

## CHAPTER 5 STRATEGIC HEALTH PLAN FOR PASTORAL FAMILIES

The overriding impetus for this study was my own personal experience in the ministry. Admittedly, I have much to learn, and there is absolutely no pretense involved in disclosing that the past five years of overwhelming ministry stress resulting in various health challenges have hastened the need for me to acquire some degree of excellence and precision in the area of balancing ministry and health. Therefore, I am committed, after 33 years of ministry life experience, to influencing clergy and congregants alike in making a contribution toward a regimen of pastoral family health. After assessing the needs my own family now acknowledges to having as a result of major stressors, I have devised strategic steps that I believe should be implemented and regarded as necessary to overall health in order that people may succeed in the pastorate. The combination of steps will address the four health challenges presented in chapter 3: physical, emotional, relational, and spiritual. The remainder of this chapter outlines these steps to survive and thrive in the pastorate.

### **1. Sense of Destiny**

Every pastor and his family must continually focus on their sense of destiny. The dictionary defines *destiny* as “a predetermined course of events often held to be an

irresistible power or agency”<sup>316</sup> or “somebody’s preordained future; the apparently predetermined and inevitable series of events that happen to somebody or something.”<sup>317</sup>

The Apostle Peter addresses the believer’s destiny and affirms that believers in Christ are “chosen” for destiny. He explains that there is one who is responsible for providing that “irresistible power” drawing us toward accomplishing great things in life.

But you are a chosen people, royal priests, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession ... chosen to tell about the wonderful acts of God, who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. At one time you were not a people, but now you are God's people. In the past you had never received mercy, but now you have received God's mercy” (1 Pet 2:9–10).

History proves that all the “Greats” of this world had a sense of destiny and kept it ever before them. Call it a dream, vision, mission, passion or drive; they understood that it was part of an express purpose moving toward accomplishing a special task. Pastors are born with destiny in their DNA, and it’s a divine bloodline. It is a calling that drives them to surrender and sacrifice without the promise of any earthly accolades. “A preacher is sent on a heavenly mission. He is to declare the message of God to the world, ‘whether they will hear, or whether they will forbear’” (Ezek. 2:5, 7; 3:11).<sup>318</sup>

A familiar biblical precedent for destiny is reflected in the Lord’s revelation to Jeremiah the prophet. “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations” (Jer 1:5, ESV). This revelation of destiny already created in the womb so affected us that we named our only son Jeremiah.

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<sup>316</sup> [www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/destiny](http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/destiny)

<sup>317</sup> [www.bing.com/Dictionary/search?q=define+destiny&qpv=define+destiny&FORM=DTPDIA](http://www.bing.com/Dictionary/search?q=define+destiny&qpv=define+destiny&FORM=DTPDIA)

<sup>318</sup> Criswell, *Guidebook for Pastors*, 23.

The top grossing film of 1994 in North America, *Forest Gump*, touched hearts with a combination of comedy, drama, and romance. The movie included memorable quotes and several touching scenes. One such was a tender interaction between Forest, played by Tom Hanks, and his mother, played by Sally Field, just moments prior to her death. Upon the doctor's exit, Forest enters his mother's bedroom and takes a seat next to her bed.

His mother smiles and says, "I'm dyin' Forest." Puzzled and unsure of what is happening, Forest responds, "Why are you dyin'?" Mama gently replies, "It's my time. Death is a part of life; something we are all destined to do. I didn't know, but I was destined to be your Mamma. I believe you make your own destiny. You do the best with what God gave you." With a searching expression, Forest quietly inquires, "What's my destiny Mamma?" To which Mamma replies, "You're gonna have to find that out for yourself. Life is like a box of chocolates. You never know what you're going to get."

Perhaps, no other vocation could identify more with Mamma's words of wisdom than that of the pastorate. We truly never know what we are going to get. It is a life of unknowns and uncertainties; however, the Creator of all has sovereignly and intentionally crafted in us all that we need to faithfully preserve us for his divine purposes. Pastor, remember your sense of destiny and keep talking about it with your family!

## 2: Spiritual Sanctuary

“We cannot make up for failure in our devotional life by redoubling energy in service. We shall never take people beyond our own spiritual attainment.”<sup>319</sup> The demands of the pastorate necessitate that pastors have a “spiritual sanctuary.” These are special times reserved for solitude and supplication; weekly, daily, or hourly times set aside to be alone with God. The specific intent is spiritual seclusion and intimacy allowing for the development of a closer relationship with God.

### *Solitude*

Jesus set a powerful example of separating himself from the crowds at strategic times to “crowd” himself to the Father. This message of the need for seclusion with God is one that should be emulated in the life of not only every believer, but most especially every pastor. Jesus models the importance of private time with God before the hectic day begins. “In the morning, while it was still very dark, he got up and went out to a deserted place, and there he prayed ...” (Mark 1:35). As a spiritual leader, Jesus shows the necessity of sometimes sending the flock away so the leader has time to experience privacy with God. He always came away from those experiences more ready for service to his Father.

And immediately He made His disciples get into the boat and go ahead of Him to the other side to Bethsaida, while He Himself was sending the multitude away. And after bidding them farewell, he departed to the mountain to pray (Mark 6:45-46).

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<sup>319</sup> [theracetabernacle.org/quotes/Pastoral\\_Ministry-Character.htm](http://theracetabernacle.org/quotes/Pastoral_Ministry-Character.htm)

Jesus celebrates his most miraculous acts and agonizes in his most painful hurts by going away so that he could be alone with God (Luke 4:42; 5:16; 6:12). Throughout his entire earthly life, including the hours just prior to his death on the Cross, Jesus isolates himself from others to be alone with his Father.

And they came to a place called Gethsemane ... He took with Him Peter and James and John, and began to be very distressed and troubled. And He said to them, "My soul is deeply grieved to the point of death; remain here and keep watch." And He went a little beyond them, and fell to the ground, and began praying (Mark 14:32-34).

For the pastor, the spiritual benefits of being alone with God can never be underestimated. There are many times in the pastorate when, only after sessions or seasons of solitude with God, can the man of God hear a word from God. Some of the greatest sermons, creativity, revelations, prophecies, and breakthroughs come when God's man isolates himself from the crowds to hear specifically from God and God alone.

One rare but powerful item of discipline is the requirement that the recruit of the company undertake a personal experience of solitude at least once a month. This is patterned consciously on the experience of Christ who periodically went alone, even at the price of temporary separation from the needs of His fellows. The justification of aloneness is not that of refined self-indulgence, but rather a consequent enrichment of one's subsequent contribution. A person who is always available is not worth enough when he *is* available. Everyone engaged in public life will realize the extreme difficult [of] getting away each month for a period of five or six hours, but the difficulty is not a good reason for rejecting the discipline. It is the men and women who find it hardest to get away who need the redemptive solitude most sorely. They need to be where they are free from the compulsion of chit-chat, from the slavery of the telephone, and even from the newspaper. A Christianity which understands itself will make ample provision for retreat houses in which such solitude is expected and protected.<sup>320</sup>

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<sup>320</sup> Elton Trueblood, *The Company of the Committed* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1961), 43-44.

### *Supplication*

In his epistles, Paul, the New Testament's church-planting pastor, requests prayer from his churches on seven separate occasions. Paul understood how important the parishioner's prayers are for the pastor. Modern culture, with its endless and ever-evolving technology, competes with God for the pastor's attention. Many pastors surveyed admitted to spending endless hours on email, Facebook, Twitter, or blogging. However crucial these media are in responding to and engaging with congregants, they must never usurp the place of the pastor's private prayer times. We may be fooled into thinking that these forms of communication will result in the prosperity of our ministries, but the Bible affirms how shepherds succeed. "The shepherds are senseless and do not inquire of the LORD; so they do not prosper and all their flock is scattered." The words of Jeremiah 10:21 should convict and prompt pastors to desire a deeper, more intimate relationship with God through supplication with God. In Jeremiah 23:16–18, God contends with the false prophets of Jeremiah's day who were speaking "visions from their own minds, not from the mouth of the LORD." He poses a question that should be asked of contemporary pastors as well. "But which of them has stood in the council of the LORD to see or to hear his word? Who has listened and heard his word?" (23:18) The pastor prepares himself for the work of the pastorate by participating with God in daily supplication. How can we hear a word from God and bring a word to the people when we have not tarried in his presence?

We must heed the memorable words written by Robert Murray McCheyne to the Rev. Dan Edwards on 2 October 1840 after his ordination as a missionary to the Jews: "I trust you will have a pleasant and profitable time in Germany. I know you will apply hard to German; but do not forget the culture of the inner man—I mean of the heart. How diligently the

cavalry officer keeps his sabre clean and sharp; every stain he rubs off with the greatest care. Remember you are God's sword—His instrument—I trust a chosen vessel unto Him to bear His name. In great measure, according to the purity and perfections of the instrument, will be the success. It is not great talents God blesses so much as great likeness to Jesus. A holy minister is an awful weapon in the hand of God.<sup>321</sup>

### *Study and Stir the Gift in Bible Study*

The main purpose of the pastor's personal life is to be transformed into the image of Christ,<sup>322</sup> and one way this is accomplished is by engaging in the study of God's Word. To better know and understand that special relationship which God desires of each one of his children, we must spend time in the Scriptures allowing the truth to transform us. This happens only when the pastor commits to the consistent study of God's Word. Paul wrote to Timothy, "Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth" (2 Tim 2:15). The primary purpose of the pastor serving in the pastorate role is to teach people the Word of God. In order to realize any success, the pastor must make the personal study of God's Word his top priority.

Robert L. Thomas argues that

[w]hat happens in the study determines what happens in the lives of people as they attend the Sunday services, particularly the Sunday morning service, which is so strategic. A fruitful study will eventually become a fruitful body of believers as the Spirit uses the Word transmitted to mold people into the image of Christ.<sup>323</sup>

The results of the pastor taking time for the personal study of the Scriptures are the rewards of healthy and spiritually thriving lives of the parishioners who reap from the

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<sup>321</sup> John R. W. Stott, *The Preacher's Portrait: Some New Testament Word Studies* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1961), 120.

<sup>322</sup> Rom 8:29.

<sup>323</sup> John MacArthur, *Pastoral Ministry: How to Shepherd Biblically* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2005), 174.

messages being preached. “If the message is of little cost to the preacher, it will be of little value to the congregation.”<sup>324</sup>

### *Study and Stir the Gift in Continuing Education*

Pastoral effectiveness relies heavily on keeping our pastors informed and growing in their particular field of knowledge. With the ever-increasing demands and expectations placed on pastors in our ever-evolving society, continuing education for the pastor is essential. Pastors are expected to perform and produce at peak levels, and rare is the pastor who professes to have learned all he needs to know during his undergraduate or seminary schooling. In 1821, Connecticut was the first state to pass a statute criminalizing abortion, and yet today women who want to terminate their pregnancies are able to do so legally. “In 2008, approximately 1.21 million abortions took place in the U.S.”<sup>325</sup> This is only one example of how times have changed. A century ago, who would have ever imagined a pastor would spend time counseling women suffering from post-abortion depression? Yet today this is a common occurrence. Congregants not only look to their pastors for guidance in spiritual matters, but ethical matters as well. It is imperative for contemporary clergy to be up-to-date on matters concerning all areas of life he will confront while leading flock. Continuing education should be a part of every pastor’s job contract. Financial resources should be allocated for him to pursue annual courses and these should not be confused with money and time put aside for the pastor’s sabbatical.

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<sup>324</sup> Criswell, *Guidebook For Pastors*, 65.

<sup>325</sup> “U. S. Abortion Statistics,” [www.abort73.com/abortion\\_facts/us\\_abortion\\_statistics/](http://www.abort73.com/abortion_facts/us_abortion_statistics/) (accessed Sept 2011).



### **3: Sage**

The significant impact of a sage or two in the life of every pastor is undeniable. When people surround themselves with strong and set-apart men and women of God, the results are beneficial to everyone involved. Pastors, being the primary target of Satan, should seek out a mentoring or accountability sage who will speak words of love, encouragement, rebuke, and wisdom into their lives. Every pastor has his own unique struggles. Paul instructs us through Romans 7 that we are perpetually dying to what once bound us (v. 6). Pastors are not immune to fighting indwelling sins and shortcomings. We, like Paul, are continually confronting our old nature. “I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do (Rom 7: 15). For this reason, pastors should seek out a sage whom they trust to realize that they are pastors who are not perfect, but simply forgiven. Admittedly, I used to be against the idea of a mentor; however of late, I have personally experienced the incalculable value of a sage/mentor in my own personal pastoral ministry. My precious friend and mentor, Judy Smith,<sup>326</sup> will never realize this side of eternity what her hours of commitment toward shaping Christ in me have meant for me.

### **4: Standards**

Simply put, *standards* encompass everything associated with the pastors’ character. They include his values, morals, and the principles that together serve as a guiding light in this

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<sup>326</sup> Leslie Smith, “Timeline of Injustice,” *Concerned Women for America*, [www.cwfa.org/prINTERfriendly.asp?id=15492&department=field&categoryid=life](http://www.cwfa.org/prINTERfriendly.asp?id=15492&department=field&categoryid=life) (accessed March 16, 2012).

culturally depraved society. A pastor must be devoted to his God and conduct himself in a righteous manner reflecting integrity. He must exude professionalism and maintain absolute confidentiality with the secrets of his parishioners. His pastoral position is one of great power and influence with the church and the community. For this reason, the code of ethics according to which he lives is to be much stricter than that of laypeople.

Today's ministers walk an ethical tightrope. At one moment they may serve as prophets, priests, or educators; in the next, they may be administrators, counselors, or worship leaders. Each of these roles raises ethical dilemmas and exposes moral vulnerability not faced by doctors, lawyers, or other professionals.<sup>327</sup>

The standards of the pastorate are strict, and those who are called to it must not only have a heart for reaching and teaching people, but must also model an ethical lifestyle to match.

## **5: Self-Care**

The focus of this thesis has been to identify and analyze the most problematic health challenges pastoral families encounter as a result of overwhelming ministry stressors. The top four areas affected are the physical, emotional, relational, and spiritual. This section highlights the physical and emotional aspects of clergy self-care.

“We live in a physical world. God uses our bodies to effect his purpose, our mouths to deliver the Good News, and our hands to help those in need.”<sup>328</sup> However, today's pastors are so busy taking care of the needs of others that they often sacrifice taking care of their own needs. “If you're healthy and if you're productive, there's a

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<sup>327</sup> Trull and Carter, *Ministerial Ethics*, 15.

<sup>328</sup> *Holy Health UMC*, [www.holyhealthyumc.com/call.htm](http://www.holyhealthyumc.com/call.htm) (accessed March 13, 2012).

pleasure in it that's visible from the pews.”<sup>329</sup> The pastoral family should model lives of stability in all areas of health. In contemporary culture, there is ample teasing and jesting for some in regard to the pounds packed on as they age and become physically undisciplined. “Beer belly” or “pot belly” are terms given to protruding abdomens and “love handles” is a more affectionate term for flabby sides. However flippant or tongue-in-cheek these terms seem, they should be taken seriously and viewed as a caution that someone's physical health is out of control. Whenever a pastor mounts his pulpit, he should remember it is an honored trust from God to be given time to minister the Word to his congregations. The people in the pews can become easily preoccupied when hearing and receiving the message God has for them if they are distracted for 30 minutes by an unfit or unkempt pastor.

Pastors must remember that the enemy will use whatever he can to divert the attention of the hearer when the message of the Bible is being proclaimed. Whether it is a crying baby in the crowd, a technical issue with either the audio or video screen, or someone on the platform for whatever reason consciously or unconsciously drawing attention to himself or herself, communication of the message is often thwarted. When a pastor loses his health, he may lose his pastorate. A fit pastor is respected by others, and he reflects confidence and a healthy lifestyle. Dr. Kenneth Cooper,<sup>330</sup> the physician who pioneered aerobics, suggests that a person can improve his or her overall well-being by

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<sup>329</sup> Samuel G. Freedman, “When Serving the Lord, Ministers Are Often Found to Neglect Themselves,” *New York Times* (Jan 9, 2009), [www.nytimes.com/2009/01/10/us/10religion.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2009/01/10/us/10religion.html) (accessed Mar 1, 2012).

<sup>330</sup> When Kenneth H. Cooper, MD, MPH, published his first bestseller, *Aerobics*, in 1968, he introduced a new word and a new concept—launching a worldwide fitness revolution. Dr. Cooper continues to be recognized as the leader of the international physical fitness movement and credited with motivating more people to exercise in pursuit of good health than any other person. In 1968, only 100,000 people were jogging in America. That number is now more than 30 million strong, thanks to the work and influence of Dr. Cooper. [www.cooperaerobics.com/About-Cooper/Dr--Kenneth-Cooper.aspx](http://www.cooperaerobics.com/About-Cooper/Dr--Kenneth-Cooper.aspx) (accessed Mar 12, 2012).

incorporating aerobic exercise, healthy eating, a positive lifestyle, and seeking emotional stability. He writes:

Total well-being can provide the physical and emotional base for finding and savoring ... goals. For example, it will undoubtedly enrich a career or a deep spiritual commitment, especially as you get more involved in these endeavors and as the time and energy demands they place on you grow greater.<sup>331</sup>

At the time of writing of this thesis, Cooper was 80 years old and has logged “more than 38,000 miles running... [He] sets an example for maintaining a healthy lifestyle by exercising at Cooper Aerobics Center on a regular basis.”<sup>332</sup> Cooper’s healthy lifestyle is the antithesis of many pastors’ attitudes toward health. They surrender a healthy lifestyle for grueling hours spent in ministry.

Being prepared to burnout for God is often considered an unspoken yet necessary prerequisite for accepting the call to the pastorate. “Many people have burned out in ministries of service ... precisely because they have been worshipping their own activity instead of God. In such instances, burnout can be a blessed time that perhaps should not be forestalled.”<sup>333</sup> Gerald May has certainly hit on an important phenomenon in the contemporary church. Pastors are perpetually attempting to keep pace with the current trends and “like the rock bottom for the substance addict, burnout for the action addict is sometimes the only way he or she can come to know the difference between the means and the end, between good deeds and God.”<sup>334</sup>

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<sup>331</sup> Kenneth Cooper, *The Aerobics Program for Total Well-Being* (New York: Bantam Books, 1982), 19.

<sup>332</sup> [www.cooperaerobics.com/About-Cooper/Dr--Kenneth-Cooper.aspx](http://www.cooperaerobics.com/About-Cooper/Dr--Kenneth-Cooper.aspx), (accessed Mar 12, 2012).

<sup>333</sup> Gerald May, *The Awakened Heart* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1991), 189.

<sup>334</sup> *Ibid.*, 189.

Cooper also talks about the importance of balance in regard to our emotions. Emotions are given to us by the Creator as a gift, so that every emotion Jesus expressed can also be communicated by us in our time of need.<sup>335</sup> Jesus, being God in the form of man, expressed his emotions at various times as reported in the biblical record; they were similar to the ones pastors and laity convey. Jesus celebrated and showed joy at the wedding in Cana (John 2:2–10). He showed anger at deceitful money lenders but did not sin in doing so (Matt 21:12). He wept upon hearing about the death of his close friend Lazarus (John 11:35). Upon nearing Jerusalem, Jesus wept over the city, recognizing the ignorance of the people (Luke 19:41). When Jesus saw the multitudes, he was moved with compassion, because they were weary and scattered, like sheep having no shepherd. (Matt 9:36). God the Father/Jesus the Son had love for “the world” as expressed in arguably the most recognized single verse of Scripture (John 3:16). And at the end, Jesus expressed various emotions on the day of his death. After being tortured, he displayed the pain and agony he endured on the cross on the behalf of mankind because of his unconditional love for us and uttered forgiveness and pardon for the very ones who were responsible for his death.<sup>336</sup> Emotions are not a sign of weakness and fault. For the pastoral family, when various emotions surface as a result of continual stressors, it is critical not to mask them, but to allow them to speak so those who love and care for us will listen and help. Paul instructs the Corinthian believers to “imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ” (1 Cor 11:1). We should model our emotions after Jesus and pattern our lives after his example. “He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as

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<sup>335</sup> Hebrews 4:15 states: “For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who in every respect has been tested as we are, yet without sin.”

<sup>336</sup> John 15:6-41; Matt 27:32-54.

He walked” (1 John 2:6), “Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus” (Phil 2:5).

## **6: Safeguards**

Safeguards are non-negotiable and should be established in order to protect the pastoral family from otherwise-unavoidable ministry battle fatigue. The pastor will never realize success in his ministry if his family is falling apart. It is crucial for the pastor to preserve a healthy balance between ministry and family. A pastor needs to remember the simple things like telling family members daily how much he loves them, spending time with them, praying for and with them, protecting them from negative and hurtful congregants, and refraining from including them as part of sermons unless they give their permission in advance. Keeping in mind that clergy spouses often become the victims of relentless verbal abuse and gossip, pastors need to take extra measures to safeguard them. Pastors’ kids can be imperiled and hurt by the unrealistic expectations put on them, and many of them are in need of psychological counseling while being prescribed medications to help them deal with the crises brought on by church-related issues. Many pastoral families are struggling with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder and are attempting to deal with the unpleasant ministry backlash with ongoing treatment. At the end of the day, your family is what matters most, so safeguard yourself and them.

*Spend quality time with significant people in your life*

Make up your mind that your family is more important than church affairs. Family time should take priority. When people seem unforgiving, even to the point of threatening, remember that after God calls you to another pastorate or when your ministry vocation changes, that inflexible antagonist will be but a fleeting memory and you will be blessed by having chosen to prioritize your family.

*Set Boundaries*

There is simply no way around it, ministry is a public service, and so often the pastor feels frustration in that he is never off-duty. During times of high stress, some clergy might rather trade jobs with a taxi cab driver so that he could then at least flick the sign atop his cab to “off-duty” and catch a much-needed and well-deserved break. Not only is it difficult to set up boundaries for the family, it is also tough to deal with congregants who view pastoral boundaries as barriers. “What I want,” one pastor remarked, “is not a wall; I simply want a fence, so folks have to slow down a bit before coming into my family’s space!”<sup>337</sup> One of the pastors in my case study for this thesis told me a story of how someone crossed his boundary and went too far. It was late evening, and the pastor retired to his bedroom to prepare for bed while his wife continued counseling a young woman in their living room. After he was fast asleep, the pastor was jolted out of bed by one of his parishioners who happened to be a local “good ole boy” policeman. He grabbed the pastor and insisted he get out of bed to listen to his issue, which was by no

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<sup>337</sup> F. Belton Joyner Jr., *Life in the Fish Bowl: Everyday Challenges of Pastors and Their Families* (Nashville: Abindgon Press, 2006), 20.

means an emergency. The pastor and his wife decided that night they would move further out of town and never allow a congregant to cross that line again. It is imperative that the pastor set up not only personal boundaries for himself but also for his family in order to maintain any sense of sanity while serving. “Jesus had boundaries, but they were more of the picket-fence variety. He allowed structured access and was careful to reserve time for himself.”<sup>338</sup> In *Boundaries: When to Say Yes, When to Say No*, Henry Cloud and John Townsend offer guidance about this issue.

Boundaries are a “property line.” Their purpose is to help us know what we are responsible for and what we are not responsible for. The function of a boundary is to keep good in and bad out, to act as an alarm system, to help us to withdraw, and to protect our freedom.<sup>339</sup>

### *Sound Bites*

Julie Workman<sup>340</sup> suggests that a pastor’s family can employ a measure of safety and protection in memorizing “five phrases that might help others better understand their challenges.”<sup>341</sup> These phrases can be interpreted as sound bites, useful not only for relating with congregants, but also as safeguards promoting pastoral family boundaries. The five sound bites are: “I’m having a difficult time,” “I need to pray,” “I don’t know,” “I’m not comfortable with that” and “I have a history too.”<sup>342</sup>

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<sup>338</sup> Anderson, *Christ Centered Therapy*, 283. Mark 1:35 and John 5:13 are examples of this.

<sup>339</sup> *Ibid.*, 284.

<sup>340</sup> Julie Workman, “Five phrases every pastor’s family should know,” (Mar 1, 2007), [www.lifeway.com/ArticleView?storeId=10054&catalogId=10001&langId=-1&article=five-phrases-every-pastor-should-know](http://www.lifeway.com/ArticleView?storeId=10054&catalogId=10001&langId=-1&article=five-phrases-every-pastor-should-know) (accessed Mar 13, 2012).

<sup>341</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>342</sup> *Ibid.*



### *Bubble List*

After years in hectic and unpredictable full time ministry and riding the perpetual roller coaster of *guilt* regarding balancing ministry and family, pastors often readily confess regret and wish they had have made more time for fun and family. I have created a new way for pastoral families to engage in family and fun. I highly recommend that the pastoral family make a “bubble list.” This could be part of their New Year’s resolutions; however, this list can be created at any time. People experiencing long periods of happiness sometimes fret that someone or something might somehow “burst their bubble.” This negative expression simply suggests that someone fears that life’s beautiful moments might be taken away from them. Most people are familiar with a “bucket list,” which is a list of activities or excursions that someone desires to engage in prior to “kicking the bucket.” A “bubble list” is basically the same idea, but with a more positive spin on it. Instead of having a “bucket list” as a continual reminder of what should be accomplished before you die, the “bubble list” is a reminder of the things we can do that bring happiness through life’s special moments. Most people never achieve a fraction of what is included on their “bucket list.” Pastoral families admittedly struggle to find time for special premeditated moments, and the “bubble list” is one way of achieving this goal together.

### *Celebrate Victories*

Spiritual leaders are notorious for seldom making time to celebrate their ministry accomplishments. Because of the very nature of the work, there is an unending to-do list

that typically thwarts any attempt to savor the successes. Ministry victories are no doubt the high point in every pastor's ministry. Whether those triumphs include a consistently growing attendance, a record number of baptisms, a plethora of salvations and commitments to Christ, or an influx of funds from tithes, these events are never truly celebrated as they should be. Times are uncertain, and we should allow ourselves to be overwhelmed by the goodness and blessing of God in our lives and ministries. Instead, we tend to lean in the direction currently seen in society—i.e., toward an attitude of entitlement instead of humble anticipation. The Psalmist says: "Let everything that hath breath praise the LORD. Praise ye the LORD" (Ps 150:6). The Israelites celebrated with "trumpeters and singers ... to make one sound to be heard in praising and thanking the LORD; and when they lifted up their voice with the trumpets and cymbals...and praised the LORD, saying, For he is good; for his mercy endureth forever" (2 Chron 5:13).

## **7: Support**

"Some clergy families see themselves as a team ministry."<sup>343</sup> In many cases this works well, and it can be a tremendous blessing in that the pastor has that additional trusted support and encouragement so often needed in ministry. In such situations, the family experiences the rewards of serving people and witnessing eternal life changes. However, at times family team ministry can be a necessary evil in some pastorates; it may be undesirable, but it might be required in order to achieve a better result. There is enormous pressure on family members to take on a supportive or partnership role while attempting to assist the pastor. Realizing the pastorate is fraught with overwhelming stressors that

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<sup>343</sup> Joyner, *Life in the Fish Bowl*, 27.

inevitably lead to various health challenges, where does the pastoral family find support, healing, and renewal when injured or struggling physically, emotionally, relationally, spiritually, or financially?

Injuries are mutually experienced; healing also has to be mutually experienced ... constructive and well-founded guidelines for the clergy family will be a source of relief of stress, confusion, conflict, and injury.<sup>344</sup>

A strategic pastoral family support system should encompass five key areas; family, peers, congregation, denomination, and counseling.

### *Family*

Studies show that if a pastor is going to seek out support of any kind he will most likely go to his family first. In fact, findings reveal that pastors feel most comfortable sharing and receiving support from their spouses. “It is no surprise that spouses are expected to provide much of the moral support for clergy. For this is a traditional expectation of marriage.”<sup>345</sup> However, there is a hidden risk in this, as most wives are already overwhelmed with things like not having their own emotional outlet, suppressing their own individuality, being neglected by their husbands, lack of privacy, finances, double standards, disparaging congregational criticism, conflicts, and sexual issues stemming from the pastoral lifestyle. “But the percent of support expected is changing. In the landmark study of clergy from the 1960s ... active clergy were found to be receiving 85

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<sup>344</sup> Paul A. Mickey and Ginny W. Ashmore, *Clergy Families: Is Normal Life Possible?* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1991), 110.

<sup>345</sup> Rediger, “State of the Clergy.”

percent of their support from spouses (nearly all were female then).”<sup>346</sup> G. Lloyd Rediger acknowledges: “Our study shows clergy find 70 percent of their support coming from spouses (now including males). This trend is reflected in other recent studies as well.”<sup>347</sup>

### *Peers*

In his blog, “A Pastor’s Friend,” Dr. Glenn Taylor wrote a post entitled “The Fall of Christian Leaders—A Redemptive View.”<sup>348</sup> Taylor enlightens his reader as to the “precursors of moral failure” and suggests this:

In many ways pastors live lives of isolation, loneliness, and silence. Yes, they may have male friends to hunt, fish, or play golf with, yet there is a protective bubble around them. They still have to be guarded about their feelings, thoughts, and struggles.<sup>349</sup>

Taylor goes on to write: “I am aware of the high standards of conduct that Paul laid down in his letters to Timothy, and yet Paul struggled with issues of his own (Romans 7). Silence then, produces isolation, loneliness and a deep gnawing pain.”<sup>350</sup> Bishop T. D. Jakes argues that the pastor’s “position prevents them from talking about their condition.”<sup>351</sup> As straightforward as these arguments are, it must be noted that peer support for pastors is certainly on the rise and is being awarded high marks for its ongoing value. David L. Odom writes: “A study finds that pastors are more effective

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<sup>346</sup> Ibid.

<sup>347</sup> Ibid.

<sup>348</sup> Glenn Taylor, “The Fall of Christian Leaders – A Redemptive View,” [coach1glenn.wordpress.com/2011/10/07/the-fall-of-christian-leaders-a-redemptive-view-part-1/](http://coach1glenn.wordpress.com/2011/10/07/the-fall-of-christian-leaders-a-redemptive-view-part-1/) (accessed Mar 10, 2012).

<sup>349</sup> Ibid.

<sup>350</sup> Ibid.

<sup>351</sup> Ibid.

leaders when they spend time in Christian community with their peers.”<sup>352</sup> Odom argues that “congregations are more robust, growing communities of faith if the pastor is part of a robust community of faith.”<sup>353</sup> He also reports findings about the benefits to not only the pastor but the congregations as well.

In the last year, sociologist Penny Marler from Samford University conducted research on the impact of pastor peer groups. By comparing data from a survey of peer groups with a respected survey of congregations, Marler and her team demonstrated that a pastor’s participation in a peer group was a strong predictor of church growth. A second, related predictor was that the peer group had a trained facilitator and/or a curriculum. Pastors develop when they are in community with one another, focusing on the classic disciplines of Christian community: reading Scripture, praying for each other, fellowshiping.<sup>354</sup>

Warren Bird, Ph.D., is research director of the Leadership Network and co-author of 24 books on various aspects of church health and innovation. Bird affirms that “peer group involvement makes a difference among pastoral leaders.”<sup>355</sup> Bird confirms this from data gathered in a 2008 study<sup>356</sup> that drew responses from “several thousand pastors.”<sup>357</sup> Pastors who participated in various peer groups “were significantly more likely to promote a culture of involvement in their churches, support an active youth

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<sup>352</sup> David L. Odom, “What is required to help congregations grow?”

[www.faithandleadership.com/content/what-required-help-congregations-grow](http://www.faithandleadership.com/content/what-required-help-congregations-grow) (accessed Mar 1, 2012).

<sup>353</sup> Ibid.

<sup>354</sup> Ibid.

<sup>355</sup> Warren Bird, “Overwhelming Evidence that Pastors in Peer Groups Are FAR More Effective, Healthy and Balanced,”

[www.leadnet.org/blog/post/overwhelming\\_evidence\\_that\\_pastors\\_in\\_peer\\_groups\\_are\\_far\\_more\\_effective\\_he/](http://www.leadnet.org/blog/post/overwhelming_evidence_that_pastors_in_peer_groups_are_far_more_effective_he/) (accessed Mar 14, 2012).

<sup>356</sup> The full 61-page report, released April 2010, is titled “Is the Treatment the Cure? A Study of the Effects of Participation in Pastoral Leader Peer Groups” and is available for free download at [www.austinseminary.edu/cpl](http://www.austinseminary.edu/cpl).

<sup>357</sup> Bird, “Overwhelming evidence.”

ministry that also integrated into the life of the church, and tend to devote time and effort to community service and positive community change.”<sup>358</sup>

“In his “State of the Clergy” Rediger notes:

It is also notable that the pattern of support from peers has changed. [One study] found that clergy peers (same and different denominations) ranked low in the support list. Our study shows that clergy peers are almost tied for second ranking in the categories of supporters. It is apparent that the clergy networking movement is having a unifying effect.<sup>359</sup>

Recognition should be given to the Lilly Endowment Fund for forming the Sustaining Pastoral Excellence (SPE) program,<sup>360</sup> enabling

a broad spectrum of institutions from a wide variety of denominations in many geographical regions to honor and support pastoral leaders. Most projects place resources in the hands of pastors themselves to engage in peer learning groups.<sup>361</sup>

### *Congregation*

Ministering to the minister is something that been neglected for far too long. The massive burdens and well-being of the spiritual lives of all those in his flock are heavy enough

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<sup>358</sup> Ibid.

<sup>359</sup> Rediger, “State of the Clergy.”

<sup>360</sup> The Endowment is convinced that many congregations in the nation, in a variety of settings and within a multiplicity of faith traditions, are being served by excellent pastoral leaders. These leaders and the work they do are of inestimable value. The quality of pastoral leadership is key to vital congregational life. When churches and parishes are led by spiritually strong, thoughtful, able and imaginative pastors, congregations tend to thrive... peer learning groups. These groups provide opportunities for intellectual, vocational, spiritual, physical and emotional support, education and encouragement. Pastoral leaders study the Bible and theology, practice spiritual disciplines, build pastoral skills and participate in retreats, much-deserved relaxation and/or renewing travel. In these projects, they are encouraged and enabled to design and implement programs that will help them sustain pastoral excellence over the long haul.

[www.lillyendowment.org/religion\\_spe.html](http://www.lillyendowment.org/religion_spe.html)

<sup>361</sup> [www.lillyendowment.org/religion\\_spe.html](http://www.lillyendowment.org/religion_spe.html)

loads; adding to that his own self-care as well as that of his family, the pastor needs ministry too. “The thought that the pastor has temptations and struggles common to man is not something Christians generally feel comfortable with.”<sup>362</sup> Daniel Weiss claims that congregants “picture their pastor as the white knight who is not tempted with earthly things. The sooner we dispel that notion, the safer, healthier, and more authentic our churches will be.”<sup>363</sup> Weiss suggests that it is time for the church to involve itself in the care for its pastor. In an article entitled “Ministering to the Minister: Offering Effective Pastoral Support,” Weiss suggests various ways the church and the pastor “can work together to safeguard and support the shepherd of the flock.”<sup>364</sup> Creatively implemented, these initiatives and activities can produce a healthy atmosphere within the church: “spiritual support, prayer teams, prayer partner, close friendships, safeguards in the church, filtering/accountability software, counseling boundaries, accountability relationship, counseling, family support, ample vacation time, involved lay people, ample elder or deacon/deaconess help, continuing education.”<sup>365</sup>

The board and church congregants are parties with responsibility for assisting the pastor in successfully attaining a healthy and balanced lifestyle. Scripture affirms that recognition, respect, and honor towards God’s anointed is due them: the Psalmist declares, “Do not touch My anointed ones, and do My prophets no harm” (Ps 105:15). Paul instructs Timothy that “[t]he elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honor, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching” (1 Tim 5:17). Honoring the pastor means respecting his rights as a human being, praying faithfully for

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<sup>362</sup> Daniel Weiss, “Ministering to the Minister: Offering Effective Pastoral Support,” [www.pureintimacy.org/piArticles/A000000622.cfm](http://www.pureintimacy.org/piArticles/A000000622.cfm) (accessed Mar 14, 2012).

<sup>363</sup> Ibid.

<sup>364</sup> Ibid.

<sup>365</sup> Ibid.

him and his family, and encouraging all of them in unique and creative ways. The church should appoint a group of people whose sole ministry purpose is to edify and encourage the pastoral family. The church budget should provide funding for the pastor to attend annual conferences and marriage retreats for continued education and renewal, and this time away should not be deducted from his vacation time. Provision should also be made for a periodic sabbatical.

### *Denomination*

Rediger writes that “[i]t is discouraging to note that denominational officials and seminary professors rank very low on the list of supporters in [a specific] study.”<sup>366</sup> Pastors surveyed indicate their openness to receiving denominational support, especially when experiencing attacks of various natures. Pastors have also suggested the development of strategies within denominations for the training and equipping of lay leaders to take the lead in responding to the needs of the church in order that it might function in a healthy manner. Pastors also recommended that denominational leaders form support systems for clergy peer networks. Rediger’s study reveals disturbing findings with respect to denominational support for clergy.

Denominational officials rank near the bottom while seminary professors rank last. This is sad because both these categories of persons are very close to clergy during their training years and transitions. Both types of supporters are typically ordained themselves and would be expected to understand clergy needs. But pastors often regard them as privileged defectors from the ranks of everyday pastors. And they consistently report

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<sup>366</sup> Rediger, “State of the Clergy.”



that they do not trust the motives of such persons, nor find them helpful in times of crisis or transition.<sup>367</sup>

### *Counseling*

Clergy case studies reveal unfortunate findings in that most pastors confess that they never feel comfortable seeking out counseling for their own personal needs while pastoring. It is perhaps a self-imposed apprehension; nevertheless, as spiritual leaders they suggest that if they were to seek counseling they might be viewed as flawed or weak. A recent study found that “only 7 percent of pastors ... expressed an interest” in seeking professional counseling.<sup>368</sup> Another study revealed that 76 percent of senior pastors surveyed acknowledged they sought out their own private coping mechanisms, while 16 percent found family support helpful, and only eight percent leaned on outside care through various relationship support mechanisms.<sup>369</sup> Ministers carry inordinate burdens and at times should consent to receiving professional help during burnout as a means of support if they are to be able to reason their way through the buildup of conflicts and cynicism. A personal family crisis with our youngest daughter recently found our entire family sitting before a Christian counselor for the first time ever. Her marriage had collapsed because of her husband’s moral indiscretions (as a youth pastor). Unbeknownst to our daughter and our entire family, he was spiraling downward quickly. It all happened within a two-week period, and without the guidance of a wonderful counselor our family

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<sup>367</sup> Ibid.

<sup>368</sup> R. A. Lish, “Clergy interest in innovative collaboration with psychologists,” *Journal of Psychology and Christianity* 22 (2003), 294-298.

<sup>369</sup> M. R. McMinn, R. A. Lish, P. D. Trice, et al, “Care for Pastors: Learning from clergy and their spouses,” *Pastoral Psychology* 53 (2005), 563-581.

might still be struggling today. With the vast number of issues pastoral families confront, it is important for them to give themselves permission to be vulnerable.

Being in therapy is like having someone in your corner to confer with after each round in the ring. When you try to say ‘No’ and get beaten severely by either anger or a guilt trip, you have somewhere to go to lick your wounds and develop a strategy for how you will handle that person or situation in the next round.<sup>370</sup>

Roy Oswald of the Alban Institute recommends “[s]taying in therapy for a minimum of six months before concluding that you have dealt with the roots of your burnout.”<sup>371</sup>

## **8: Spousal Sexual Intimacy**

Child psychologist and child and family psychiatrist, Dr. Philip G. Ney, argues: “The basic purpose of the human sexual relationship is union and communion, not pleasure or procreation.”<sup>372</sup> We live in a society that has this all backwards. More and more people are looking out for their own pleasure, sexual and otherwise, and there is a tremendous lack of intimacy and genuineness in relationships. Sexual innuendoes are communicated via innumerable forms of communication, limiting the pastor and his spouse’s ability to stem its overall influence on their lives as well as in the lives of their children. Popular books are now being authored by pastors on the subject of sex and sexual intimacy in marriage. And for any who contend this area is not a struggle for them, well, he or she is

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<sup>370</sup> Roy M. Oswald, *Clergy Self-Care: Finding A Balance for Effective Ministry* (Herndon: Alban Institute, 1991), 159.

<sup>371</sup> Ibid.

<sup>372</sup> Philip G. Ney, “The Christian Doctor and Sex,” [www.messengers2.com/articles/discoveries\\_and\\_ethics/christian\\_doctor\\_and\\_sex.htm](http://www.messengers2.com/articles/discoveries_and_ethics/christian_doctor_and_sex.htm) (accessed Mar 10, 2012).

simply being disingenuous. Paul cautions the Corinthian believers thus: “Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall” (1 Cor 10:12, ESV).

My husband and I recently celebrated our thirty-third wedding anniversary, and we have spent every one of those years together in the ministry. As I reflect on the years, I must honestly admit that all but two or three were super great, and that today we enjoy one another’s company very much. Those few painful times were concurrent with our church building program where, as the pastor, my husband became inundated with burdens that, looking back, I realize were far too great for him to shoulder alone. Our marriage took the brunt of the impact, and I would be dishonest if I failed to admit there were times I contemplated packing my bags to go away for a while until the storm passed. I loved my husband, but I confess I did not really like him then. I witnessed my husband morphing into a person I didn’t marry. He has always been passionate for God, prayer, and people, congenial, and great fun to be with. He exudes all the qualities that make up a great husband and father. However, at one point, the pressure and stress of pastoring a successful and growing mega-church almost cost us our marriage. This thesis provides me with the first opportunity in which I have elected to express my thoughts and feelings about this to anyone other than my mate. Through God’s providence, my husband and I came together and got things back on track and have committed going forward that we will not allow the ministry encumbrances to interfere with our marriage.

With that short introduction as my framework, I must, as an evangelist/pastor’s wife, express my candid reflections on intimacy in the pastoral marriage. In 33 years of traveling the globe and considering the life experience I have gained, I confess I am only now realizing at 52 years of age how important it is to communicate fairly and

objectively with my mate about sexual intimacy. We have always enjoyed a wonderful marital relationship; however, when the pressures of life and ministry become overwhelming it is easy to lose that connection and to disengage from your spouse. And, truthfully, pastors and their spouses are the first to dismiss the guilt in doing so as they feel a certain God-given right to do so “for the sake of the ministry.” Should this not be our first hint that Satan is on the warpath and hell-bent to destroy us? “Trouble is ahead for a pastor’s marriage when the marital relationship becomes polite with no genuine emotional intimacy.”<sup>373</sup> Larry Russell<sup>374</sup> says: “When two single people live in a relationship centering around hectic activity, that marriage is in trouble ... it’s leaving the door open for infidelity.”<sup>375</sup> Our issues were never infidelity or even the hint of it. Communication and time for each other were the big issues separating us. Concurrent with our own personal marital struggles, my husband and I were required to attend a denominational conference while in seminary a few years back. Frankly, I was still reeling from the lack of communication and intimacy in our marriage and incredibly fatigued as well. During the conference and in God’s providence, I was corralled along with 1,500 other pastor’s wives to attend a luncheon where the speaker, Gary Chapman,<sup>376</sup> invited us to learn “How to Love Your Leader.” I took a seat at the very back table with five other pastor’s wives I did not know, hoping to easily escape as

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<sup>373</sup> Rebekah Montgomery, “Pastors and Wives at the Breaking Point,” [www.adventistreview.org/article/680/archives/issue-2006-1522/pastors-and-wives-at-the-breaking-point](http://www.adventistreview.org/article/680/archives/issue-2006-1522/pastors-and-wives-at-the-breaking-point) (accessed Mar 10, 2012).

<sup>374</sup> Through Shepherd’s Heart Ministry, a crisis intervention and prevention outreach for ministry leaders, the Russells hear the secrets pastors and their wives can’t tell anyone else. Both Russells, who have ministry experience and hold master’s degrees in counseling, say pastors and their families clearly need help. Ibid.

<sup>375</sup> Ibid.

<sup>376</sup> Chapman is the senior associate pastor responsible for adult discipleship, marriage counseling and pastoral care at Calvary Baptist Church in Winston-Salem, N.C. Shannon Baker, “Loving a leader is ministers' wives' topic,” (Jul 13, 2008), [www.sbcannualmeeting.org/sbc08/newsroom/newspage.asp?ID=65](http://www.sbcannualmeeting.org/sbc08/newsroom/newspage.asp?ID=65) (accessed Mar 14, 2012).

quickly as possible. Honestly, I donned the proverbial pastor's wife's mask during the initial pleasantries, and when I heard the president of the luncheon announce Chapman's topic, I sat and rebelled in utter disgust. I fiercely attempted to hold back the tears and everything in me was shouting, "Get the heck out of here Cristie Jo. I'm so angry with my husband for ignoring us and I am about done. The pressure of ministry has about destroyed us and this sermon doesn't even deserve my attention."

Thankfully, God saw my tears and patiently redirected my rebellion. He softened my heart and kept working on me as I sat weeping through Chapman's six critical suggestions for "loving your leader." They are: (1) Praise is always better than criticism, (2) Requests are more productive than demands, (2) Unconditional love is the only true love, (3) Learn from his defensiveness, (4) Understanding male sexuality is essential, (5) Learn to apologize, and (6) Don't expect perfection. Chapman went straight for the jugular and then penetrated my heart.

The area I most needed to work on was the essential understanding of male sexuality. The mandatory sex-education class in fifth grade did not prepare us for sexual intimacy in marriage. Where do we learn the skills in succeeding at such an important God-given gift? Typically, parents never taught us, the school system was lacking, and God forbid we educate ourselves about marriage sexual intimacy in seminary. This is exactly where it should be taught and re-taught. There is so much misunderstanding between the male and female sexes. We truly don't have a clue how each other's bodies operate. Sadly, we learn by trial and error and statistics reveal we are not doing well at all at this. Ministry is demanding, and the one of the first signs of marital crises is the lack of communication, congeniality, and sexual intimacy. "Noting that men have a physical

need for sex, Chapman encouraged wives to be understanding when their husbands seek intimacy with them.<sup>377</sup> Chapman concluded by stating that "I believe that God did not ordain marriage to be miserable," he said, adding that when Christian couples do marriage God's way, other couples will be drawn to learn from them."<sup>378</sup> I appreciate and concur with Chapman's conclusions; however, vast numbers of pastors and their spouses are miserable. They no longer enjoy sexual intimacy either quantitatively or qualitatively. For various reasons, their interest and attraction to one another is waning and it did not happen overnight. Perhaps one or the other or both have neglected their physical health and appearance. Pastors' wives are content to meander through their days without showering or applying make-up, and many don the famous "comfy" sweat suits instead of "prepping" themselves like they did previous to marriage. Pastors are undisciplined in allowing themselves to pack on extra pounds, presenting an unappealing appearance which hinders a desire for their mates to engage in any type of intimacy. We are simply not conversant with one another and fearful about offending our lover when it comes to discussing unhealthy habits that turn us off sexually. Ministry has a way of justifying the "pause button" we push regarding all our most intimate needs. The surveys discussed here, among others, reveal that it is time to redirect our thinking and begin communicating about how to better love and enjoy one another sexually. We are intimidated about being completely honest with one another about what pleases us, and we no longer designate time for educating ourselves on how to make our marriages and the intimacy required better. Dr. Ney writes:

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<sup>377</sup> Ibid.

<sup>378</sup> Ibid.

One destructive misunderstanding between men and women that often occurs is a woman's failure to understand that the testes and the prostate are both endocrine and exocrine glands. Once production has begun, only under unusual circumstances will it stop and those secretions need to be released. That intense male drive to ejaculate in a vagina is often both misunderstood and resented by women. Generally speaking, in Western culture men are more ready to give than women are to receive. Among the Chinese, the women are more ready to receive than men are to give. Women can best understand male urgency by picturing the effect of a child intermittently stopping and starting breast feeding. As the breast becomes engorged the mother feels very uncomfortable and inadvertently begins looking around for some other child who will appreciate her milk production. So it is with sexually frustrated males. This is why Paul advises that couples should not withhold sex except for mutually agreed upon periods of prayer and fasting (1 Corinthians 7:5). Obviously, if they are fasting their sexual drive is lessened.<sup>379</sup>

Dr. Taylor wraps it up nicely in his concluding thoughts in regard to “Sex-The Drug of Choice.”

When we hurt, either physically or emotionally we will seek relief, or a way to cope with the pain. There is a powerful drug available that resides in the brain that even the use of strong sexual thoughts can spring into action. Fanaticizing about illicit sex, the use of porn, or any other kind of sexual stimuli releases the chemicals that God has given for the use of married couples. However, if there is already a disconnect in marriage, the need for this medication may feel overwhelming. Endorphins and Enkefalins bind with opiate receptors to release a strong analgesic to the brain, bringing a measure of relief. Sometimes just the presence of a female emits triggers to this pain reliever. Of course the pinnacle of euphoria is reached with total sexual release. When this occurs with someone who is not our spouse, we understand it to be full blown adultery.<sup>380</sup>

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<sup>379</sup> Ney, “The Christian Doctor.”

<sup>380</sup> Taylor, “The Fall of Christian Leaders.”

## 9: Sabbaticals

“For thus saith the Lord GOD, the Holy One of Israel; In returning and rest shall ye be saved; in quietness and in confidence shall be your strength: and ye would not. But ye said, No; for we will flee upon horses; therefore shall ye flee: and, We will ride upon the swift; therefore shall they that pursue you be swift” (Isa 30:15-16, KJV).

A sabbatical is intended to provide an extended period for ... reinvigoration of the mind and heart through research, purposeful travel, writing ... the goal is to enable the preacher to rejuvenate in body, soul, and spirit. The role of a pastor ... is one of the most taxing professions ... not only emotionally taxing, but also physically and spiritually taxing.<sup>381</sup>

Survey findings reveal a disturbing apathy toward pastoral sabbaticals. When asked if they had ever taken a sabbatical, every pastor interviewed for the author’s case studies replied, “No! They were never offered.” How is the pastor to fully engage in weekly ministry when he is faithfully and gruelingly ministering 24/7? The pastorate requires times of stillness and quiet. Charles Swindoll argues: “Noise and words and frenzied, hectic schedules dull our senses, closing our ears to His still, small voice and making us numb to His touch.”<sup>382</sup> Sabbaticals are not vacations; they are periods of rest and renewal necessary to replenishment of the mind, body, and spirit. “The relentless pace of contemporary society overwhelms our sense of time as a gift from God.”<sup>383</sup> Steve W. Raimo writes: “As such, pastors allow their sense of obligation to the ministry to blind the need to observe a portion of this gift as Sabbath rest. Not only do pastors fail to

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<sup>381</sup> Matt Schmucker, “Caring for the Pastor: The Sabbatical,” [www.9marks.org/journal/caring-pastor-sabbatical](http://www.9marks.org/journal/caring-pastor-sabbatical) (accessed Mar 10, 2012).

<sup>382</sup> Charles Swindoll, *Intimacy with the Almighty*, 40.

<sup>383</sup> R. Sherman, “Reclaimed by Sabbath Rest,” *Interpretation* (Jan 2005), 38-50.



allow themselves adequate rest, they increase their work-related hours in an attempt to get it all done.”<sup>384</sup> Rowland Croucher argues that the necessity for managing stress is to

make sure your life has a sabbatical rhythm of work-and-withdrawal (retreat from work). A Sabbath is the day on which, from when you wake until you go to sleep at night, nothing reminds you of your vocation. (Wednesday or Thursday may be best for preaching pastors). And: all the great leaders in Scripture spent a disproportionate amount of their lives in deserts!<sup>385</sup>

## **10: See the Signals**

Seasoned shepherds realize the need to read signals indicating the danger ahead in their ministries. Sadly, many pastors become so entrenched in the daily duties of the pastorate that they remain unaware of the warning signals until it is too late. Satanic warfare is a reality when serving God, and the pastor must be aware of his cunning strategy which seeks to take him out.

### *Strike the Shepherd*

As already discussed in previous chapters in this thesis, Satan tenaciously targets God’s leaders with intent to ultimately destroy the church. “Strike the Shepherd and the Sheep scatter” (Zech 13:7). Our shepherds are being stricken with various temptations and tribulations, and some are being taken out to Satan’s great glee. On November 10, 1952, *Time* magazine featured a story in the religion section entitled, “Strike the Shepherd.”

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<sup>384</sup> Steve W. Raimo, “The Role of Rest and Renewal in Leadership Success,” [www.christianleadershipalliance.org/?page=roleofrestandrenewal](http://www.christianleadershipalliance.org/?page=roleofrestandrenewal) (accessed Mar 13, 2012).

<sup>385</sup> Rowland Croucher, “A Pastoral Survival Guide [6]: Stress Management,” [pastordummies.blogspot.com/2011/08/pastoral-survival-guide-6-stress.html](http://pastordummies.blogspot.com/2011/08/pastoral-survival-guide-6-stress.html) (accessed Mar 13, 2012).

These were choice words and no doubt intentionally written. The article featured the story of Father Patrick J. Byrne who was the first Maryknoll<sup>386</sup> priest. Byrne was assigned to Korea in 1923 and later opened a new mission in Kyoto, Japan. In 1935, he was placed under house arrest during World War II. His work was invaluable. Father Byrne assisted General Douglas McArthur in reassuring the people at the beginning of the American occupation. “On July 2, 1950 Bishop Byrne was seized by the Communists and put on trial. Refusing to give in, he was forced to march the Yalu River along with the remnants of the US Army 24<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division. He died on November 25, 1950 and was buried in an unmarked grave in Hanjangni, North Korea.”<sup>387</sup> Think of the ministry that was lost or hindered as a result of Bishop Byrne’s death. One would imagine Byrne’s followers were shocked and terrified at the Communists threats and tactics and were no doubt frightened to carry on the work.

### *Suffer and Sacrifice*

C. S. Lewis once wrote, “God whispers to us in our pleasures ... but shouts in our pains: it is His megaphone to rouse a deaf world.”<sup>388</sup> Admittedly, most pastors today feel they have been the repeated recipients of those blaring shouts from God while suffering often unimaginable pain. Are pastors the “deaf world” to which Lewis is referring? We revel in the victories of our service to God, and yet we loathe the times we fall victim to the viciousness of the very people we are called to serve. Christ has called all His children to

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<sup>386</sup> a US-based Catholic mission movement.

<sup>387</sup> [maryknollvocations.org/news-and-events/201-bishop-patrick-j-byrne-mm.html](http://maryknollvocations.org/news-and-events/201-bishop-patrick-j-byrne-mm.html) (accessed March 6, 2012).

<sup>388</sup> [www.tentmaker.org/Quotes/sufferingquotes.htm](http://www.tentmaker.org/Quotes/sufferingquotes.htm), (accessed March 12, 2012).

suffer and sacrifice in dying to themselves. If there is no suffering and no sacrifice there is no learning. If the pastor is to live by a higher ethical and spiritual standard, then he is promised suffering. So why are we so often taken off-guard when we are tried and tested? The great Indian Christian Missionary, Sadhu Sundar Singh (1889–1929), knew the pain of suffering and the reward it brings. He likened the cries of God’s children to a newborn’s cry.

A newborn child has to cry, for only in this will his lungs expand. In order to make a child breathe the doctor gives it a slight blow. The mother must have thought the doctor cruel. But he was really doing the kindest thing possible. As with newborn children the lungs are contracted, so are our spiritual lungs. But through suffering God strikes us in love. The lungs expand and we can breathe and pray.<sup>389</sup>

Peter reminds us as well: “Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you; but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ’s sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy” (1 Pet 4:12–13).

Dr. Larry Cornine, Associate Professor of Pastoral Care and Counselling at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, was instrumental in counselling our 26-year old-daughter during the unexpected and heart-breaking divorce from her husband. Dr. Cornine also counsels members of our family who, at times, struggle with the demands and idiosyncrasies of parishioners in the congregation. One of the most arresting suggestions Cornine offers pastoral families who feel like calling it quits because of the suffering, sacrifices, and thankless nature of the ministry is advising them to think about “ministering without expecting anything in return.” These words of wisdom were

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<sup>389</sup> Ibid.

presented during a critical time in our pastorate. They were sincerely welcomed, and with great determination the entire family committed to minister from that point forward with those intentions in mind. It seemed to work for a time; however, after several unanticipated and utterly gut-wrenching events within the church it became more and more difficult to stay true to that commitment. I added what I believe to be a necessary postscript to Cornine's advice; "Minister without expecting anything in return and be willing to lose it all." Afflictions, trials and tribulations are par for the course where the believer in Christ is concerned. Matthew Henry gives a contemplative rendering of James 1:12–18.

It is not every man who suffers that is blessed; but he who with patience and constancy goes through all difficulties in the way of duty. Afflictions cannot make us miserable, if it be not our own fault. The tried Christian shall be a crowned one. The crown of life is promised to all who have the love of God reigning in their hearts. Every soul that truly loves God shall have its trials in this world fully recompensed in that world above, where love is made perfect. The commands of God, and the dealings of his providence, try men's hearts, and show the dispositions which prevail in them. But nothing sinful in the heart or conduct can be ascribed to God. He is not the author of the dross, though his fiery trial exposes it. Those who lay the blame of sin, either upon their constitution, or upon their condition in the world, or pretend they cannot keep from sinning, wrong God as if he were the author of sin. Afflictions, as sent by God, are designed to draw out our graces, but not our corruptions. The origin of evil and temptation is in our own hearts. Stop the beginnings of sin, or all the evils that follow must be wholly charged upon us. God has no pleasure in the death of men, as he has no hand in their sin; but both sin and misery are owing to themselves. As the sun is the same in nature and influences, though the earth and clouds, often coming between, make it seem to us to vary, so God is unchangeable, and our changes and shadows are not from any changes or alterations in him. What the sun is in nature, God is in grace, providence, and glory; and infinitely more. As every good gift is from God, so particularly our being born again, and all its holy, happy consequences come from him. A true Christian becomes as different a person from what he was before the renewing influences of Divine grace,

as if he were formed over again. We should devote all our faculties to God's service, that we may be a kind of first-fruits of his creatures.<sup>390</sup>

### *Strongholds and Satanic Warfare*

Satan's intent in the life of the pastor is clear. His agenda is to prevent the power of God from being established in the pastor's life and ministry.

We cannot ignore Satan and spiritual warfare, nor can we turn a blind eye to his characteristic and schemes. Yes, he cannot get those who are in Christ, but he surely can hassle us. He cannot possess those who are in Christ, but he can trick and mislead us and try to distract our eyes and faith from Christ.<sup>391</sup>

Clergy families are Satan's target. If he continually derails the pastor with either a family or church crisis, then he has succeeded in hindering the Kingdom agenda. Satan will stop at nothing in an attempt to set up and secure strongholds in the path of the pastor's spiritual journey and ministry. It is imperative for a pastor to continually pull down satanic strongholds surrounding him and his family (2 Cor 10:3–6; Eph 6:10–18; Col 2:15; 1 John 4:4).

### **11: Stick-to-itiveness**

The dictionary defines stick-to-itiveness as a “firmness of purpose; resolution.”<sup>392</sup>

Ministry often challenges our “firmness of purpose” and our ability to hang in there not

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<sup>390</sup> *Matthew Henry's Concise Commentary*, [www.christnotes.org/commentary.php?b=59&c=1&com=mhc](http://www.christnotes.org/commentary.php?b=59&c=1&com=mhc), (accessed Mar 12, 2012).

<sup>391</sup> Richard Krejcir, “Spiritual Warfare Part II”

[www.intotheword.org/apps/articles/default.asp?articleid=39408&columnid=3803](http://www.intotheword.org/apps/articles/default.asp?articleid=39408&columnid=3803) (accessed Mar 10, 2012).

<sup>392</sup> [www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=stick-to-it-iveness](http://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=stick-to-it-iveness)

only when times are tough but also when anticipated results of our work are not immediately realized. Admittedly, pastors grow weary in the battle, but not weary of it. Paul encourages the believers at Galatia: “And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart” (Gal 6:9 NKJV). John Walvoord argues that we

may become discouraged with spiritual sowing because the harvest is often long in coming. In the face of this reality the apostle charged the Galatians not to become weary or give up because the harvest is sure ... the reaping will come at God’s proper time, which may be only in part in this life and in full in the life to come.<sup>393</sup>

Regardless how tenuous the circumstances may appear, pastors must remain focused, and ministry should be done with excellence and effectiveness. Stay focused and stick to God’s plan. There is no room for slacking off or for slackers in God’s service. Pastors should swing for the fences when committing to the pastoral call. This sports metaphor which most people recognize as “going for broke” suggests the baseball player’s grit or determination in hitting the ball as hard as he can rather than simply safely connecting with the ball. Some pastors are content to “safely connect” and to live in the “comfort zone” of serving, never taking risks or shaking things up in an attempt to make a dramatic spiritual difference in their world. We need to remember we are dealing with matters of eternal significance; the “lost-ness” of man, heaven and hell, and the wrath and forgiveness of God. John Piper claims that “[t]he preacher’s mantle is soaked with the blood of Jesus and singed with the fire of hell.”<sup>394</sup> The pastor’s role is substantial,

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<sup>393</sup> Walvoord, *Bible Knowledge Commentary*, 610.

<sup>394</sup> Caleb Kolstad, “10 Marks of a Faithful Pastor (Pt. 1),” [expositorythoughts.wordpress.com/2006/11/09/227](http://expositorythoughts.wordpress.com/2006/11/09/227) (accessed Mar 12, 2012).

and all seriousness should be exhibited in that the author of Hebrews affirms we “are keeping watch over ... souls, as those who will have to give an account” (Heb 13:17).

## **12: Shake the Dust**

Most pastors are faithful to their call and often to a fault. They possess incredible tenacity in seizing every opportunity, no matter how intense the storms in ministry become. Such pastors can equal any great captain of a ship who never abandons his battered or sinking vessel until everyone onboard is out of harm’s way. However, Scripture does affirm that there are times when the messenger is no longer welcome and must abort. “Whoever will not receive you nor hear your words, when you depart from that house or city, shake off the dust from your feet” (Matt 10:14, NKJV). Pastors are often guilty of remaining in a pastorate or in a city too long, when every indication seems to affirm that God called him to leave long ago. His insistence on staying can certainly be appreciated; however, he may be resisting the very will of God for his life. Harry Gardner, President of Acadia Divinity College, suggests that pastors facing unbearable and innumerable obstacles making it difficult to make key inroads for an eternal purpose, leave and “protect their investment.”<sup>395</sup>

Of course, pastors are not alone in finding it difficult to part ways. On June 9, 1999, New York Mets manager Bobby Valentine was ejected from the game during the twelfth inning of a 14-inning marathon with the Toronto Blue Jays, for arguing a call. Valentine submitted and stepped away; however, his stubbornness in being a part of the

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<sup>395</sup> Dr. Harry Gardner, Acadia Divinity College, Wolfville, Nova Scotia, Canada. Dr. Harry Gardner’s advice to a war-torn pastor in a private meeting.

game prompted him to find a disguise and then return to the dugout. Regardless of his commitment to the game, Major League Baseball did not see the humor in it. They fined Valentine and suspended him for three games. By resisting the authority over him Valentine only brought more hurt to himself. Jesus affirms Paul in similar situation prior to his conversion: “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads” (Acts 26:14). John MacArthur argues that “[t]o fight God, as Saul was doing, was to fight a losing battle. It was as stupid as an ox kicking against the goads (sharpened rods used to herd cattle).<sup>396</sup> When pastors resist the Lord as he attempts to move them on to another location or ministry vocation they are only injuring themselves. A glimpse at Paul’s various struggles during his missionary journeys displays God’s leadership. When being forced to leave town, when imprisoned or shipwrecked, Paul saw it as an opportunity to shake the dust and move on to the next ministry assignment. Staring over or starting afresh can be a good thing.

### **13: Scriptural Theo-logic and Scriptural Journaling**

How important is right thinking for those engaged in ministry? How often is Satan messing with the minds and thoughts of God’s leaders as they attempt to fulfill God’s plan for their lives? As previously presented in this thesis, pastors’ families can experience Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) after periods of overwhelming ministry stress and crises. Christian counselor H. Norman Wright suggests that “[t]raumatized people have alterations in their brains... [and] trauma can create PTSD.” Wright contends, “Trauma is a wounding. It overwhelms the ordinary adaptations to

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<sup>396</sup> John MacArthur, *Acts* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1994).



life.”<sup>397</sup> According to Scripture, Paul endured many traumatic events during his ministry that certainly opened a door for the adversary to attempt to mentally massacre him. Undoubtedly, this prompted Paul to frequently write about our minds and thoughts being taken captive.

Is it possible then to establish a biblical plan that will help the pastoral family overcome PTSD and begin again on a path of right thinking? Since the pastoral family is a prime target for Satan’s fiery darts, a Pauline approach might be in order as a daily remedy for renewing the wounded mind. Paul teaches us about transforming the mind through employing a “Scriptural theo-logic,”<sup>398</sup> which is simply right thinking.

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, *which is* your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what *is* that good and acceptable and perfect will of God (Rom 12:1–2, NKJV).

Wright encourages those who have been traumatized by reminding them their story is not finished: “[Y]ou can write the last chapter of your trauma. It hasn’t been written yet.”<sup>399</sup>

Those in ministry who have been afflicted with any range of traumatic events might also resort to spiritual journaling. During the writing process, ask yourself three important questions: (1) What is God developing in me because of my suffering?; (2)

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<sup>397</sup> H. Norman Wright, “Trauma and the Brain,” [www.hnormanwright.com/index.php?main\\_page=page&id=22](http://www.hnormanwright.com/index.php?main_page=page&id=22) (accessed Mar 13, 2012).

<sup>398</sup> Kenneth R. Jones, “Biblical Counseling and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD),” (Dec 22, 2010), [reformedbiblicalcoaching.wordpress.com/2010/12/22/biblical-counseling-and-post-traumatic-stress-disorder-ptsd/](http://reformedbiblicalcoaching.wordpress.com/2010/12/22/biblical-counseling-and-post-traumatic-stress-disorder-ptsd/) (accessed Mar 13, 2012).

<sup>399</sup> Ibid.

Where is God deploying me to minister to others because of my suffering?; (3) What is God delivering me from due to my suffering?<sup>400</sup>

#### **14: Seek Out and Offer Forgiveness**

This is possibly the most important step after enduring ministry hardships. Paul writes to the believers at Colossae instructing them in “bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also *must do*” (Col 3:13, NKJV). Forgiveness is something that must be both “given” and “gotten.” It is an essential component to the healing of pastoral families. Forgiveness frees the heart so the mind and body can recover. Our pastoral experiences can make us either better or bitter. The choice is ours, and if we choose to be bitter then we jeopardize the gift with which God has privileged us. However, if we hasten to the throne of God in asking for His forgiveness and granting forgiveness to those who have offended us, we then ultimately choose to be better, allowing God to use us for his greater glory. Neil Anderson argues: “Unforgiveness is an open invitation to Satan’s bondage in our lives.”<sup>401</sup> The burden of bondage grows rapidly when we refuse to forgive our transgressors. “Forgiveness is necessary to avoid entrapment by Satan. I have discovered in my counseling that forgiveness is the number one avenue Satan uses to gain entrance to believers’ lives. Paul encouraged mutual forgiveness “in order that no advantage be taken of us by Satan; for we are not ignorant of his schemes” (2 Cor 2:11).<sup>402</sup>

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<sup>400</sup> Ibid.

<sup>401</sup> Neil Anderson, *Victory over the Darkness: Realizing the Power of Your Identity in Christ* (Ventura: Regal, 1990), 129.

<sup>402</sup> Ibid.

### **Concluding Thoughts**

John sums up the intent of my thoughts and commitment to pastoral family health. “Beloved, I pray that you may prosper in all things and be in health, just as your soul prospers” (3 John 1:2). So it is for you I pray—that you may be compelled to start afresh by implementing each of the steps outlined here and learning, perhaps for the first time, how to live and enjoy the abundant and healthy life Christ offers.