more than that now. Even more stress. So, I don't really know and I used to pastor a church of 100 down in [city]. Great people. Stress. I don't know if there is more stress because of size. I think any pastor feels some kind of stress. I mean, yeah there have been times I've been down. There have been times I've been discouraged. There are times that there's pressure, but it's just part of my life. This is who I am. This is not a job. This is who I am. I think it may be different for me than some pastors in other churches because I came to [church name] as a youth pastor 30 years ago. I was 21 years old. My wife grew up in [church name]. Her parents were here before she was born. We met when I was Youth Pastor. It was on the other side of town and I'd gone out to [seminary name] and then after she graduated from a college here in town, we got married and pastored down in [city] for 3 years and came back. It was still on the other side of town. The average age was 70. We had no young people, well I mean a handful maybe, but no children at all. Our son was 90 days old at the time. He was the only child under probably 12 in the church. We relocated and I'm telling you all that to say when I came to be pastor, I knew these people and they knew me. They had raised my wife, changed her diaper. I mean, I had just turned 29, so there wasn't any unreal expectations. I had a great deal of freedom to fail. I had a lot of guys who were like my dad and they put me under their wing. They were in my corner. We would argue about stuff, but it was always like I was arguing with my dad. I remember one time, a guy that really turned out to be a father figure for me, I got home and called him up crying like a baby because, you know? He told me. He said, I love you [self reference]. We will not always agree on everything, but you will never doubt my love for you. That's kind of been the people that I've been able to associate with and that has been a remarkable, wonderful thing for more than 3 decades now as pastor. All those people are dead, but the next generation that we have raised up are kind of those same kind of guys. There is pressure. I'm not saying there's not. I take the month of July off every year for the last 20 years. On that month, 30 days or whatever, I think 5 weeks in a row that I realize man, I really am under a lot of pressure. Then I kind of ease back into it, but the good news for me. That has become a vow because no matter what's going on, in 6 months, I'm going to get away from here for a month. When my kids were young, we would go trips out west. We went to Europe one time. I have 3 children. Even now, my sweet wife, this past summer we went on a cruise for about a month, and the church gave it to me for my 30th anniversary. We were gone almost a month. I'm saying all that to say, I know that there are release valves for me. I think there's always pressure. I may not be answering your question, but it's just part of the job. I don't expect anything other than the pressure that I feel because every night when I go to bed, there are at least, and I'll be literal. There are 2 or 3 things I should have done and probably 4 or 5 people I should have contacted. I can't do it all. I did all I could do today. I did the things I thought were most important and I'll do what I can tomorrow, but I'm asleep because I did all I could do. The people here, I've stood up in front of our church on many occasions and apologized. I've said things from the pulpit that are stupid. I have done things that were just crazy wrong, mistakes or whatever. I've been able to go, hey guys. I messed this up. I thought this and it was just a bad thing. I remember early on, I made a mistake of, it was a big deal back then. A quarter million-dollar mistake on something. We voted, took it to the bank and everything. Then I realized I had made a quarter million-dollar mistake. It was not good. I just talked with the guys. This is why you all don't want me to be the guy that crunches numbers here because this is my mistake. I

own it, but you signed off and we're into it. I'm telling you all, just because there's a great deal of freedom here for me to fail and I don't have to be anything I'm not. That's real freeing because I've known these people forever and everybody that's joined, out of the people that came to pastor, there's about 40 here. There's no way there's more than 40 here on Sunday morning that were here 30 years ago because our average age was 69 years and 7 months for the average church member. So, they're all dead and gone. Everybody here has joined when I had been the pastor. That gives a great deal of freedom for me because there's nobody sitting here that's outlasted. Well, I've been here the whole time and you joined me. You knew what you were getting into. We have a membership class. This is what we believe. This is how we behave. This is what's expected. This is what you can count on. This is what we count on from you. If you get involved in stuff you shouldn't, we come to you and go, and say, "Listen man. We told you that this is what we believe and this is what we expect. You're outside what we believe or our behavior and we want you to get back with us. You staying here is not an option. Either you believe in this or you are doing this, so we've got to figure this thing out." That's a lot of freedom. Anyway, I think I may be rambling.

Speaker 1: One thing I'm interested in is when you think about that stress, inevitable stress and like you said, it's prevalent no matter what, do you notice it coming from any certain areas even more so than others?

Speaker 2: For me, it is the relentless return of Sunday. I don't care what else I do or who else I help. I average a funeral a week. I have buried 1,500 people since I've been the pastor. There's always a lot of stuff and I love these people. I'm involved in their lives. It might be a funeral. This past week, I was able to stand up and say, for 5 generations, I have been the minister for 5 generation. Because I was here as youth pastor. I have done funerals for 3 of these generations. I'm in the second generation of marriages. I don't even know where I was going with that. Oh, what I was going to say is, no matter how many funerals or weddings or people I counsel or whatever it is, Sunday comes and I think a pastor, ultimately this is where I could kill myself on a regular basis. This hit me early on. I was on a bus in West Virginia. I was reading a book by, what's the guy's name? John Maxwell, the guy that introduced theology, but it was on leadership. What he said, and this is the [self-reference] version. I don't know what he said, but this is what I remember. He said at any job, and he called it the, starts with a P, some principle. He said, at any job, there are two things that you can do. I don't care if you're a garbage man, but there are two things you are hired to do. There is one thing somebody else would be doing. In any job, you were hired to do too many things. You've got to figure out what those two things are. Spend 80 percent of your time doing those two things and 20 percent of your time making sure everything else gets done. That's a very freeing concept for a pastor, I think. Do I marry, bury, meet, cry, pray, visit? I do all those things, but those are not, I'm not the chaplain. I'm the pastor. The two things that a lead pastor does, and we have lots of other ministers, lots of other pastors, but as the lead pastor, senior pastor or whatever you call that, nobody in that, the only person that gets to say this is where God is leading us and this is God's word for us today is whoever is in that role. Not that everybody else is not doing something in their area, but it stops somewhere. So, you get all your group together. You get your elders or whatever, but there's still a point man and as the point man, I think that leading and feeding is where you spend most of your time. One of the ways you lead is casting a vision, point people to Jesus every Sunday from the word. That's it. The biggest pressure I feel every week is, this is God's word for God's people today. That's a scary thing for me every week and I never feel prepared. I never feel ready to preach. On Sunday mornings, I am here at the office by 3:30, 3:45 AM. It's all done, but I'm not. I'm not ready to get up and go, this is God's word. That may just be a quirk of my personality, but it's that serious, therefore I feel that pressure to make sure that not only is what I'm preaching theologically correct, but this is God's word for these people today and not just a cute story. People's lives are going to be impacted by God's word and God's spirit today.

Speaker 1: How do you, say there's a week where there's two funerals? Totally unexpected, obviously and you still have to preach Sunday. Obviously, that creates a stress for you. How do you deal with that? What do you do to make sure that you're still ready on Sunday after you've had all this piled back on top?

Speaker 2: Well, the big deal is, I know that none of this took God by surprise. He was already on all of this. He knew what I was preaching. He knows who is coming and His word is not going to return void, but there are certain deadlines I have to hit because of the way we do things here. I'm going to hit those deadlines if I have to stay up all night. Outline has to be turned in. Supplies have to be turned in. Then if it takes me all day Saturday and Saturday night to get it done, I'll do whatever it takes. Then I'll crash out a little bit on Sunday night.

Speaker 1: What about in your personal life? You talked about good and bad stress. That comes up in the research. The researchers called the good stress eustress, and then the negative stress is what leads to burnout. How does stress affect you in a physiological way? What do you feel? When do you know that you're under a lot of stress? What do you see or feel?

Speaker 2: Well one thing, I eat. Okay? You're looking at me right now. We have never met, but I weigh 80 pounds less than I did on January the 2nd this year.

Speaker 1: Oh, wow.

Speaker 2: Wow, yeah. So, the people of [church name] have stuck with me through thick and thin, thick and thin and thick and thin because I've always struggled with weight, but food wants nothing from me and I know I'm under a great deal of pressure when I just go, man I'm going to go eat. My idea of a balanced meal is a Big Mac in each hand. You know? I could just eat. That is one of the ways that I have dealt with stress that's not healthy. I'm going to turn 60 next year, so on January the second of this year, I went okay, the number of days to the 100th day of the year, generally speaking, except for leap year, I guess. I thought okay, 464 days from today, I'm going to turn 60 and I want to be in the best shape I've ever been. So, I got on this regimen. I've been doing it. I want to lose 75 pounds. I did that. Then I said, at 75, I'm going to start working out, so I started going to the gym. I started losing weight, and I'm going to do that now for 118 more days. I know because that's when I turn 60. An answer to your question, one of the least helpful ways to deal with stress is for me to just eat. I have done that.

Speaker 1: Yeah. You recognize that?

Speaker 2: Oh yeah, but I don't care because it's like, and it has run in cycles. You know, I had never really thought about it, but all of what's going on in the church, because a couple years ago, we did this thing where we basically zeroed out our church membership. This was 2 years ago. You know, you had to rejoin the church. Everybody. That was a great stressor because there were a whole lot of people that got upset. We went from 7,500 members to 4,500 members. It's been the healthiest thing we've done in a long, long time. It got a lot of people's attention. It was a good thing. It has been a good thing, but there was a lot of stress involved. Looking back, I probably yeah, I dealt with it by just hanging in there. Get a bag of chips. Sit down on the couch. That's what I did.

Speaker 1: What would you say would be some good things that stress has created in your life?

Speaker 2: Well, you know that old adage somebody says I work, about pressure makes you work, I work, and anyway I have a tendency to do my best work under pressure. Just because I know it's coming, I've got to do it. Yeah, I think there's pressure because of what we do is so serious. I don't take myself very seriously, but I'm the kind to take the

word and his call very seriously. That's been very helpful because it's really about the hand and when I mess up, I mess up again.

Speaker 1: So, a deadline is something that motivates you?

Speaker 2: It has to. I mean, yeah. There are deadlines I have to, we have to have. There are a lot of people dependent on what's happening and not just the Sunday stuff, but every year we have a theme and doing this. The staff wants to know if I've got that meeting. I've got to be ready.

Speaker 1: Good. Let's focus on your family.

Speaker 2: Sure.

Speaker 1: For a moment. You mentioned your wife. How many children do you have?

Speaker 2: We have 3.

Speaker 1: 3? And what are their ages?

Speaker 2: [son] is 30. [daughter] is 28 and [son] is 24.

Speaker 1: Because of those ages, they grew up in this church.

Speaker 2: They did.

Speaker 1: Did you ever see stress impact your family negatively?

Speaker 2: Well, it would be interesting to hear my kids talk. We do talk about that some. I think it was probably at times, they felt some stress just because there are a lot of people that are members of our church and a lot of people in the community that they did not know, but knew them because of who they were. You know, it was frustrating to them because they never did anything. I always tell them there's about 6,000 eyes, 7,000 eyes watching you, so you better watch out what you're doing. What was your question again?

Speaker 1: Did the stress ever impact them negatively? And your wife included in that. Not just your children.

Speaker 2: What I might say, not everyone agrees with it, but it did work well with me, is I encourage my staff to do this. My kids and my wife, but let's just talk about my kids a second. My kids have never heard me say anything negative about anybody in our church ever. I'm not going to do it. They've heard me say I'm tired or me saying somebody's mad at me, but I have never called anybody a name. I've never really talked on whatever. I just tell them it's a tough situation or somebody's upset or I really messed up. I don't mind telling that, but there's never been a need for me to divulge names or anything too much because I really want them and my wife to love [church name]. If somebody says something bad about my wife, she'll get over it. I'll remember you said that forever. That's just human nature, I think. There have been times when people are so mad at me about something and I just don't know why she's loving on them and she's laughing. I know that person is thinking, doesn't she know I can't stand her husband? No, she doesn't know that and she doesn't need to know that. I don't know if this is going to be a question, but I have preacher friends, but I have two really close, I guess three, but two here in town. We talk about anything and everything together.

Speaker 1: So, that's your release.

Speaker 2: Absolutely. We call each other up and I'll say, let me tell you what this rear end did today. Let me tell you what he said. Let me tell you what I said. We will just say

everything that needs to be said and then it's done. We go on a retreat once a year. It has now turned into a week long retreat. We have done it I think 12 years now. It is something I look forward to because the first few days, we do what you think pastors would do. What are we doing next year? Preach through Hebrews. Let's talk. We'll do that for a couple of days and then in a couple days, we just laugh, hoot and holler. Do things that are just a lot of fun.

Speaker 1: So, there are those times that you all plan. Is there any other set sequence or is it just when something comes up, you have their number and you call them?

Speaker 2: Oh yeah.

Speaker 1: That's the way it works?

Speaker 2: They're there and we're getting together Monday night. Everyone arrives. We'll just sit around and laugh, eat and talk.

Speaker 1: So, just to clarify, you feel a responsibility to protect your family from things that are going on within the church?

Speaker 2: Absolutely, yes.

Speaker 1: But you find, you know that you have to get that off of your chest, so you use these other methods?

Speaker 2: Absolutely. I know a guy at [seminary]. He was only there a short period of time, but he was a pastor. I think pastors probably need to teach more than they do in seminary, but anyway because he was in it day after day, he used the analogy, who cuts the barber's hair? That little phrase stuck because when you walk to the barber shop, you've got to ask, who cuts his hair? Well, these guys metaphorically are the guys who cut my hair because we get together and we have laughed. We have dogged each other. We have challenged each other. All the things that you want to do and if I didn't have them, I don't know what I would do because you know, pastors can be pretty weird. We're hard on each other. Very competitive and I think pastors have a hard time maybe opening up with other pastors sometimes because you just don't know if you can trust them. These two or three guys, I trust.

Speaker 1: I imagine there is a rapport that has to be built.

Speaker 2: Oh yeah.

Speaker 1: It's not just going to be immediate.

Speaker 2: Oh no, no.

Speaker 1: You have to spend some time in the trenches.

Speaker 2: Yeah.

Speaker 1: You mentioned your physical health. Eating, that maybe it's caused some negatives there. Any other physical ailments that you think are stress related that you ever dealt with?

Speaker 2: No.

Speaker 1: Okay. What about spiritually, what is the negative on your spiritual life that stress creates and what's the positive maybe that the stress creates for your spiritual life?

Speaker 2: Great question. They're almost two sides of the same coin. I guess it just depends on how it flips in my life because sometimes when I feel a great deal of stress, it makes me run to the Lord. God, I can't do this. I'm in over my head. Then there are other times, where almost like Jonah, I just want to get away from everything and everybody and even God. You know? I'm just tired of it all. It's those times, one phrase that has helped me through the years, there's a world of difference between being tired of the ministry and being tired in the ministry. That has helped me a great deal. I have to back off and go okay, I know I'm tired and I'm physically worn out, emotionally, spiritually drained, and I'm tired in it, but I'm not tired of it. This is my calling. I love these people and they love me. I can be tired in it without being tired of it and that's okay.

Speaker 1: Huh, that's interesting. So, when you get emotionally exhausted, there's always a temptation there to blame the people that have exhausted you.

Speaker 2: Right.

Speaker 1: For the way that you feel. Somehow, you've been able to not do that. How do you not see them as the one who keeps making these withdrawals?

Speaker 2: That's a good question.

Speaker 1: How do you continue to love when obviously they're the ones pulling?

Speaker 2: Right. Well, another thing I've told myself, and I guess the most pressure I feel or the thing I dislike the most is conflict. I hate conflict, especially somebody, I think everybody ought to just love me because I'm so wonderful and it stuns me when they don't [sarcastic tone]. I'm just joking. Early on, I decided that I would, I'll either out love you or I'll outlast you and I will not do both, but I'm here for the long haul. I am not going to let you press my buttons. I'm not going to let you make me angry. I'm not going to let you control me in such a way that I say or do something that is not good. So, I'm going to out love you or outlast you. That has served me very well because there are times in 30 years and 3 locations and everything that's gone on, both big and little, there were many occasions where people have been upset with me and if I can just calm down and go, I'm going to love them no matter what. I had a guy, probably in the last 5 years or probably 25 years, I don't know why, but he just didn't like me. He just went through some crisis. I was there for him. His wife died. His house got destroyed in another incident and I just kept on loving him. If you were to meet that man now, you would think that this guy [referring to himself] must be his daddy or something. He loves me. He'll bring me clothes. I lost some weight a few years ago. I guess maybe 5 or 6 years ago. He said, you might be able to wear these. I can't wear them anymore. I put them on. The next time he saw me, I had them on. He was just beaming. This is a guy that for 25 years, every time that somebody would say hey, you know what he said about you? I can't help that. I love him. I'm not going to let him drive me away from him. By God's grace, I'll out love you or outlast you. That's okay.

Speaker 1: How do you view your role in helping people with the problems they bring you? The second part is, how has that perspective changed through the years, of your responsibility and role in that perspective?

Speaker 2: Of course it depends on what the problem is. If it's a physical issue or whatever problems of the Lord, then that's one thing. If it's a problem with somebody else, and those are the problems that are overwhelming, is when somebody has an issue with somebody else because I don't like conflict. For me to be a peacemaker. I find I do that a great deal. In fact, in 30 minutes, I'm going to be meeting with a couple that they've gotten their feelings hurt over something and I will get to play that role. Last Thursday morning, two guys had a business deal that went sour and I know them both. We set down and spent a couple hours. I let them have the first hour where they just said

some very hard and ugly things to each other. Then I left and then I said, let's role this back and let's talk about what's sin and what's not and what's a different opinion, different understanding. It doesn't always happen, but in this one, it only took a couple hours and they were holding hands and praying for each other. You know, the pressure that I feel is when I'm a part of the problem. When somebody's mad at me or when I've done something wrong. That's when I feel pressure. If somebody's having an issue, I'll do everything I can to help them, love them, and tell them if they need to see somebody else. Those are the kind of things, I'm not a counselor. That's not my deal, but I am a pastor. I almost think it would be easier to be a Christian counselor because you deal with whatever issues, but as pastor, I feel responsible. If somebody's having a marital problem and they've been a part of the church for 20 years, I think it's done under my teaching. What if I dropped the ball? What is it that I should have, would have or could have done? I begin to take a lot of responsibility. Probably more than I need to. But there may be some, we remind people here all the time. You're the spiritual leader in your home. We're here to equip you. We don't raise your kids. You raise your kids. That's what this is about. We still have some responsibility in that and when things get off track, it goes off the rails, and I think man, then maybe we messed up somehow. I don't know if that's helpful.

Speaker 1: No, it is. Over the years, do you think that your feeling of responsibility for solving their problems or coming up with answers has grown or diminished?

Speaker 2: When people come to me, and you've been a pastor. You know this. A lot of people want absolution. I'm not here to give that. I can't. I can't free you of your sins. A lot of people want a free pass. They've done something they shouldn't do and they want me to be able to say that's okay. God will understand. No. One of the questions I ask a bunch because of our people coming here, I go, what do you think I'll tell you? What do you think I'll tell you? I let them answer. 99 out of 100 times, they know exactly what I'm going to say. What I'm doing is wrong or whatever. And I go, that's exactly right. So, I tell you and you know that. Let's figure out why you're not doing it. Yeah. Hardly anybody ever comes to me and they don't know what they're doing is wrong. They do know what they should be doing.

Speaker 1: Have you always thought that way?

Speaker 2: No. At first, early on, I thought I could fix people. One of the most framed concepts and I preach it all the time and I think the older your children get, now that mine are adults, it's a lot harder to be the parent of adult children and now, when I preach, it's not just theoretical. It's practical for me. That is, God's not called you or me or anybody else. We're not called to fix people. We're just called to love them. That gets very frayed. If I believe in God's grace, God's sovereignty, then God is glorified in the manner in which I seek to help, but it's not my responsibility to fix them. Only God's going to fix them. I'm going to bring glory to him. I represent him directly, but what this person does is not my responsibility. What my kids do is not my responsibility. That's a hard thing to really live, and I think I keep grabbing that back. I don't know if you ever actually get there, but it is the frame being when you go, I'm called to love them. God's going to change them. That's all I can do.

Speaker 1: That's good. That's good. What's the most important spiritual discipline you have? The keys that if you quit doing this, you start coming off the tracks?

Speaker 2: Just open up and let God speak. Let me speak through you. You know who [professor's name] is? From [seminary name]?

Speaker 1: Yeah.

Speaker 2: Probably a dozen years or so ago, he's been here a couple of times, but the first go round, he talked about praying through the Psalms. I don't know if you're familiar with what he preaches on that, but he'd go through 5 Psalms a day. He'd pick one and you'd pray through it. That has become a very important part of my life and what I do. It has been a good thing. I'm not a very smart man, but if you give me a track to run on, I can beat you to death. I think a lot of people are like that. That has been a very good track for me to run on as far as just having a prayer life. The idea of praying through a list, I would have a tendency to go, God here's my list. You know what's on it. Just take care of it. That's not what, but that's my mentality of prayer list is not good. For me to read through the Psalms and begin, because I know what's on my heart and my mind, who is on my heart and mind and what things are going on. To be able to read through the Psalms and go okay, God. You're talking to me. I'm talking to you. It's been a really good thing.

Speaker 1: What about physical disciplines that you've got to keep?

Speaker 2: Well, I told you about my struggle with my weight. I guess I'm a foodaholic. Like an alcoholic, it's all or nothing. Right now, I'm doing very well. I'm doing exactly what I need to do. I'm exercising 6 days a week. When I'm in a routine, it's fine. It's all or nothing. Right now, I'm on. If I had discipline, I'd be able to do all things in moderation, but that's not my personality when it comes to food. I also go to Cross Fit.

Speaker 1: Oh do you? Wow.

Speaker 2: Right at Cross Fit. Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday, I have a treadmill in my basement. I go down there and do that on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays. I was out there this morning at my own house, like this is crazy. That's what I'm doing.

Speaker 1: I want to touch on one other thing. Organizational structure. What has to stay in place and what is key for the organizational structure not to create stress for you?

Speaker 2: Sure. This is a big deal for me. Organization... That's not my job. That's in that other 20 percent. That's not my job. When we first started growing here and we got to 1,000 or better, we didn't have a church administrator. We didn't have an executive pastor and I was doing the budget. That's why we came up with a quarter of a million-dollar mistake, because I put it together. Finally, I went to people and I said guys, this is not what I'm supposed to be doing. We had grown rather quickly. What we do now is we have a church administrator which is a bit of all that kind of stuff and then we have an executive pastor. Basically, we meet and he makes sure that everything is running and he is the one that supervises the staff... I encourage. I challenge them and then he holds them accountable. It's not a good cop, bad cop, but sometimes it may seem like that because I love our staff and they know that. [admin's name], our executive pastor, he comes in, "Hey, these are things we agreed to do. You were in there. You know what's up. How come we're not doing this?" He tells them that. I don't have to. I can be their encouragement. Keep going. Keep going. That works out really well because if it gets to the point where I have to talk to you about your performance, that's not a healthy thing just because that should have been worked out long before it got to me. I'm in your corner. I'm your cheerleader. I'm your leader. We're going this way. This is going to help you get there. That has worked out well for me. I think it helps the staff because I'm not their boss in the sense that I'm going to check up on them. If I have to check up on you all the time, you're not doing your job and I'm not able to do mine. I like the system here.

Speaker 1: It sounds like it works very well for you.

Speaker 2: It has.

Speaker 1: My last question is really summarization from your perspective and it's this. From your experience, your longevity experience, what do you perceive is the most important thing? There's probably a lot that you put, but if you had to say one as the most important the young or new pastor needs to know about dealing with inevitable stress that he's going to see in the ministry that he's starting, what's that one piece of advice that you would give to them, from your own experience?

Speaker 2: Okay. One piece of advice. I almost have to, I want you to quantify your question a little bit because spiritually, stay close to God. Preach the gospel. Don't get involved in entertainment. Be sure it's all about Jesus. Have good theology. I mean, all of that spins hot. I did 3 small groups. We read through systematic theology. I've done that now for 12 years. It takes a year and a half. I read with the 9th grade boys and take them through the 12th grade. I read with guys that are in the 30's and then guys that are about my age. I'm always doing that. Stay connected with your people. Love them. Lead them. I don't know if that's what you're asking. As far as leadership kind of things, I know it sounds crazy, but one of the things that probably has served me the best is remembering that a dog can whoop a skunk anytime, but sometimes it's not worth it. That has helped me more than any other piece of preverbal sage advice, and that is I am not going to fight with you. I'm just not. There are plenty of things around here I ought to change, do differently, but it's not immoral, unethical, or unbiblical I'm not going to fight with you over something. There are times where, I told you early on. If there's something major going on, we'll butt heads and all that stuff, but there are a lot of pastors, they get themselves in a mess because everything is a big issue. I'm not going to fight with you. I'm going to love you. I'm going to outlast you. When you fight with me, I'm not fighting back. I'm just not. I'm not going to fight about it. Now, I might call my friend and say, this guy is the biggest jerk I've ever seen and I wanted to slap him 5 ways to Sunday, but I'm not going to do that. It's just, I'm not going to do that. That may not be what you're fishing for.

Speaker 1: Oh, that's perfect. Skunk and dog. I like that.

Speaker 2: Another, it has nothing to do with anything, but you know, I was at some conference where they talk about leadership rules and everything. I said the thing about the dogs. The other one was, plow the ground. You've been at your church a long time and you have done this. I think that anyone who has been at a church longer than 3 or 4 years who has accomplished anything has done it and that is, I'm not in a hurry. You know, when I hire somebody, I go and listen. I'm hiring you. God's giving it to you, but I don't want to see your bag of tricks. Whatever you did in your last church, don't bring that trash in here because this is not that church. I want you to know that you'll be here the rest of your ministry. That means you're going to reap what you sow. Everybody looks good in 2 years, but you may not have anything that lasts. That fruit may not last. I want you to understand that you are going to be here forever and you're going to have to face the consequences no matter what you do in your area. You can be sure about that. I'm not going to evaluate you with any kind of real objective standards for the first 36 months because people don't know you for 36 months. Most pastors don't even last for 36 months. I go, I listen. Let's go slowly. Let's plow the ground. When I say plow the ground, what I mean is, if there's something I want to see happen, like this thing where we revamp the membership and I start talking to people about that 4 or 5 years ago, come to the leaders casually and it's not manipulation. It's information. It's allowing me to modify what I'm thinking. You know, I've been thinking. What do you think about whatever and I'll listen, but you do that 2 or 3 years on whatever it is that you want to do and before long, people are coming out and going, you know? I've been thinking about the very same thing that you've been saying. I've been talking about that 3 years ago. That's a great idea. You know, we're going to pay our debt off. We were in debt a long time, but in the next 60 months, I believe we'll pay our debt off. Well, I've been paying that off for the last 2 and a half years. Now people are coming up and going, when are we

going to get this paid off? And I go, you know, what do you think about whatever? That is a good thing. A guy came up and said, I've been thinking about how we can do this and I can get my family involved. That's what I want. There's only been one thing I've ever done here that I just kind of did almost spur of the moment. I said hey, I'm announcing this. We're doing it. I only bounced it off one guy who is the chairman of the deacons. It turned out to be a good thing. I think that's what I was supposed to do at that time, but the rest of this, I'm in no hurry. I'd rather get something done over 30 years than try to, and I tell guys when they go to church. I go, I listen. You're going to stay there 5 years. Don't do anything. Just love them. But if you go in there and you're going to have elders and we're going to adopt this, and we're going to do this and this. If you're not going to be there 30 years, don't you dare do that because you're going to tear that church up. You move on to something else. They're going to be looking around and going, well what did we just do? Don't do it. That's why we got such unhealthy churches. Not only do people not stay very long, it's while they're there, they're just tinkering. They're not going to have to live with the consequences of the choices they've made. Somebody else is going to have to clean their mess up.

PP20

Speaker 1: In what ways have you experienced stress in ministry and how do you identify it as it comes at you?

Speaker 2: I do agree that gospel ministry is very stressful. Some years ago, I read that the 3 most stressful jobs in America are President of a large university, Administrator of a large hospital and Senior Pastor of a large church. Whether they are right or wrong, who knows? I make the case that the solo pastor of a small church is stressful as well. I've been a pastor of a weekend church in seminary, 17 or 20 people on Sunday morning and all in between to where we are today. They're all stressful. Each church has its own unique sense of challenges and stressors. I believe Jack that that's the case because what we do, we don't do in a vacuum. I'm not saying that a Christian attorney or a Christian taxi driver or Christian farmer doesn't have temptation. Let me put it this way. The more visible you are for Jesus, the more you're pushing back against the darkness, the greater push back you're going to get from the enemy. I think that stress just comes with the territory. Maybe a better word for it would be spiritual warfare. The minute I understand spiritual warfare, is simply to cast out demons, which we read about in life ministry with Jesus, which takes place today. That was, for our missionaries in some places, fairly routinely. Then I think we underestimate the subtlety of the enemy and the attacks that come against pastors are stressful. It might be a disgruntled finance chairman or some lady in the church who is unjustly angry because you recused of doing her daughter's wedding because she's going to marry a Mormon and you couldn't in good conscience do that. These things, individually by themselves are nothing big, but when it's just one after another after another week in and week out, year after year, it adds up. I think probably the primary reason that so many pastors drop out is they get wary and so many that drop out move from church to church to church. I'm not saying that every move is premature, but I'm persuaded that quite a few of them are premature. They're thinking well, if I could just go to another church, I know it will be better there. It won't be. The devil is there. He's going to follow you wherever you go. We shouldn't be surprised. Jesus warned us. Peter warned us. Paul warned us. We do our work on a battlefield and stress is an effective tool to attack some of God's messengers, and put them on the sidelines. It seems to be working. That's my take on that. Yeah.

Speaker 1: What are some areas in church, ministry especially from the pastorate that you see the stress coming from the most or more frequently?

Speaker 2: Unhappy church members. It doesn't take many to create trouble. Adrian Rogers used to say a couple bullfrogs in a mill pond on Saturday night croaking will sound like 100 frogs, but it's only 1 or 2. He also used to say we'd be less worried about what people thought about us if we knew how seldom they think about us. That's been helpful to me.

Speaker 1: That's a good way of putting it.

Speaker 2: When 1, 2 or 3 people out a thousand can make a lot of noise. That's a factor. Another would be just the unrelenting demands of preaching. Preaching done well is hard work. I teach our interns, preaching is hard work. Sunday comes every 7 days. It's relentless. There's never a leap day. It just comes and comes and comes. For me, it's the agony and the ecstasy. We are being compared in ways today that we were not compared with our fellow pastors in the past. Our people are listening to all the finest preachers on the radio and television and want to know why you can't do that. When in fact, some of these radio preachers are having their stuff edited. All their verbal snafus are edited out. I'm not saying they're not great preachers. They are. I listen to many of them and are blessed by them. Some of our folks want you to be like their favorite radio guys or TV

guy. We're not all triple threat guys. Just cornbread and peas. They'll nourish you if you'll eat 'em.

Speaker 1: That's good.

Speaker 2: It might not have the spit and polish of the Charles Stanley, David Jeremiah or Charles Wendell or Tony Evans, but I can feed you if you come hungry. That's stressful because we want to do our best. The older I get, the more I want, quite frankly, I'm a much better preacher. In fact, I know I am than when I was when I started. Having said that, I don't preach with the same volume or repetitive speech. I talk slower. I don't think as quickly as I did, but there's a depth to it and a substance to it that I didn't have when I started. That's a stressor. Then there are the expectations for people for counseling and crisis and hospitals. All of us deal with funerals. People never die on our schedule, do they? Then in a larger church, you know this. You have staff to manage. I can do it. I've done it for decades. My idea of a good day is right here in this room.

Speaker 1: Let me ask you this. I'm sure you know that longevity in ministry is an anomaly in a church today. Noting those avenues of stress that come at a pastor and specifically you here with the ministry that you've had, how do you identify that when it happens? In other words, I think some people's stress hits them and they don't even realize how hard they're being hit by it because they're distracted by everything that's going on. How do you identify it first and then deal with it in such a way that you've been able to stay at this location for a long time?

Speaker 2: Well, if you had asked me these questions 25 years ago, I would have said I don't have any stress. Well, that would have been a totally incorrect answer. I have said that pastoral ministry is exceedingly stressful and after being in one place for 37 and a half years, I learned there's certain rhythms in the life of the church, the life of the community and in my own life. I need to plan for those and plan around those. For those of us at [church name], mid August to end of September are the 6 most stressful weeks of the year for all of us on staff. That's when everything cranks up. Everybody's back in school. Our local schools, our university students are back. The seminary starts back. The fall cyber school program starts back. All the choirs and all the stuff that goes into the church. Everybody wants 3 minutes on the first 2 or 3 Sundays of the fall to promote their stuff. Just the fact that you had to say no. You can't have all you want, is at least minor stress. We learn to get a good rest in July and the first 2 weeks of August. We know that okay, we'll survive it. We've survived it for the last so many years. We just get in the hot tub and we'll be okay. Recognizing where those stresses are coming from is important. People, right before Christmas, drop off. Of course, that's not as stressful for us as the first 6 weeks of the school year because of the nature of the university community. Then you come back in mid-January and school is back, and it starts up again. You can't live in that kind of emotional high year-round. Physiologically, you'll kill yourself. You know?

Speaker 1: I like how you say you can identify stressful seasons and prepare for them. I'll be curious to say, what about the stress that is haphazard or comes at you unexpectedly and you don't have time to prepare for that? What is your mental approach to those when they pop up?

Speaker 2: Yeah, and they pop up routinely, regularly. When you have a sense of anticipation. Anything can happen today. Early in the day, you want to make sure you've got your heart right with God and spend some time asking God for his grace to go through the day. When you walk in the spirit, then the fruit of the spirit is manifested in us and through us. Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. I was focusing this morning my time with God on self-control. That's a supernatural act of the spirit of God, but only as we walk in the spirit, as we cast ourselves literally moment by moment, spending the first part of the day focusing on God and

saying God give me grace today. There's a time in my life I would have said that I was far more responsible for what God's done here. God hadn't totally stripped that out of me and I still have a pretty good-sized ego. If I just look back on my life in ministry and somebody asks, what's the secret behind it all and I say God's sovereign grace. You don't have to be a Calvinist to believe in God's grace. You have to be a Christian to live in God's grace, but it's a working grace and the fact that I am able to stay here this long and face the kind of adversity that I faced the first 28 months and then face other adversities here, like midway through my 30th year, there was a couple here that started a petition to have me fired. That was stressful. The wife was on the search committee that recommended me as pastor. Ever since year 2, she's been at least semi unhappy with me because she wanted a chaplain. She got a pastor. I'll let you impact that any way you want to. There's a difference between the chaplain and a pastor. Well, thankfully, the fellowship of deacons, we have 12 deacons here. They pretty much function as elders. They made the decision not to change the name a long time ago. They've been functioning this way all these years. The deacons were not happy about that. By the way, they only got a handful of signatures, if you want to know and there were reasons to terminate people. We had to terminate a pastor back in the winter for moral failure, which was heartbreaking. That was very stressful, I can tell you that. We didn't see that one coming at all. It was very stressful. Chairman of the deacons, the Vice Chairman of the Deacons and one other deacon represented the other deacons made an appointment to go see this couple and said we understand you have some concerns about our pastor. There's a petition that's been circulated. We want to hear what they are. They listened to them, determined none of them had merit. They didn't. There was no reason, quite frankly, I don't even remember what they were. They told me, but I don't remember. Frivolous, just made up stuff. After listening to them, they said well, Titus 3:10, rebuke a person once, rebuke a person twice and after that, had nothing to do with them. Consider this the first warning. That stopped it dead in its tracks. We got deacons that love their pastor.

Speaker 1: Would you say that's God's grace or is that, in the beginning, you surrounded yourself with those people intentionally to be able to protect you in instances like that?

Speaker 2: Yeah. It's both. It's not either or. I think I told you over lunch that 5 of the 12 deacons voted against me and I'm sure 4 more didn't want me, but over the year, we put in place procedures so that all the unregenerate ones, 'un'spirit filled ones, the unregenerate ones left, the liberals left. I had to tell them, "this is how you do this guys. I preached all this, but let's go back and review this. If you really think I'm God's man, don't leave me out to dry, hang me out to dry. You go do it." They were happy to do it.

Speaker 1: That's awesome.

Speaker 2: That was a stressful time and that was 30 years, 29 and a half years into being pastor.

Speaker 1: How has stress impacted you in your personal life?

Speaker 2: Define personal life.

Speaker 1: Like, you as the way you think, emotionally, perspective of yourself, the way you perceive yourself, your position, not relationally, but internally, how has it impacted you? Maybe even the way you see your role as a pastor or anything like that.

Speaker 2: Oh, I don't know if I have ever thought about that. I mean, just think out loud and reverse course. Thinking out loud with you. My spiritual gifts are prophecy, leadership and giving. Prophecy, seeing things in very stark contrast. If it's right, it's right. If it's wrong, you better get away from it. That's a factor in how I see myself. I was reared with Godly, loving parents who prayed a decade for a son and I'm the first born. They raised me to have a strong sense of self-esteem and self-worth in a healthy sort of

way and not a wrong sort of way. I grew up just having a strong, I don't know what the right word is, psyche or self-identity. My father loved me. My mom loved me. It was easy for me to believe God loved me. The downside of that, if you turn that rock over, is you can have a massive ego. If the Devil was going to trip me up, it'd be my pride. Pride is a wicked sin and I didn't realize it was a part of my life until probably 20 years ago. I've been fighting it ever since then, but I can see it pretty good. I look in my heart. It's not pretty. I've been proud to say, quick to make a decision. Often wrong, but never in doubt. I don't know how it affects me personally. Somebody stresses on me, I just think they're wrong. Go repent. If you knew what I know, you wouldn't put that on me. That can be necessary at times and should be. Okay?

Speaker 1: Yeah. That's right.

Speaker 2: But sometimes, I should say, "You know, you may have a point there. Let me think about that and pray on that and get back with you," instead of just blasting them like I used to do routinely when I was your age and younger.

Speaker 1: Has it ever elicited fear initially when it first happens? A fear? An inadequacy? An anger or anything like that you have to be careful of?

Speaker 2: Sounds kind of strange, but after preaching more than 5,000 times, I still get nervous. It's not fear anymore. I get nervous. Typically, the more nervous, the better I preach I think. I don't think I fear anybody but God. I think that's one of the reasons I've been able to survive here. Not just survive, but thrive. Adrian Rogers said we need to please an audience of one and that's what I try to do. Just please Jesus.

Speaker 1: Is that something that you grew to or from the very beginning you had that perspective?

Speaker 2: No, I kind of grew into that. Yeah. I think I came with it by spiritual gifting and temperament. It's liberating. I can preach systematically through a book in the bible and I can preach the sweet part and the sour part. I spent 3 or so years preaching through the gospel of Luke recently. You come to chapter 16, the first sermon about the love of money, materialism and Jesus warning about that. The middle part is about divorce and remarriage. There's no exception to the laws of Luke 16. The last part is about Hell. That's 3 non-seeker friendly passages in a row. You've got a choice to make, don't you? You've got a choice to make. Here's an old boy out there. He's 45. He's hit his midlife crisis. He's getting a little pudgy around the middle. His wife has got a few gray hairs. She's put on a few pounds. She's had 2 or 3 babies. There's a hot looking woman down the hall where he works. He's got his eye on her and she's got her eye on him. He's about to get himself in trouble. What happens? His wife's been nagging him to go to [church name] and hear [self-reference] preach. He's been putting it off, but decides to go one Sunday just to get her off his back. What am I preaching on? I'm preaching on the sin of materialism. He says, I knew it. I knew it. I knew it. He gives her a second chance. He goes back the next week and I'm talking on divorce and he's thinking of cashing in his bride and divorcing her. He gives her a third chance and he's coming back and hearing me tell he's going to Hell. Now why would he want to do that if he can go down the street and learn that his best life is right here? You think about it. That is stressful. That's the world we live in. If you're basing your ministry on the size of your congregation and trying to please them, you're going to be under a whole lot more stress than just trying to please Jesus. The preacher's job is not to fill the pews. It's to fill the pulpit. Preach the word.

Speaker 1: That's good.

Speaker 2: Some will embrace it and some will be driven off by it.

Speaker 1: That's not your issue.

Speaker 2: Yeah. I mean, Jesus said be aware of when all men speak well of you and I've never been elected clergyman of the year by the Chamber of Commerce. I don't think I ever will be. I hope I'm not.

Speaker 1: Let me ask you another question. How have you perceived stress impacting your family? Your occupation, stress that comes from doing what you do, how has it impacted your family?

Speaker 2: Well, our kids are obviously grown and gone. I don't think it impacted them very much.

Speaker 1: Okay. Tell me about that.

Speaker 2: Yeah, because [wife's name] and I tried to be real careful not to put undue pressures on them to do anything because their dad was the pastor. If we did something perhaps above and beyond what others might do, it was because we loved Jesus, not because their dad was pastor. I don't think it had any stress effect on our girls. They were just thrilled that I was their pastor. Our son [son's name], he's the oldest, had rebelled when he was 16 to 19. I don't think it was because of something we did wrong. I wish we could have done a few things a little differently during that era. Then he came back to the Lord when he was 19. He's an active member here now. We never said, well you've got to do this because your dad's the preacher. We never talked to the children about any problems at church, ever. I don't think they ever heard us talk negatively about all the backstabbing going on behind the scenes. Just shielded them from that. We had a host of missionaries and guest evangelists and theologians come through our home and stay with us in our home overnight many, many, many times. The kids had a lot of famous people come their way. They didn't know J.I. Packer was famous when he spent the night with us. Never heard of him. Old man coming in.

Speaker 1: Wow. What about your wife?

Speaker 2: Yeah. Well, it was stressful on her. Only in the sense that it's stressful on me, so sometimes she'd notice when I come home and I'm quiet. Typically, in the younger years, I'd tell her very little because I didn't want her to know the bad stuff on people that she highly respected and worshiped with. I tell her more now, but there's less bad stuff to say than there used to be. She's a pretty cheerful person. Pretty poignant. I think she would agree that she hasn't sensed a lot of stress. She came out of a home similar to mine. High self-esteem. She's far more relational than I am. She's an extrovert. I'm an introvert. She has a high need for people that I don't have. If I'm having a hard time, she'll know that. In the summer of 1990. I fell into a depression. It actually started early May. We were in London. This was our first ever mission trip to London. The team had come home and [wife's name] and I and our then mission's pastor and his wife and I went to Switzerland and Austria for a week. Over the course of that week, I just got sad, melancholic. There was no reason. Any way you measure what was going on at [church name] from a human perspective was just soaring and there were no issues in the church. But there was a sadness that came over me. By the time I got back from Europe, I was mildly depressed. Through May, June, July and into August. I never had anything happen to me like that. I didn't know why. I was just crying out to God. I didn't talk to anybody about it. Not a living soul. That was a mistake. Except my wife. I once talked to her about it. I should have reached out to somebody somewhere that I would trust, but I didn't. I mean, this is what, 26 years ago? I'm just, everything is great. Every Sunday I preached in the gray suit. Light gray suit. That's the way I felt in my world, is gray. Every single Sunday until it broke, I preached in a gray suit. I walk early in the mornings. I was just down on myself. In fact, I sat down and I wrote out all the reasons why I was no longer

qualified to be pastor at [church name]. I came up with 7 very compelling reasons why God should release me from this assignment. In fact, I just raised the paper and said God, what do you think about this? I mean, God hadn't spoken to me in weeks. God spoke. He said, this is what I heard the spirit of God say. ?? Is that all you can think of? Then he went silent for weeks to come.

Speaker 1: Really?

Speaker 2: Yeah. Really. Yeah. During that whole course, he spoke to me that time and 1 other time. I was coming home from my walk and it was just light enough to see. I just went on the deck behind our house. I opened up my bible. This has only happened to me I think 3 times in my life. It just fell open to Psalm 60 and I started reading. I got to verse 5. I read, Lord, you've assigned me a portion in my cup. You have made my life secure. Now, whatever David meant by that, I'm not sure at this moment, but it's like the words were raised off the page. I knew this was my assignment. This was my portion in the cup. I knew I couldn't walk away from it as badly as I wanted to walk away. I had a call here. In fact, I have a lifetime call here, at least until I come to retirement era. For me to walk away during that time of depression, I mean I just wanted to sell my house, get me a cabin in the mountains of North Georgia, get me a milk cow and some chickens, books and my family and just run away. I would hear the train come through 2 miles on the other side of town at night, hear the whistle blowing and think. Let me just get on a boxcar and ride. I don't care where it is. I was low. I believe God's called me to [city name] and I'm coming to stay. I'm not coming to stay 5 or 10 years. I'm coming to stay and I've stayed. But the first 2 years and 4 months, I wanted to leave lots of times. Then I wanted to leave in the summer of 1990. Then when my son was in rebellion for 3 years, I actually wrote out a resignation letter. I called in the Chairman of the Deacons, the Chairman of Trustees and Chairman of the Personnel Committee and told them what was going on. All the shenanigans that were going on. They didn't know about it. I just felt like, based on what scripture said, I wasn't qualified. They made me tear the letter up. I wanted to quit. Those were 3 crises in my life. I just knew I'd be walking out of the will of God. That's why it was God's grace that kept me here. I didn't want to stay. I wasn't mad at anybody. It wasn't their fault my son rebelled. I thought it was mine. The fact of the matter is, it wasn't mine. It was his. Paul said every man is accounting himself to the Lord. He chose to be an idiot for 3 years.

Speaker 1: Was there any other health related issues from stress that you've dealt with?

Speaker 2: Yeah. Let me think about that. Let me go back to depression. The depression came on suddenly. Like, within a day or 2. Then it left suddenly.

Speaker 1: Really?

Speaker 2: It just lifted. Yes. Yeah. Just lifted. Now, one thing that God used in my life is, Martyn Lloyd Jones *Spiritual Depression: Its Causes and Cures*. It sat on my shelf for 20 years or more before I read it. I just immersed myself in that book during the course of that summer. It was very helpful. Someday I'll tell the doctor thank you. Of course, my wife knew and she was very kind except for one time. We were taking a walk one Saturday night and I was just having a pity party and she said, well you just need to snap out of this. It was painful to hear and I'm glad she said it because I learned something. I said to her, I would if I could, thank you. It's a mystery. Now, all that to say, we had a minister of music on staff here for almost 18 years. He was depressed from 1991 to 1999. The last 12 years he was on staff, he was depressed. He finally resigned to get out from under the stress. He now teaches at the university. He's still depressed and he's been gone 17 years. It's a mystery about depression. In hindsight, I believe God put a spirit of depression on me to keep me from killing [minister of music]. Not literally, but I would have surely said things like my wife said to me. In fact, I used to say that to him. Okay

[name]. Get over it. Get back to work. Quit being a crybaby. Otherwise, I would have said some very cruel things to him just trying to motivate him, immobilize him in ways that would have been very, very harmful to him.

Speaker 1: That's wild. What about spiritually? How did stress impact your spiritual life?

Speaker 2: Well, to me, that's a positive. It drives me to Jesus. The more stressed I am, the more time I spend in the prayer closet. You know, when the bills are paid and the dogs aren't barking in the neighborhood in the middle of the night and the deacons are happy, I'm less inclined to earnestly seek the Lord than when I'm in crisis mode. Anything that drives me to Jesus is good for me and stress is the kind of thing that drives me closer and closer to the Lord. Cast myself on his mercy. Yeah.

Speaker 1: What would you say would be the most effective ways that you've learned to mitigate the negative aspects of stress?

Speaker 2: Prayer. The Psalms. Praise, praise in the Lord, and Sabbaths. Friday is my Sabbath day and we get Sabbath days and you better believe that I take them.

Speaker 1: What does that look like? Your Sabbath day?

Speaker 2: Oh, well I don't work on Friday. We had one last Friday. It distressed me. I'll tell you that. Had one last Friday afternoon. I mean, why can't we bury him Thursday or Saturday, but you know you do whatever day you want to. As it turned out, God's in charge. Fridays are my day with [wife] and has been for decades. When we were younger, we would ride bikes through [local park] or we'd go hike the [state park]. We'd go to a movie and out to eat. We still do some of that occasionally, but mainly it's a nap after breakfast and a nap after lunch.

Speaker 1: That's good though.

Speaker 2: I think I live a less stressful life than I could because I'm electronically, technologically illiterate. If you get an email from me, I dictated the words. I speak to my Dictaphone and then Gretchen sends it. It would come under her email address. It's a lot easier to do correspondence that way, and quicker.

Speaker 1: That's good. With the remaining time we have, I have 2 questions.

Speaker 2: We do get 8 weeks of Sabbatical leave every 6 years, which I take.

Speaker 1: That's a renewal type thing? Where you go and study?

Speaker 2: Always out of town. Usually I go on study leave. I've been many time to Regent's College of Vancouver, study with Packer. I just spent a week 2 weeks ago at Fuller Seminary. Yeah.

Speaker 1: Do you usually do that by yourself or with your wife?

Speaker 2: No, [wife] goes with me. She always goes with me. When the kids were younger, they always went. Yeah. Always.

Speaker 1: I've got one question at the very end that's going to be a brief question, but before I get to that one, I want to ask you organizationally, structurally, how much stress is impacted by the organizational culture of your church?

Speaker 2: A huge amount.

Speaker 1: Okay. Tell me about that.

Speaker 2: Well, there's so much machinery here. So much of it is just perpetuating. We have an administrator who does a great job. Maintenance people with the support staff, with the finances. I typically go to finance maybe once or twice a year. I look at it every year and talk to [name] about it. But supervising these pastors is time consuming and that is stressful for me. We have a great team. We've been together a long time. Our children's director of 31 years, our preschool director of 25, our missions pastor of 24, [employee name], before he died, 27, but he had a moral failure at 27. That's pretty much unheard of to have that many people together that long.

Speaker 1: Wow. That's amazing.

Speaker 2: We're doing well. We love each other. We respect each other. But it's a lot of folks that we care for, pray for, manage.

Speaker 1: You manage them personally or is it more of you let them do their thing and you have them report to you?

Speaker 2: Yeah. Well, I only manage 4 or 5 people. You've got to dig it out. [Admin pastor] manages half the pastors. I manage half. He has all the folks in the preschool, children's, and college. Every week, we meet to pray together. Everybody gives a written report of what they've been doing the week before. We talk about it. I know who they've talked to. They're making disciples, nurturing disciples, and growing disciples. That's the grid we work off of. That keeps me in the loop about what's going on.

Speaker 1: One last question. From your experience, what do you perceive is the most important thing that a new or young pastor needs to know about dealing with stress and what is one piece of advice you would share from your own experience? If you were narrowing it to one, what would you say is the most?

Speaker 2: Expect it. It's the world you're going to be living in the next 40 years, 50 years. Just count on it. You are misled if you thought this was sitting around reading the bible all the time. It's war.

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ABSTRACT

STRESS AND LONGEVITY IN PASTORAL MINISTRY: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

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There is a sad and consistent narrative that permeates the story of so many pastors. After dedicating their lives to advance the gospel and to serve the Bride of Christ, His church, so often the story ends in the tragedy of burnout and its debilitating effects and far reaching impacts on family, congregation, and community. Yet, there is a small group of resilient and enduring pastors who have somehow learned to grow from the difficulties and stress of ministry. How are they able to avert the negative and often detrimental effects of ministerial stress to experience such success and longevity in ministry? What are their stories? How do they perceive their roles and the stress of those roles? How have they learned to not only survive, but somehow, thrive? This study seeks to give a voice to their stories and to understand their self-perceptions.

Several researchers have concluded that the occupation of pastor is especially prone to burnout. These same researchers cite varying contributors to this condition, such as time demands, unrealistic expectations, isolation, and loneliness. Even though debate exists surrounding the specific contributing factors and the level of their contribution, the results are clear in the research. Pastors' lives become imbalanced and their spiritual growth stagnates. However, some pastors have demonstrated growth and longevity in a constant ministry context. Hence, they have seemingly developed and matured through the difficult experiences and occupational stressors that have left many of their colleagues defeated. This study sought to discover why some pastors are able not only to overcome

these adverse and detrimental factors of stress and burnout, but also achieve both personal and professional growth in spite of them.

This phenomenological qualitative study describes the experiences of twenty pastors who have experienced the phenomenon of growth and longevity in ministry despite occupational and personal stressors, and identifies commonalities of their perceptions of how they have dealt with stress and achieve success over an extended period of time in a constant ministry context. The pastors have ministered at one church for at least fifteen years. Each church has exhibited measurable growth under the leadership of each respective pastor during their tenure.

The results of this study identified four common themes: Source of stressors, how these pastors identify and deal with their occupational stress, the impacts of stress on their personal lives, and their advice for young pastors from what they have learned over their long tenures in ministry. A common pattern among these veteran pastors is that over time they gained a new perspective and became more effective at coping with stress. They modified and adapted their behaviors, adopting several practices that are recommended in the broader literature on stress and burnout and the specific literature on religious clergy. These include: delegating and prioritizing responsibilities, seeking social support, taking time off, engaging in regular physical exercise, guarding family time and family vacations as well as recreational activities, and discipline in spiritual practices such as prayer, meditation, and worship.

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