

CHAPTER 4

WHY ARE PEOPLE LEAVING THE CHURCH?

One of the significant contributors to pastors leaving the ministry is discouragement over declining attendance, giving, and volunteer involvement. Our fast-paced, digital culture has created entertainment for people, on demand and without end. Concurrently, we are witnessing the moral corrosion of a nation. In this chapter, we will review the cultural challenges faced by pastors and observe the downward trend line of church attendance in the United States. In addition, we will examine the reasons why people are leaving the church.

Pastors today face increasing moral, social, and technological changes that complicate and challenge ministerial longevity. Meteoric changes characteristic of present and upcoming generations of Americans, in our digital, on-demand age, will decrease church attendance, membership, and giving. Pastors must lead their churches creatively or they will find attendance dwindling. Our world is changing at a rapid pace beyond anything ever seen in history. Where will all these cultural shifts lead with respect to church attendance? What do the downward trends of church attendance now suggest? What is in the future for our government, the economy, families, singles, biblical illiterates, and churches?

Europe is experiencing a growing number of “de-baptisms,” the most visible evidence of the continent’s secular drift. It is a phenomenon that has touched both Protestant and Catholic constituents. In 2010 in Belgium, there were approximately 2,000 de-baptism requests, compared with 66 two years earlier. In Germany, a record 181,000 Catholics split from the Catholic Church in 2011—the first time that Catholic defections

outpaced those among Protestants. “The movement is happening across Europe,” said Anne Morelli, who heads a center studying religion and secularity at the Free University of Brussels.¹³³ Is the same slow secularization taking place in the United States? Information is critical to pastors in order that they may make wise decisions so their ministries and personal lives keep pace with the meteoric changes. And, unlike previous decades, if a pastor is not fruitful and stable, there are plenty of other pastors ready to take his place. “In the 1950s there were roughly the same number of ministers as there were U.S. churches. Now there are almost two ministers for every church, according to the latest *Yearbook of American and Canadian Churches*—607,944 ministers and 338,713 congregations. Not all those ministers are looking for employment; some are not working or are employed in other professions. Those who are looking, especially recent seminary graduates, say that realistic offers are few. Larger churches are eliminating vacant positions or terminating associate pastors, Marcia Myers said. Smaller congregations are shifting some ministers from full-time to part-time.”¹³⁴

G. Jeffrey MacDonald, Yale Divinity School graduate and Religion News Service correspondent, has written a scathing review of the contemporary church in his book, *Thieves in the Temple: The Christian Church and the Selling of the American Soul*. Once devoted to forming character and conscience among its followers, the contemporary church has let the marketplace take control. Churchgoers, MacDonald argues, demand entertainment, not edification—and pastors, desperate to grow membership rolls, treat

¹³³ Elizabeth Bryant, “Europeans ‘De-Baptize’ In Growing Numbers, Church Officials Worried,” *Huffington Post Canada* (Jan 18, 2012), www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/01/18/europeans-de-baptize-church_n_1214256.html (accessed January 22, 2012).

¹³⁴ Greg Warner, “From clergy shortage to clergy glut,” *The Pew Forum* (May 6, 2010), www.pewforum.org/Religion-News/From-clergy-shortage-to-clergy-glut.aspx (accessed February 16, 2012).

their churches more like companies and their congregations more like customers. In an effort to cast a wide net for souls, churches have sacrificed their ability to transform Americans' self-serving impulses for the better. In his epilogue, MacDonald summarizes his convictions regarding the church in the United States:

Over the next fifty years, church life in America will likely change more dramatically than ever before in the nation's history—and in unpredictable ways. The forces of religious consumerism that have been unleashed in recent years are now free to take the Church in directions unimaginable just a generation ago. Everything is in flux: even the common understanding of a church as a community bound by shared Christian beliefs and practices cannot be presumed to apply in the years ahead. In the new religious marketplace, shared preferences for whatever a 'church' is offering will be all that holds some religious communities together ... What happens to the institution [the church] in the next fifty years will determine how American characters are shaped (or not shaped) for centuries.¹³⁵

MacDonald documents that religious mobility has become a way of life. In 1955, only 4 percent of Americans had switched religious affiliations in their lifetime. By 1985, it was one in three. By 2008, the number had reached an astonishing 44 percent.¹³⁶ Denominational loyalty is dying with the generation that is 55 years of age and older. We are living in an age of "church-hoppers" and of finicky church consumerism as it relates to church attendance and membership.

¹³⁵ G. Jeffrey MacDonald, *Thieves in the Temple: The Christian Church and the Selling of the American Soul* (New York: Basic Books, 2010), 181.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, xi.

Social Factors and the Decline in Attendance

Although the message of the Gospel never changes, our methods must or church ministry will become antiquated. Social changes mean that the church and its pastors must be energized with a new vision to minister to an ever-changing community.

The Rise of the “Nones”

“Nones” are people who do not want anything to do with the church or religion. The disenfranchised groups meet for a Sunday gathering they call “Not Church.” “The fastest growing religious group in the U.S. is the category of people who say they have no religious affiliation. Sometimes called “the nones” by social scientists, their numbers have more than doubled since 1990; major surveys put them at 16 percent of the population.”¹³⁷ Imagine, over 50,000,000 Americans in this category alone!

Relationships

In and because of our increasingly digital world, relationships are diminishing. Insights from the Pew Research Center indicate that the number of meaningful relationships—and the diversity of those relationships—have been in decline for the last two decades.¹³⁸

¹³⁷ Amy Sullivan, “The Rise of the Nones,” *Time* (Mar 12, 2012), 68.

¹³⁸ www.pewresearch.org.

Internet

The digitization of our lives is exploding: Last year, music downloads surpassed CD sales for the first time; e-books went from a novelty to a billion-dollar market, and streaming is becoming the preferred way to watch movies and television shows. The University of Southern California's Center for the Digital Future found that more than one-quarter of adults now spend less time than ever with family members, largely replacing those interactions with time devoted to the Internet and television. The same study shows regret by parents about the amount of time children spend engaged with television, the Internet, and other technologies.¹³⁹ In 1950, a mere four million Americans lived alone, and they made up only nine percent of U.S. households.

According to the 2011 census data, people who live alone—nearly 33 million Americans—make up 28 percent of all U.S. households, which means they are now tied with childless couples as the most prominent residential type, more common than the nuclear family, the multigenerational family and the roommate or group home.¹⁴⁰

Sex

Sexual intimacy is common in America beginning in the teenage years. The average age of a person's first experience of sexual intercourse is 15, 16, or 17. For more than four out of five people, their first sexual encounter occurred prior to marriage. In fact, just 24

¹³⁹ USC Annenberg School Center for the Digital Future, "2009 Digital Future Report," posted April 28, 2009; [/www.digitalcenter.org/pdf/2009_Digital_Future_Project_Release_Highlights.pdf](http://www.digitalcenter.org/pdf/2009_Digital_Future_Project_Release_Highlights.pdf) (accessed January 30, 2012).

¹⁴⁰ Eric Klinenberg, "Living Alone is the New Norm," *Time* (Mar 12, 2012), 60.

percent of all men and women aged 15 to 44, who have never been married, are still virgins.¹⁴¹

Marriage

Only 56 percent of adults in the U.S. are currently married. In 1970, 71 percent of the adult population was married, and that statistic remained the same for the following 20 years.¹⁴² Rana Foroohar, *Time* magazine's assistant managing editor in charge of economics and business, reported on the state of marriage:

A recent Pew study found that the national marriage rate has hit an all-time low. Meanwhile, the percentage of children born out of wedlock has been rising: it's now 41 percent overall and 53 percent for those born to women under 30 ... According to Princeton professor Sara McLanahan, it's not unusual for a single or cohabiting parent to have three partners over the course of five years and multiple children with different partners ... (In France the average length of cohabitation is 9.5 years; in the U.S. it's 1.17.) They also tend to lead to marriage more frequently: In Sweden, 82 percent of cohabiting couples end up sealing the deal. In the U.S., fewer than half do.¹⁴³

Adultery

Approximately one out of five married men admits to having cheated on his wife, usually engaging in affairs with at least two other women. About half as many married women

¹⁴¹ U.S. Census Bureau, *Statistical Abstract of the United States: 2010*, tables 94, 95, www.census.gov/compendia/statab/2010/tables/Iosoo94.pdf,

www.census.gov/compendia/statab/2010/tables/Iosoo95.pdf (both accessed February 4, 2012).

¹⁴² Benedict Carey and Tara Parker Pope, "Marriage Stands Up for Itself," *New York Times* (June 26, 2009), www.nytimes.com/2009/06/28/fashion/28marriage.html. U.S. Census Bureau, *Current Population Reports*, "Household and Family Characteristics: March 1991," Pso-458: U.S. Census Bureau, *Statistical Abstract of the United States: 2010*, table 56, www.census.gov/compendia/statab/2010/tables/Iosoo56.pdf (accessed Feb 4, 2012).

¹⁴³ Rana Foroohar, "For Richer or Poorer," *Time* (Mar 12, 2012), 23.

have cheated on their husbands. Nevertheless, more than two-thirds of those marriages weather the storm.¹⁴⁴

Promiscuity

Among the 76 percent of never-married, non-cohabiting adults who had had sex, men average four sexual partners; women average three.¹⁴⁵

Homosexuality

Most evangelicals are sidestepping this issue with silence, however, societal changes will eventually force pastors and churches to state their position and inherit the consequences. I fully believe that the next presidential election, for the first time in history, will feature a candidate who will endorse gay rights and promise full equality, if elected, and in the process win an army of zealots to insure he is elected. The nation's attitudes toward gay marriages have slowly changed over time (with the younger generation's support notably disproportionate to that of the older generation). In 2003, 54 percent of survey respondents considered homosexual men living together with a child to be a family; by 2010 it had increased to 68 percent.¹⁴⁶ Proposition 8, a voter-approved ban on same-sex

¹⁴⁴ Leslie Bennets, "The Truth about American Marriage," *Parade* (Sept 21, 2008), Carey and Pope, "Marriage Stands Up."

¹⁴⁵ U.S. Census Bureau, *Statistical Abstract of the United States: 2010*, table 94, census.gov/compendia/statab/2010/tables/Iosoo94.pdf (accessed February 1, 2012).

¹⁴⁶ Brian Powell, Catherine Bolzendahl, Claudia Geist, and Lala Carr Steelman, *Counted Out: Same-Sex Relations and American's Definitions of Family* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2010), 45. See Pat Wingert, Pat and Barbara Kantrowitz, "What Makes a Family?" *Newsweek* (Sept 30, 2010),

marriage that passed in 2008 in California, was thrown out by a federal appeals court panel on February 7, 2012. The three-judge panel issued its ruling in San Francisco and upheld a 2010 decision by Judge Vaughn R. Walker, who had been chief judge of the Federal District Court of the Northern District of California. The panel found that Proposition 8—passed by a vote of 52 percent to 48 percent—violated the equal protection rights of the two same-sex couples who brought the suit. Theodore Olson, former United States Solicitor General under President George W. Bush, was recruited by the American Foundation for Equal Rights to litigate the case, *Perry v. Schwarzenegger*, the plaintiffs in the suit being two couples who wish to be married but were denied marriage licenses because of Proposition 8.

Here again is another matter of complexity faced by today's evangelical church as the battle lines are drawn—for gay rights, marriage, adoption, no doubt followed by polyamory marriage partners wanting full rights, and polygamists who will seek freedom from laws of prohibition. Societal approval of gay rights will redefine the word “family” in the United States. Proposition 8 is a stark reminder that, once a constitutional amendment is passed, all it takes is a rogue court or a litigious couple, and time, to reverse it. The church cannot legislate morality; we must seek a change of heart within people, a change that comes from the transforming work of the Holy Spirit.

Divorce

The United States continues to lead the world in the number of broken marriages. After the initial five years of marriage, nearly one in four Americans (23 percent) has split through separation or divorce. That is double the rate in Canada, Finland, Austria, Germany, and Sweden; triple the rate in England and France; and about five times the rate in Italy, Belgium, and Spain. Other nations require a delay period in granting divorce, during which many couples are reconciled. Regretfully, in the United States, 33 states have no waiting period at all; despite that fact, in about four out of five cases one of the spouses does not want to get divorced.¹⁴⁷ And another burgeoning reality—divorce is growing in rural America. Since 1990, class has become an increasingly reliable predictor of family patterns, according to June Carbone, a law professor at the University of Missouri-Kansas City and co-author of *Red Families v. Blue Families*. College-educated Americans are now more likely to get married and stay married than those with only a high school diploma, representing a change from 20 years ago.

Just one in six rural residents have college degrees, far fewer than in cities, where one in three do. Nationally, there were about 121 million married adults and 26 million divorced people in 2009, compared with about 100 million married and 11 million divorced people in 1980.¹⁴⁸

Christians (a loosely applied term), like adherents to other religions, have a divorce rate of about 42 percent. The rate among religiously unaffiliated Americans is 50 percent. A University of Connecticut sociologist, Bradley Wright, examined the statistics

¹⁴⁷ Michael McManus, “A New Agenda for Conservatives,” *Virtue Online* (Nov 4, 2009), www.virtueonline.org/portal/modules/news/article.php?storyid=11510; U.S. Census Bureau, *Statistical Abstract of the United States*.

¹⁴⁸ Sabrina Tavernise, and Robert Gebeloff, “Once Rare in Rural America, Divorce is Changing the Face of Its Families,” *New York Times*, www.nytimes.com/2011/03/24/us/24divorce.html?_r=1&pagewanted=print posted March 23, 2011 (accessed 2012, January 18).

on divorce among evangelicals and found that worship attendance has a big influence on the numbers. Six in 10 evangelicals who never attend church had been divorced or separated, compared to just 38 percent of weekly attendees.

Attitudes

Americans no longer frown on a person who has been divorced. In fact, 69 percent now contend that divorce is morally acceptable, an increase in 25 years of more than 20 percentage points. Ironically, Americans suggest they believe in both the importance of marriage and the acceptability of divorce. Brad Wilcox, director of the National Marriage Project at the University of Virginia Analysis of the National Survey of Families and Households has found that Americans who attend religious services several times a month were about 35 percent less likely to divorce than those with no religious affiliation.¹⁴⁹

Cohabitation

In 1960, fewer than a half-million couples were living together while unmarried; today that number exceeds 6.4 million. In any year, America has three-to-four times more couples living together than getting married during the year (between 6 million and 8 million cohabiting couples versus 2.2 million newlyweds).

¹⁴⁹ Adelle M. Banks, "Christians question divorce rates of faithful," *USA Today* (Mar 14, 2011), www.usatoday.com/cleanprint/?unique=1326925884505 (accessed January 18, 2012).

Single Parents

We now have more than 15 million single-parent families in the nation. Department of Justice data indicate that more than 60 percent of the people in American prisons grew up in a home without their father, and nearly 70 percent of the juveniles in state-operated institutions were found to be from homes where the father was absent.¹⁵⁰

Profanity

Experts estimate children use 80–90 swear words per day. A recent survey found that 70 percent of teachers said disrespect in the classroom was a serious problem. A recent study across nine universities, including several Christian schools, noted that 83 percent of professors had experienced disrespectful behavior that disrupted their classes.¹⁵¹

Media

The secular media's influence in the lives of Americans cannot be underestimated. Reasonable estimates show that, on average, we ingest about 3,500 hours of media content per year from various sources, which averages out to 67 hours per week. And many people use more than one medium at a time, listening to music while surfing the Internet, or sending text messages while watching TV or a DVD. Research finds that our

¹⁵⁰ Benjamin Scafidi, "The Taxpayer Cost of Divorce and Unwed Childbearing," *Institute for American Values* (Apr 15, 2008), Charles Colson, "Healthy Marriages, Healthy Society," *Breakpoint commentary* (Jan 14, 2010).

¹⁵¹ Chantal M. Lovell, "3 UR Professors Study Increase in Disrespect in Classrooms," *Redlands Daily Facts* (May 24, 2010), www.redlandsdailyfacts.com/ci_15151889?source=rss_emailed; "Swearing Habit," *Connect with Kids newsletter* (Apr 21, 2010), www.connectwithkids.com/tipsheet/2010/486_apr21/thisweek/100421_swearing.shtml; K.J. Mullins, "Bullies, Drugs, and Disrespect Top Concerns for Schools," *Digital Journal* (Apr 29, 2010), www.digitaljournal.com/article/291366 (accessed February 2, 2012).

favorite sources of media content are television (we watch about 1,600 hours annually, which equates to almost 31 hours per week) and the Internet.¹⁵²

Internet

The Internet is poised to become the most significant medium in our lives, surpassing even television. The Internet is now regarded as the “most essential” medium in our society, selected by 42 percent of adults, compared to 37 percent who listed television, 14 percent who named radio, and only five percent who chose newspapers.¹⁵³

The church is woefully behind and not even remotely keeping pace in the utilization of the Internet, video-streaming, Facebook, Twitter, and other social media. Compare the hours of an American submerged in media with the hours worshiping monthly in a church. No wonder we are losing ground—part of the evidence for this is believers with the lowest level of biblical knowledge in history. The National Congregations Study (2006–07) reported that fewer than half of all church congregations (44 percent) have a website, but 74 percent of attendees are in those congregations. In 1998, those numbers were only 17 percent and 29 percent respectively. In 2006–07, 59 percent of congregations use email to communicate with regular participants, but 79 percent of attendees are in those congregations. In 1998, those numbers were only 21 percent and 31 percent, respectively. “These figures imply that in each year since 1998, some 10,000 congregations created a website. Nothing else increased so dramatically. Synagogues and more liberal Protestant congregations lead the way in using email and

¹⁵² U.S. Census Bureau, *Statistical Abstract of the United States*.

¹⁵³ Arbitron Inc., “Use of Social Media Explodes,” (Apr 8, 2010), arbitron.mediaroom.com/index.php?s=43&item=682 (accessed Feb 3, 2012).

starting websites, while African-American Protestant congregations lag behind. There is a digital divide even within the religious world.”¹⁵⁴

Virtual World

The number of wireless Internet users in the United States has grown exponentially in the past decade, jumping from about 12 million users in 2003 to over 100 million in 2010. That represents one-third of adults and an even higher percentage of young people utilizing wireless services for computing.¹⁵⁵

Social Networking

Nielsen’s research finds that about half of the adult population visited a social-networking site in the past year. Social networks and blogs are the fourth most popular online activity and are responsible for 10 percent of all time logged on the Internet. Another study, by Arbitron/Edison Research, revealed that 48 percent of all Americans 12 or older have a profile on one or more social networks; double the percentage that had one two years earlier. As of February 2012, Facebook has more than 845 million active users.¹⁵⁶ On average in December 2011, Facebook saw 483 million daily active users. The company has said before that more than 50 percent of the website’s active users log on to Facebook on any given day. Either way, Facebook is now 84.5 percent of the way

¹⁵⁴ Mark Chaves, Shawna Anderson, and Byassee, “The National Congregations Study,” Duke University, 2006-2007; www.soc.duke.edu/natcong/, 7 (accessed January 24, 2012).

¹⁵⁵ eTForecasts, “Internet User Forecasts by Country,” www.etforecasts.com/products/ES_intusersv2.htm (accessed February 1, 2012).

¹⁵⁶ www.zdnet.com/blog/facebook/facebook-has-over-845-million-users/8332 (accessed February 1, 2012).

to its milestone of 1,000,000 subscribers. Last month, it was predicted that the company will pass the milestone in August 2012. Facebook accounts for one in every seven minutes spent online around the world and three in every four social networking minutes.

Christianity

The Barna Research Group reports that half of all adult respondents (50 percent) agree that Christianity is no longer the default faith of most Americans. “In the same vein, people are more likely than not to acknowledge that Americans are becoming more hostile and negative toward Christianity (47 percent say we are; 45 percent say we are not).”¹⁵⁷ Adding to the concern, the Barna report says this:

... our studies show that 40 percent of adults say they are evangelical. However, more than one-quarter of those individuals (28 percent) do not believe that their eternal salvation is based upon full reliance on the forgiveness of sins by Jesus Christ.¹⁵⁸

The bestselling book in the United States is the Holy *Bible*, with 20–25 million copies sold annually. At the same time, it is the least read. Americans are more biblically illiterate now than at any other time in our nation’s history.

Time magazine observed in a 2007 cover story that only half of U.S. adults could name one of the four Gospels. Fewer than half could identify Genesis as the Bible's first book. Jay Leno and Stephen Colbert have made sport of Americans' inability to name the Ten Commandments—even among members of Congress who have pushed to have them posted publicly.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁷ George Barna, *Futurecast* (Austin, TX: Tyndale, 2011), 125.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 128.

¹⁵⁹ Collin Hansen, “Why Johnny can’t read the Bible,” www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2010/may/25.38.html posted May 24, 2010 (accessed January 22, 2012).

The Barna Group examined trends in fourteen religious factors over 20 years (1991–2011) and reported the following:

- Bible reading undertaken during the course of a typical week, other than passages read while attending church events, has declined by five percentage points.
- Church volunteerism has dropped by eight percentage points since 1991. Presently, slightly less than one out of every five adults (19 percent) donates some of their time in a typical week to serving at a church.
- Adult Sunday school attendance has also diminished by eight percentage points over the past two decades. On any given Sunday, about 15 percent of adults can be expected to show up in a Sunday school class.
- The most carefully watched church-related statistic is adult attendance. Since 1991, attendance has receded by nine percentage points, dropping from 49 percent to 40 percent in 2011. [Note: These statistics, like Gallup's, have been proven false. Barna's polling does not use the empirical method of the prominent study cited in this thesis, a study that puts adult church attendance in the United States at 20.4 percent.]
- The most significant change in religious behavior among those measured has been the increase in the percentage of adults categorized as unchurched. In 1991, just one-quarter of adults (24 percent) were unchurched. That figure has ballooned by more than 50 percent, to 37 percent today.¹⁶⁰

The Barna Group's surveys (generally conducted with small samplings) are not without error. Barna surveys made the claim that women were rapidly falling away from religion. The basis for this was a comparison between polls they conducted in 1991 and the one cited above. But Rodney Stark and Byron Johnson, co-directors of the Institute for Studies of Religion at Baylor University, begged to disagree:

Many national surveys have been conducted during this period (1991 to 2011)—in fact the Barna Group had been doing them all along. Did the organization check to see if its new results were consistent with its own

¹⁶⁰ Barna Group, "State of the Church, Part 1: General Trends," www.barna.org/504-barna-examines-trends-in-14-religious-factors-over-20-years-1991-to-2011, posted July 26, 2011 (accessed January 23, 2012).

previous data or with the many other national surveys widely available? There is no sign that it did. If it had, it would have found that its findings about women are as unfounded as previous claims about young people deserting the church and young evangelicals becoming liberals ... As for the supposed decline in female church attendance, the best data come from the University of Chicago's National Opinion Research Center, which has conducted annual surveys since 1972. Across 38 years, there have been only small variations in church attendance, and Barna's reported 11 percentage-point decline in women's church attendance (to 44 percent from 55 percent) simply did not happen.¹⁶¹

Pew research data present some disturbing trends regarding religiosity and biblical literacy in the United States of America:

More than one-quarter of American adults (28 percent) have left the faith in which they were raised in favor of another religion – or no religion at all. The survey finds that the number of people who say they are unaffiliated with any particular faith today (16.1 percent) is more than double the number who say they were not affiliated with any particular religion as children. Among Americans ages 18–29, one in four say they are not currently affiliated with any particular religion. The Landscape Survey confirms that the United States is on the verge of becoming a minority Protestant country; the number of Americans who report that they are members of Protestant denominations is characterized by significant internal diversity and fragmentations, encompassing hundreds of different denominations loosely grouped around three fairly distinct religious traditions – evangelical Protestant churches (26.3 percent of the overall population), mainline Protestant churches (18.1 percent), and historically black Protestant churches (6.9 percent)¹⁶²

What is interesting about this study is that change *within* religious traditions is included (i.e., from one Protestant denominational family to another). The survey found that roughly 44 percent of Americans (almost one out of every two people) now profess a

¹⁶¹ Rodney Stark, and Byron Johnson, "Religion and the Bad News Bearers," *The Wall Street Journal*, posted August 26, 2011; wsj.com/article/SB10001424053111903480904576510692691734916.html#printMode (accessed January 23, 2012).

¹⁶² Pew Forum's U.S. Religious Landscape Survey. (2007, May 8 to August 13). A representative sample of more than 35,000 adults in the U.S. Report 1: Religious Affiliation, May 8 to August 13, 2007; religions.pewforum.org/reports (accessed January 25, 2012).

religious affiliation different from that in which they were raised. It is certainly indicative of the fact that Protestant Americans change churches during their faith life. Those who are changing denominational families in Protestantism, according to the study, are much more likely to cite beliefs as the main reason for leaving. Instead, those changing churches tend to cite their likes and dislikes about religious institutions, practices and people (32 percent) as the main reason for leaving. Life cycle changes also figure prominently for this group. People will often leave a church because of their students who “don’t have any friends from school” at the church, or because the youth ministry is dead or nonexistent. And, as I have experienced as a senior pastor, parents will often, against their own desires, become members of an evangelical church because of its impact on their children. Other church members leave over music style or dress on the platform—issues that in the light of eternity mean very little. Today’s church member is finicky. Carnal church members dangle their tithe over their pastor’s head. I know of one medical doctor who amalgamated a group of members in his church around him, added up their collective tithe, and withheld it until the pastor simply had to give in and agreed to tender a forced, concealed, reluctant resignation. The same hypocritical crowd had the audacity to show up at his going-away reception with cards and hugs. The sun of denominational loyalty is certainly setting in the United States. Churchgoers leave churches because their friends left and went to another church. Personal experience has taught me that many times the leaving of a church does not make any theological sense whatsoever; it is simply about social relationships, their children, and how much commitment and accountability their present church is asking. And we can certainly understand why Koreans and other foreign nations are now sending missionaries to the

United States. The world's greatest mission-sending nation is now in dire need of missionaries to evangelize its own countrymen and women with the Gospel of Christ.

Pastoring in the Current Social Climate

Pastors are charged to teach the mysteries of God in a factual, relevant, and compelling manner that keeps people coming back for more. If a pastor is not a wise steward of his time in the effective preparation of sermons, people will lose interest. John MacArthur reminds us that

We live in a day when most are ignoring Paul's exhortation to Timothy to 'preach the word' of God. Instead of the Word of God, all too often from the pulpit come the uncertain sounds of political rhetoric, social commentary, and pop psychology. Such 'persuasive words of [human] wisdom' (1 Corinthians 2:4) are a prostitution of the preacher's true calling.¹⁶³

The pastor who ignores the careful discipline of study, preparation, and exposition of God's word cannot hide it when he stands before his people to deliver sermons. A lack of engagement in the word of God will leave God's people spiritually hungry and ultimately destined to walk out of the church doors looking for something to remedy their malnourishment. A pastor must remember that "how you get them is how you keep them." There are many fads and trends which come and go in the church. G. Jeffrey MacDonald, a minister in the United Church of Christ, the author of *Thieves in the Temple: The Christian Church and the Selling of the American Soul*, writes—somewhat surprisingly—in *The New York Times*:

¹⁶³ John MacArthur, *Pastoral Ministry: How to Shepherd Biblically* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2005), 18.

... churchgoers increasingly want pastors to soothe and entertain them. It's apparent in the theatre-style seating and giant projection screens in churches and in mission trips that involve more sightseeing than listening to the local people. As a result pastors are constantly forced to choose, as they work through congregants' daily wish lists in their email and voice mail, between paths of personal integrity and those that portend greater job security. As religion becomes a consumer experience, the clergy become more unhappy and unhealthy.¹⁶⁴

The pastor who bases his ministry on the careful exegesis of God's word with clever application to the everyday needs and concerns of people will produce a ministry without expiration. This is what gripped the Presbyterian pastor, Francis Schaeffer, who, early in his ministry, questioned whether Christianity, if it has so little effect, could be true? His personal spiritual crisis resulted in the creation of *L'Abri*, a word meaning "shelter," in his home in Switzerland. He opened it to anyone who was struggling with the basic questions of life. Over the years, student backpackers, troubled atheists, and thoughtful Christians found their way to this chalet in the Alps. Schaeffer wrote, "Christianity is the greatest intellectual system the mind of man has ever touched," and "I believe that pluralistic secularism, in the long run, is a more deadly poison than straightforward persecution."¹⁶⁵ *L'Abri* has expanded all over the world, and now has branches in Australia, Germany, the Netherlands, Sweden, England, Korea, Canada, and two in the United States. People hungry for spiritual and biblical truth are leaving mainline denominations with their shallow theology.

In 2006–07, 91 percent of American congregations and 69 percent of attendees are Protestant. For Catholics, those numbers are 6 percent and 28 percent; for Jews, 1 percent and 2 percent; and for something other than Christian or Jewish, 2 percent and 2 percent. This basic distribution has

¹⁶⁴ G. Jeffrey MacDonald, "Congregations Gone Wild," *New York Times*, posted August 7, 2011; www.nytimes.com/2010/08/08/opinion/08macdonald.html?pagewanted=print (accessed December 14, 2010).

¹⁶⁵ www.brainyquote.com/quotes/authors/f/francis_schaeffer.html. (accessed February 16, 2012).

not changed much since 1998, though a percentage of independent congregations are increasing. In 2006–07, more congregations were unaffiliated than were affiliated with any specific denomination. The largest denomination in terms of people is Catholicism, but the largest denomination in terms of congregations is the Southern Baptist Convention, with 11 percent of all congregations. Twenty percent of all congregations are affiliated with no denomination.¹⁶⁶

The Barna research group revealed its findings in a study entitled *What People*

Experience in Churches:

The survey also probed the degree to which people say their lives had been changed by attending church ... nearly half said their life had not changed at all as a result of churchgoing (46 percent). One of the most significant gaps uncovered by the research was the fact that most people cannot recall gaining any new spiritual insights the last time they attended church. Asked to think about their last church visit, three out of five church attendees (61 percent) said they could not remember a significant or important new insight or understanding related to their faith. Even among those who attended church in the last week, half admitted they could not recall a significant insight they gained.¹⁶⁷

Closing Churches

This is why we see the troubling trend of more churches closing than opening in the

United States:

- Every year, more than 4,000 churches close their doors compared to just over 1,000 new churches opening.
- There were about 4,500 new churches started between 1990 and 2000, with a 20-year average of nearly 1,000 per year.
- Every year, 2.7 million church members fall into inactivity.

¹⁶⁶ Mark Chaves, Shawna Anderson, Shawna, and Jason Byassee. “The National Congregations Study,” 2006-07 (Jan 23, 2012), www.duke.edu/natcong/ (accessed February 10, 2012).

¹⁶⁷ The Barna Group. This report is based upon telephone interviews conducted in the Omni Poll. This study consisted of a random sample of 1,022 adults selected from across the continental United States, ages 18 and older. The maximum margin of sampling error associated with the aggregate sample is ± 3.2 percentage points at the 95% confidence level. “What People Experience in Churches,” (Jan 9, 2012), www.barna.org/congregations-articles/556-what-people-experience-in-churches?tmpl=component&printed.html (accessed January 22, 2012).

- From 1990–2000, the combined membership of all Protestant denominations in the USA declined by almost five million members (9.5 percent), while the U.S. population increased by 24 million (11 percent).
- At the turn of the last century (1990), the ratio was 27 churches per 10,000 people, as compared to the close of the last century (2000), where there are now 11 churches per 10,000 people in America.
- The United States now ranks third, following China and India in the number of people who are not professing Christians.
- Half of all churches in the U.S. did not add any new members to their memberships in the last two years.
- Serious speculation suggests that only 15 percent of Americans might be attending church by 2025.¹⁶⁸

The mainline denominations, many of which have shifted on social issues from biblical authority and truth, are in a free-fall as it relates to attendance. In fact, the years following 2001 have shown a deep recession in worship attendance: The Presbyterian Church USA: down 2.76 percent; the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America: down 15.41 percent; the United Methodist Church: down 10.22 percent; and the Episcopal Church: down 17.86 percent. It is interesting to note that all four of these denominations have sanctioned the homosexual issue, with the ELCA now ordaining homosexuals to serve as pastors.

A Duke University study, *American Congregations at the Beginning of the 21st Century*, reports:

In a 2007 survey conducted by the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, 70 percent of Americans who are religiously affiliated agreed that many religions can lead to eternal life, and 68 percent agreed that there is more than one true way to interpret the teachings of their religion. Almost half—47 percent—said that their church or denomination should adjust its traditional beliefs and practices in light of new circumstances or adopt

¹⁶⁸ R. J. Krejcir, “Statistics and Reasons for Church Decline,” *Francis A. Schaeffer Institute of Church Leadership Development* (2007), www.intothyword.org/apps/articles/default.asp?articleid=36557&columnid=3958 (accessed January 30, 2012).

modern beliefs and practices. According to the General Social Survey, only 12 percent of Americans say that there is truth in only one religion. Indeed, only 29 percent of Protestant evangelicals say this. Only 34 percent of Americans say that they believe the Bible is the word of God—and that number has been declining, slowly, but steadily, for decades.¹⁶⁹

A survey of mostly mainline Protestant clergy by a prominent American sociologist, Jeffrey Haddon, showed that many doubt Jesus' physical resurrection: Among American Lutherans: 13 percent; among Presbyterians: 30 percent; among American Baptists: 33 percent; among Episcopalians: 35 percent; and among United Methodists: 51 percent.¹⁷⁰ The nebulous theology of these mainline clergy will not energize, or evangelize, people. The General Social Survey 2008, conducted by the National Opinion Center, revealed that worshipers attend less frequently and the members of religious constituencies are aging. The age group in which self-identified adherents of "no religion" are most likely to be found is 25–34, and the attendance category that has grown the most since 1990 is "never."¹⁷¹ In the United States, church attendance remains relatively stronger among older Americans and more common among women than men.¹⁷² Again, roughly 21 percent of Americans and 10 percent of Canadians actually go to church, and those numbers are decreasing.¹⁷³ Those who do attend are older. In 2006–07, 30 percent of regular attendees in the average congregation were older than 60, compared with 25 percent in 1998. The percentage of regular adult

¹⁶⁹ Chaves et al, "The National Congregations Study."

¹⁷⁰ Jeffrey Hadden, Results of a survey of 7,441 Protestant ministers published in *PrayerNet Newsletter*, 1998-Nov. 13, 1. Cited in *Current Thoughts & Trends*, 1999-MAR, 19.

¹⁷¹ Lovett H. Weems Jr., "No shows," *The Christian Century* (Sept 22, 2010), www.christiancentury.org/article/2010-09/no-shows (accessed Feb 14, 2012).

¹⁷² "Gender Profile of Church Attenders," www.ncls.org.au/default.aspx?sitemapid=137 (accessed Feb 14, 2012).

¹⁷³ www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Church_attendance (accessed Feb 14, 2012).

participants younger than 35 in the average congregation dropped from 25 percent to 20 percent.

Older people long have been over-represented in American congregations because religious participation increases with age ... the over-representation of older people seems to be increasing. This probably stems from people living longer and young adults participating less than they once did ... The senior clergy person in the average congregation was 48 years old in 1998 and 53 years old in 2006–07. Meanwhile, the average age of the over-25 American public increased only one year, from 48 to 49.¹⁷⁴

Growing Churches

Julia Duin, former religion editor for the *Washington Times*, has written a book entitled *Quitting Church: Why the Faithful Are Fleeing and What to Do About It*. Ms. Duin is a good-hearted, charismatic Christian and, in my opinion, sees everything through that lens. Consequently, she perceives the moribund reality in churches as the lack of signs, wonders, tongues, and healings characteristic of that expression of worship. I sense an exaggeration in some of her conclusions; however, Duin provides food for thought regarding singles and women being ignored in local church ministry. Her book does identify two valid, thought-provoking reasons why people are leaving the local church. In regard to this, Duin points to award-winning sociologist and educator, D. Michael Lindsay, the eighth president of Gordon Conwell College, and among the youngest presidents in the country's nationally ranked colleges and universities, author of the Pulitzer nominated book, *Faith in the Halls of Power*. Lindsay earned his Ph.D. in sociology from Princeton University, where he was named a National Science

¹⁷⁴ Chaves et al, "The National Congregations Study."

Foundation Graduate Fellow in 2002. His book is a compendium of 360 in-depth interviews with evangelicals who wield power in the White House and Wall Street, at Harvard, and in Hollywood. The book explains how these Christians have lost interest in the church because they consider it a waste of their time.

These influential people had written off committee meetings that focus on minutiae, incompetent leadership, and inefficient projects. They thought in business terms—long term planning, strategies, vision, bottom-line performance and progress—concepts that don't exist in church systems run by volunteers and headed by an overworked pastor.¹⁷⁵

Lindsay adds:

Further, the leadership acumen of the senior pastor is extremely important to public leaders; most said they cannot worship at a church where they do not respect the senior minister as a leader, and they are most likely to find the kind of pastor they're looking for at a mega-church.¹⁷⁶

So the pastor's leadership ability is crucial to the tone, vision, and growth of the church. Pastors with small vision draw small-vision-minded people. Pastors with big vision draw big-vision-minded people. The second valid point of Duin's book is her emphasis on the importance of the emergence of social media. She reminds us of a stark reality, particularly true among the younger demographic diminishing in their church attendance, through a quotation of a *Los Angeles Times*' poll which found that just 17 percent of young adults view the local church as essential for developing faith. The explosion in digitized spirituality might make the local church obsolete. "Different forms of technology are allowing Christians to decentralize where they get their spiritual needs met. Instead of meeting in a building for three hours on Sunday morning, they can find

¹⁷⁵ Julia Duin, *Quitting Church: Why the Faithful Are Fleeing and What to Do About It* (Grand Rapids MI: Baker, 2008), 31.

¹⁷⁶ Michael D. Lindsay, *Faith in the Halls of Power: How Evangelicals Joined the American Elite* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 222.

everything from chat groups to teachings on the Internet.”¹⁷⁷ I find these two points culled from her book absolutely scintillating. Strong, competent, visionary leadership and confronting the emergence of technology—they almost seem like twins in a way, and they are requirements of a church that is going to combat congregational attrition.

Church Hopping

In addition, perhaps more significantly than ever before, church-hopping and the lack of long-term church member adherence is a growing phenomenon among people in our nation, who now bring their fickle tastes and consumerism to their houses of worship. Dr. Cho, pastor of the largest church in the world, Yoido Full Gospel Church, based in Seoul, told us at a church growth conference in Korea, “If they will transfer to you (believers/church membership), they will transfer from you.” This is certainly the case as church attendees, primarily “baby boomers” and younger, show no long-term allegiance to any church. Emotional and spiritual bonds are created between a pastor and an individual or family to whom he ministers. One pastor who quit the ministry, unable to cope with the grief from church members who so casually left his fellowship, said to me, “I just could not handle the rejection of families who I had so sincerely invested in spiritually and that had become disenchanted with our church and flippantly left to attend another one.” This burdened pastor speaks for thousands of ministers who scratch their heads and wonder if they are inadequate for pastoral ministry because members so easily bailed out on them and their church.

¹⁷⁷ Duin, *Quitting Church*, 54.

There are many reasons why people leave a church. Some of the reasons are explicable and, although a pastor may not understand or agree, they make sense. However, what is so damaging to a pastor's mind and emotions is what seems to be the *inexplicable* reasons church members exit. I have found, first-hand, that some members, particularly affluent members, jockey for power, and desire close proximity and personal friendship with the pastor, or a seat on the board or a strategic committee. When I detected these church members had an agenda I purposely delayed encouraging them in any of the ways, overtly or covertly, in which they were courting me to gain position and influence in the church. As our stalemate continued, with shallow conversations over a period of weeks, eventually these laypeople took the cue, gave up, and left our church, generally with some admonition or rebuke, most often expressed through an email setting out their opinion as to what was "wrong with the church" and many times stating that the anonymous "everybody" "feels this way." It happens in every church to every pastor. Pastors either develop a tough skin, or take it on the chin, or they eventually throw in the towel on church ministry. Whereas in earlier decades a church member might have left a church, taking two or three families or people with him/her, now they leave and often start an anonymous blog, writing about the pastor and church, putting biased information on the web. One Christian leader told me, "If I read everything that was written about me on the blogs I would commit suicide!" Another pastor of a mega church, Perry Noble, from South Carolina, said he used to go to the pulpit and preach with anger because of the criticisms he had read about himself on the numerous blogs critical of his ministry.

A widely read author, G. Lloyd Rediger, in his timely book, *The Toxic Congregation: How to Heal the Soul of Your Church*, relates a story far too common in innumerable churches across the nation:

The first signs of the killing process began at a church board meeting. A member of the board, Tim Johnson, said, ‘A lot of people are complaining about Pastor Enright. They’re saying he doesn’t call enough; he can’t be reached when they want to talk to him; and he’s not friendly enough.’ Board members asked Johnson to identify ‘a lot of people,’ but he refused to be specific (Appendix A). Then they asked for specific examples. He refused to be specific. The board said they couldn’t take action unless they knew the specific complaints. Johnson replied that they had better take action because these were important members. In response to Johnson’s demand, the board set up an investigative team. At the next board meeting, the team reported that they could find no tangible evidence of any real problems. Johnson told them the complaints were real and might have something to do with sexual misconduct and misuse of church funds. The investigative team did some more work and again reported, at a later date, no tangible evidence of such misconduct. Johnson then called for a congregational meeting. This request was denied. Before the next board meeting, a letter filled with innuendoes against the pastor was mailed to the congregation. At the following meeting, the board and Pastor Enright were in a near panic. Johnson said he had talked to the bishop, and the bishop said these were serious charges that needed to be investigated. At a later date, a new investigative team reported that there seemed to be a lot of people unhappy with the pastor. The board voted to have a delegation meet with the pastor. The pastor was absent from the next meeting. After months of this harassment, he was in the hospital. The board voted to send a delegation to the bishop and at the following meeting the delegation reported that the bishop recommended removal of the pastor. By that time, the pastor was scheduled for heart bypass surgery. And it was rumored that his wife had become addicted to tranquilizers.¹⁷⁸

Church congregational migration and declining attendance can be blamed on the pastor, and, in some cases, he is responsible. Regardless of whatever potential issue arises, there must be a biblical protocol followed rigorously by the Elders, board, and church members regarding accusations against a pastor. A pastor has the responsibility to

¹⁷⁸ Lloyd G. Rediger, *The Toxic Congregation: How to Heal the Soul of Your Church*, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2007), 42-43.

graciously teach these biblical procedures to his church. The Elders, or board members, should model the principles of 1 Timothy 5 in holding laypeople accountable for any and all accusations against a pastor and insist on scriptural behavior by both the congregants and the pastor. With the exception of the spiritually mature, biblically knowledgeable few, Elders do not come on a board with the natural know-how to respond and, if need be, confront church members on pastoral character assassination. They have to be taught these principles. I recommend that there be an Elder, or board protocol document, that is clearly reviewed prior to the appointment of any Elder, regardless if he is appointed by the board or congregational votes. Godly Elders, committed to biblical standards of holding people accountable, including pastors, for their words and actions, can make the decided difference in a church. No church is more than 24 hours away from a major conflict breaking out. In less than a year, such a conflict can destroy years of hard work and growth, and people leave.

Nearly 50 years a minister, Ron Susek points out the six observable phases of a church firestorm. He reminds us that firestorms ignite from various sparks:

- Someone has an unthreatening complaint about the pastor or board.
- A group is in conflict over a procedural issue.
- Some feel the board is acting unfairly on a problem.
- A group is unhappy about a certain direction the church is taking.
- Someone feels slighted or insulted.
- A pastor may be abusing his position.

The unhappy people generally lack the clout, desire, or fortitude to set a firestorm into motion, so they use small power plays to express their grievance:

- They quit the choir.
- They stop giving.

- They complain to family and friends.
- They formally complain to the board.
- They leave the church.

If enough people suffer injustice (perceived or real), in time a firestorm will erupt.¹⁷⁹

God's people, board members, staff, and volunteer leadership need to be biblically instructed in the honor the New Testament Scripture places on the office of the pastor. God's word gives specific guidelines regarding listening to accusations about a pastor. The following is a study outline helpful for every congregation.

Biblical Procedures for the Office of the Pastor

God's word clearly instructs that a pastor is not to be the subject of gossip or any charge or accusation brought against him unless under the strictest of biblical guidelines, which the Apostle Paul set forth for the church in his letter to Timothy. Elders, deacons, and/or the church board, must be taught this protocol and must be united, unwaveringly demonstrating this behavior to every member and attendee in a local church who has any concern with the pastor.

Bible Text: 1 Timothy 5:17, 19

“Let the Elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in the word and doctrine.” The New American Standard translation of this passage

¹⁷⁹ Ron Susek, *Firestorm: Preventing and Overcoming Church Conflicts* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1999), 25-26.

reads: “Let the Elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching.”

Key Words

- “Elders” (*presbyteros*)—refers to the pastor. The term “pastor” emphasizes the shepherding/feeding function; “overseer” refers to the pastor’s authority/leading function; and “Elder” refers to the pastor’s spiritual maturity.
- “Let the Elders that rule well.”
 - “Rule” (*proistēmi*) —a position of leadership; to preside; “well” (*kalos*) —right; the word presents a high standard of biblical excellence. “Well” discriminates between mediocrity and excellence in preaching and spiritual leadership.
- “Let the Elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honor”
 - “double” (*diplous*) —twofold, twice as much;
 - “honor” (*timē*) —price, the amount at which something is valued, respect, regard.

The Elder (pastor) should gain double respect ... he should receive one honor for his position and another for service with distinction ... he should obtain respect, both implied and explicit, from the church, plus a living wage.¹⁸⁰

¹⁸⁰ Robert Gromacki, *An Exposition of 1 Timothy* (The Woodlands, TX: Kress Christian Publications, 2002), 144.

All Elders (pastors) are to be honored, and those who excel in teaching the Word of God and sound doctrine are to be doubly honored ... The world might not think so, but no nobler task exists on earth than to make known the word of God.¹⁸¹

1 Thessalonians 5:12-13

“And we urge you, brethren, to recognize those who labor among you, and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, and to esteem them very highly in love for their work’s sake. Be at peace among yourselves.”

Special consideration is due to those who work is preaching and teaching.¹⁸²

Since Elders (pastors) occupy a position of responsibility in the church, they become a special object of satanic attack.¹⁸³

- “Let the Elders who rule well be counted worthy of double honor, those who *labor in the word and doctrine.*”
 - “especially” (*malista*) —chiefly, particularly, most of all;
 - “labor” (*kopiō*) —work to the point of exhaustion, toil, strive, struggle, and work hard.
 - “word” (*logos*) —speech, the public proclamation of God’s truth.
 - “doctrine” (*didaskalia*) —teaching with an emphasis on instruction.

¹⁸¹ John Phillips, *Exploring the Pastoral Epistles* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2004), 161.

¹⁸² Donald Guthrie, *The Pastoral Epistles* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1995), 117.

¹⁸³ William MacDonald, and V. Paul Flint, V. Paul, *Timothy and Titus, An Emmaus Correspondence Course*, (self published, 1980), 6.

1 Timothy 5:19

“Do not *receive* an *accusation* against an Elder except from two or three witnesses.”

- “Do not receive an accusation against an Elder ...”
 - “receive” (*paradechomai*) —to entertain, listen, to consider in your mind;
 - “accusation” (*katēgoría*) —to accuse, the incrimination of a person.
- “except from two or three witnesses.”

Confirmation vs. Gossip

Hebrews 13:7: “Remember those who rule over you, who have spoken the word of God to you, whose faith follows, considering the outcome of their conduct. (17) Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you.”

Romans 16:17: “Now I urge you, brethren, **note** those who cause divisions and offenses, contrary to the doctrine, which you have learned, and **avoid** them.”

- “note” and “avoid” those people that cause divisions.

2 Timothy 2:23: “But avoid foolish and ignorant disputes, knowing that they generate disputes.”

2 Thessalonians 3:6: “But we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you withdraw from every brother who walks disorderly and not according to the tradition which he received from us.” (cf. 2 Corinthians 2:6-11)

Titus 3:10–11: “Reject a divisive man after the first and second admonition, knowing that such a person is warped and sinning, being self-condemned.

Conclusion

Rapid societal and moral changes pose new challenges to and create new dynamics in the evangelical church. Mature Christians will grow through evangelism. Culture is working against the ministry of the church, and it is crucial that the pastor and leadership team of the church become literate to the rise of the “nones,” to the centrality of people’s quest for relationships, and to changing mores of sex, marriage, adultery, promiscuity, homosexuality, cohabitation, demographics, media, morality, social networking, the Internet—and they must devise Spirit-led strategies to innovatively minister to all people with the Scriptures.

In chapter 5, we will examine why pastors’ health is deteriorating and causing them to be regarded as “high risk” by insurers and others. Further, we will outline the recommended steps to the maintenance of good mental, physical, and emotional health, even in the face of all the pressures of ministry.