

INTRODUCTION

As we all know, the spiritual vitality and longevity, as well as the moral and spiritual failure of pastors, has an exponential impact on people. In this thesis, I am going to share three important truths with readers. First, what is the central problem that I have carefully researched, studied, and addressed? My thesis answers the grossly underreported question and tragic phenomenon of why clergy are leaving the ministry. My research has probed deeply into studies conducted by the Alban Institute; notably, the Southern Baptist Convention (the largest Protestant denomination in the United States) participated in my research and provided me with unpublished data related to the dismissal of pastors and the reasons for it. The Assemblies of God also provided valuable data on pastoral attrition, as did as the Evangelical Free Church of America. In addition, I refer, in detail, to the significant studies conducted by the Fuller Seminary, Duke Divinity School, and the Hartford Seminary, as well as to the extensive research conducted by the Lilly Endowment Fund.

Pastoral moral failure is at catastrophic levels—of the more than 600,000 clergy in the United States, studies reveal that some 60,000–75,000 pastors act on sexual temptations with their own congregants: an astounding 165–205 pastors fail morally every day, i.e., six to nine pastors commit sexual indiscretions per hour. Every six to ten minutes a pastor falls morally in the United States. My thesis is a unique contribution to knowledge because it thoroughly examines the causes of and cures for pastoral moral attrition. Clergy sexual misconduct exceeds that of all other professionals, including

psychiatrists, psychologists, and physicians. Surveys reveal that some 100,000 pastors report fighting sexual attraction and temptation with respect to church congregants.

In this work, I have documented the rapid societal and cultural changes that have taken place in the United States, similar to those that have affected Europe, and which have resulted in a free-fall in weekly church attendance: This factor too significantly affects pastoral longevity. In addition, I have corrected the erroneous claim made by the Gallup organization that 40 percent of Americans (118 million out of a total population of 313 million) attend church weekly, by citing Hadaway and Marler's extensive study, which indicates that only 20.4 percent of the U.S. population attends church (i.e., some 56,603,588 people; of that group, only 22,233,944 are Evangelicals). Only in one in six Americans attends church, and estimates suggest that, by 2015, only 15 percent of Americans will attend church.

Strategically comparing the common denominators of data from six major studies, my thesis reveals the primary causes of pastoral attrition. Pastors who quit or fail morally are:

1. Pastors who were not spiritually, emotionally, or intellectually prepared.
2. Pastors who were isolated—they were not well connected.
3. Pastors who lacked self-care and self-discipline.
4. Pastors who were poorly compensated, sometimes to the point of significant financial hardship.

5. Pastors who lacked the expertise to manage and resolve conflict among their parishioners.
6. Pastors who had simply lost their way—their spiritual compasses had failed.

I illustrate these conclusions by providing six case studies of successful pastors who failed morally and, compassionately I believe, I attempt to reveal the causes, the reasons for their failures. I am not a theoretician when it comes to building a mega-church or experiencing the severe pressure of media harassment, or the rigors of preaching and teaching innumerable sermons and inculcating a biblical worldview in thousands of people. There are nearly 2,000 mega-churches in the United States. I have a deep passion for, and believe it my burden to educate mega-church pastors about the dangers of success and the heightened levels and intensity of attacks being made on high-impact pastors in the United States. My thesis has armed me to provide the critical information these church leaders need: that gives me the greatest excitement. I know many of these accomplished leaders throughout America's 50 states and believe they will be eager to review the information in this dissertation.

Pastors of mega-churches are publicly visible and are under scrutiny in unique ways. My thesis draws upon the well of a very painful personal experience which could have cost me my own ministry. From it I have drawn ten ministry-life-saving suggestions that can preserve and protect the ministries of mega-church pastors. In these pages, I address the following crucial issues:

1. Church governance or polity

2. Timely communication in crisis situations
3. The absolute prerequisite of a solid marriage
4. The importance of seeking competent legal assistance
5. Public disclosure of church finances
6. Avoiding politics and the distraction of social issues
7. How to handle media scrutiny and sabotage
8. The vital need for exercise
9. The primacy of pastoring
10. Trials and how to survive them.

I also offer advice on the difficult dilemma of how to address volatile social issues, and the proper procedures to follow in order to avoid slander and other attacks from the media. My thesis fills a significant gap in the scholarship that addresses ways to help successful pastors avoid pitfalls and take steps to insure their physical and spiritual health. In this thesis, I have elucidated a clear plan for pastoral longevity. It includes:

- In-church accountability
- Peer Accountability: The appointment of a pastor to the pastor
- Professional counseling
- Specific signs and signals of pastoral distress:

- The pastor emotionally, physically, and spiritually drained.
- The pastor lost in legalism.
- The pastor who rarely talks about his wife and children.
- The pastor who has lost his joy.
- The pastor henpecked by cantankerous board or staff member(s).
- The pastor who will take no reproof.
- The pastor who has no common sense.
- The pastor submerged in success or failure and its accompanying dangers.

I am convinced that the following material can be taught to pastors and used by denominational leaders to help prevent the collapse and premature demise of pastors and church leaders who are so crucial to the discipleship and evangelism of the world.

One out of every two pastors in full-time vocational ministry quits during the first five years of service. Studies reveal that one in every four pastors is terminated by his or her church. The average tenure of a minister who serves in the role of “church pastor” is a brief 3.8 years. Why do pastors quit? Why are they so discouraged? What are the specific factors of the accelerated rate of pastoral attrition in the United States of America? A cause for further concern is the poor physical, marital, emotional, psychological, and spiritual health of pastors who actually remain in the pastorate. The office of the pastor is on the list of the top ten occupations for heart disease. In one survey, 75 percent of pastors reported that their marriages are unfulfilling, a common precursor to

inappropriate clergy sexual misconduct. Repeated studies reveal that pastors are inept at conflict resolution and do not have the requisite leadership skills to lead the local church; however, the majority want more training and complain that their seminary education was inadequate, that it did not prepare them for the rigors of ministry. Most important, I provide reliable recommendations for pastors, church Elders, leaders, board members, and laity on how to protect their pastors from unnecessary, preventable collapse. Each of my case studies offers an opportunity for deeper reflection and greater understanding, because all the ministers wanted to be identified by name. Several continue to maintain blogs on the Internet, have written books, made television appearances, and are speaking publicly about their moral collapse. I have identified the print or Internet resources created by these pastors to allow readers to investigate more deeply the painful pasts and challenging futures of pastors who commit adultery. In the truest sense, these pastors put “skin” and emotion on the sterile statistics and dry surveys reviewed in this dissertation. Pastors quit, and they experience crippling marital, psychological, physical, and emotional problems or issues, including adultery, as we will learn.

In chapter 5, “The Health Challenges of Leaders,” I recount the documented physical problems of pastors. Here again, the aim of this chapter is to provide valuable recommendations for the protection and promotion of good physical health for pastors—a God-designed antidote to pastoral stress. And in chapter 6, “Soul Care,” I reflect on legendary pastors and their herculean accomplishments in ministry in circumstances even more difficult than those presented by our current, modern conveniences and opportunities. The chapter clearly reveals how the nurturing of their spiritual lives enabled Christian leaders of earlier generations to manifest such extraordinary fruit and

spiritual power. My prayer is that this thesis will assist the leaders of the church of Jesus Christ by helping them to discover the perilous pitfalls that can hinder its ministry and its effectiveness.