

Hope and Help for the Struggling Shepherd

Chris Bruynzeel

BC598 Thesis Research

February 28, 2022

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	iii
I. INTRODUCTION	1
A. PURPOSE STATEMENT	1
B. INTENDED AUDIENCE AND SCOPE	2
C. DEFINITION OF TERMINOLOGY	2
D. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY	5
II. DEFINING THE PROBLEM—THE REALITIES OF LIFE IN MINISTRY	5
A. A LACK OF UNDERSTANDING THE UNIQUE PRESSURES OF CHURCH LEADERSHIP	6
B. THE NECESSITY OF UNDERSTANDING BY THE CHURCH BODY, THE CHURCH LEADERSHIP	8
III. TOWARDS A SOLUTION—THE BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVE ON THE PROBLEM FACING SHEPHERDS	8
A. AN EVALUATION OF MAN’S WISDOM	9
B. AN EVALUATION OF THE AID FROM INTEGRATION	10
C. THE BLESSING FROM THE BIBLE—SCRIPTURE’S VIEW OF PASTORS AND THEIR PROBLEMS	12
IV. THE BIBLICAL HOPE AND HELP FOR A STRUGGLING SHEPHERD	18
A. GOD’S INTENTIONAL PLAN FOR THE SHEPHERD’S TRIALS TO REFINE AND STRENGTHEN	19
B. GOD’S INTENTIONAL MEANS FOR THE SHEPHERD’S PERSONAL GROWTH AND PERSEVERANCE	20

C. GOD’S INTENTIONAL APPOINTING OF THE SHEPHERDING TEAM FOR MUTUAL MINISTRY	21
D. GOD’S INTENTIONAL GIFT OF PURPOSEFUL AND CARING CHURCHES TO HELP THEIR SHEPHERDS	24
V. BIBLICAL PRACTICES OF FOSTERING CARE FOR STRUGGLING SHEPHERDS	26
A. PREVENTATIVE PRACTICES	26
B. CORRECTIVE PRACTICES	28
C. CHANGE PROJECTS SAMPLES—PRACTICAL RESOURCES FOR SHEPHERDS AND CHURCHES	30
VI. CONCLUSION	30
VII. BIBLIOGRAPHY	31
VIII. APPENDICES	35
A. SHEPHERDS QUESTIONNAIRE	35
B. SAMPLE EVALUATION QUESTIONS FOR STAFF DISCUSSION	46
C. SAMPLE ACCOUNTABILITY QUESTIONS	49
D. SAMPLE ANNUAL REVIEW	50

ABSTRACT

Title: How the Church can Bring Hope and Help to the Struggling Shepherd

Author: Chris Bruynzeel

Degree: Master of Arts in Biblical Counseling

Advisor:

Bringing hope and help to the leaders of the church is no easy task. These men feel the weight of responsibility for the spiritual life of the flock (Acts 20:28; Hebrews 13:17). The list of qualifications (1 Timothy 3:1-6; Titus 1:5-9) is also at the forefront of their minds. The responsibility to be godly examples to the members of the body, above reproach in their character and in their family, is a heavy burden.

The varied reports and accompanying statistics don't seem to agree as to percentages of struggling shepherds, but the point can be made that the church must both recognize that their leaders are men who face serious struggles (whether as sinners or sufferers—usually both), and that the local church must do a better job to minister to their shepherds.

The church must prepare itself to have a ready answer and strategy to the inevitable issues that arise in the personal struggles of their shepherds. What happens when a leader of God's church is suffering serious discouragement? When they are depressed or anxious, who brings them help? Who do they trust to open their hearts and lives, without potentially losing their role and even livelihood? Many pastors suffer in silence or will go for help outside of their church family seeking guidance, comfort, encouragement, and yes, exhortation.

The thesis of this research outline in answering those questions is to help churches grow in their understanding of the unique struggles their pastors and elders face and to better develop biblical systems of care in their trials.

The various topics addressed in fulfilling the above purpose are: revealing the serious and real problem in the wider church; the problematic answers given by the world and even the church itself; the clarification of what a leader is really supposed to be and do; the potential idols of a pastor's heart as a sinner and sufferer; how the church can equip itself to counsel and care for a struggling shepherd from within their own body; and, how the shepherding team can intentionally pursue genuine friendships from within where they help each other persevere in trials of life.

I. Introduction

A. Purpose Statement

1. The thesis of this research outline is to help churches grow in their understanding of the unique struggles their church leaders face and to better develop biblical systems of care in their trials.
2. Thesis topics covered include: the serious and real problem in the wider church; the problematic answers given by the world and church; the biblical role of a shepherd; the hope found God's purposes for trials; the church's care for a struggling shepherd; and the prescription for help to shepherding teams to intentional friendships of care.
3. The thesis is meant to serve as a resource to churches and their shepherds about the shepherding crisis and the need to develop a biblical culture of care in the church.
4. The church's shepherds carry a heavy burden for the spiritual life of the flock. Providing help to these men is no easy task as they carry the burden, yet solutions must be investigated.
5. The church carries a burden of caring for their shepherds. Therefore, the church must be aware that their leaders are men who face serious struggles (whether as sinners or sufferers), and plan and provide better help for their shepherds.¹ The church must have a strategy for the inevitable issue, "What happens when a leader of God's church is suffering serious discouragement? When they are depressed or anxious or their marriage is in trouble or they struggle with sexual temptations, who brings them

¹ For example, "Why Pastoral Care?" www.pastoralcareinc.com/why-pastoral-care/; or, "Pastoral or Elder Burnout" www.biblicaleldership.com/2017/08/02/pastoral-elder-burnout/; or "Your Pastor Needs You" (Daniel Sherman) www.my-pastor.com

help? Who do they trust to open their hearts and lives, without at the same time sacrificing their role and even livelihood?” Many pastors suffer in silence or will go for help outside of their church family seeking guidance, comfort, and encouragement. Neglecting to care for its own is not an option for a church family.

6. This outline will address the problem in the wider church; the problematic answers given by the world and even the church itself; the role of a biblical leader; the potential idols of a pastor’s heart; and, how the church can equip itself to counsel and care and comfort a struggling shepherd from within their own body.

B. Intended Audience and Scope

1. The audience is intended for the church and its leadership who desire to better minister to their shepherds as imperfect men ministering in churches of imperfect sheep in a world system opposed to the vitality of the church and its shepherds.
2. The scope of this outline is to both inform and equip the local church and its leaders. To help the church and its shepherds, they must move beyond the notion that a pastor is just tired and facing “burnout.” It is critical to the health and witness of the local church to examine this issue, educate the body and shepherding team, and equip them to better bring help from God’s Word to God’s men burdened by ministry cares.

C. Definition of Terminology

1. “Shepherds” are those who hold the overseeing function of the church body as paid or unpaid elders of the church (Acts 20:28ff; 1 Tim. 3:1-7; Tit. 1:5-9; 1 Pet. 5:1-5). Paid elders are also referred to in today’s church as pastors.
2. The church is the local assembly of believers in Jesus Christ who are under the spiritual leadership of such shepherds. The church who is to minister to struggling

shepherds are both the overall church body in their loving care for their shepherds, as well as the elders themselves as they are alert to each other's needs for discipleship and care in their unique circumstances within the church family.

3. "Burnout" is a common term but in need of clarification. The focus on the struggles a shepherd faces is not primarily "burnout," but is one of the issues covered. Others will be discouragement, depression, discontentment and more. It is important to note that not all seeming expressions of depression and discouragement are to be taken with concern. Indeed, it may simply be the heavy heart of a shepherd expressing sadness or "grief" over sin and suffering in the world and the people who the shepherd loves who are hurting.²

As a very commonly used term, the definition of "burnout" is assumed and better described by the evidence in a minister's life. It can mean the point in which a pastor "[reaches] extremes of emotional and spiritual exhaustion...feeling worn out and unappreciated."³ The term was first used in 1974 by Psychologist Herbert Freudenberger in a published article. He and others working with him had experienced these feelings of what he called "burn-out." Those experiencing "burn-out" had physical symptoms such as "exhaustion and fatigue, being unable to shake a lingering cold, suffering from frequent headaches and gastrointestinal disturbances,

² Thankful for this helpful insight from Dr. Ernie Baker, thesis supervisor at The Master's University. Comment Oct. 23, 2021. "I have been thinking quite a bit recently about soberness and those who are melancholy as not necessarily "depressed" but actually maybe grieving. For example, I think I often live in a state of grief for the lives of the people I counsel and the state of the world. I don't think of myself as depressed though. Sober yes."

³ Tracey Dawson, "Whose Problem is Clergy Burnout?" *Christian Century*, Nov. 5, 2020, <https://www.christiancentury.org/article/recommendations/whose-problem-clergy-burnout>

sleeplessness and shortness of breath.” They exhibited various behavioral symptoms (and to differing degrees) such as ‘quickness to anger...cries easily...suspicion... excessively rigid... totally negative attitude... looks, acts, and seems depressed.’”⁴

Occupational burnout (applicable to pastors) is listed by the World Health Organization “...[as a] syndrome resulting from chronic work-related stress, with symptoms characterized by ‘feelings of energy depletion or exhaustion; increased mental distance from one’s job, or feelings of negativism or cynicism related to one’s job; and reduced professional efficacy.’”⁵

4. One biblical example of discouragement in ministry may be found in Elijah’s situation (1 Kgs. 18). The discouragement he experienced (or “burnout”) was caused by “the continuous stresses he faced consumed the last of his energy, his ability to go on... always consuming spiritual, emotional and physical energy... [With the following] major consequences of burnout: Loss of purpose in life; Having one’s self-image destroyed; Feeling alone in the world; Being filled with resentment and bitterness; Feeling that all is hopeless.”⁶ “Burnout” is diagnosed as the result of prolonged exposure to stresses (pressures, trials) of life in ministry. The leader is counseled to delegate the responsibilities or to reprioritize his schedule and plan for

⁴ H.J. Freudenberger, "Staff Burn-Out," *Journal of Social Issues*, 30, no.1 (1974):159–161, doi:10.1111/j.1540-4560.

⁵ "Burn-out an ‘occupational phenomenon’: International Classification of Diseases". WHO. 28 May 2019. Retrieved 2021-12-22.

⁶ “Seven Common Effects of Ministry Burnout,” *Musicademy*, accessed October 1, 2021, <https://www.musicademy.com/seven-common-effects-of-ministry-burnout/>

more times of rest, exercise, and better diet. Or the symptoms are identified as depression or severe anxiety and the help is to be found in their various prescriptions.

5. Seeking to find a biblical diagnosis and prescription is the far better approach to diagnose what is happening in a struggling shepherd. We find better answers using biblical language and categories such as: the unique circumstances shepherds face (their “heat” to use Powlison’s term);⁷ the responses to the trials seen in the life of the shepherd (their “fruit”) and then to identify the core motivations of the heart (their “root”) that cause these responses.

Attention must include an examination of the outer man (his physical responses).

Investigation into their sleep patterns, exercise and eating habits is important.

Encouragement should be made to see a physician for a checkup.

D. Research methodology

My research is done primarily through my personal library of books on pastoral ministry and theology, interaction with agencies who specialize in member care of missionaries, online searches, and personal correspondence with shepherds of local churches.

II. Defining the Problem—The Realities of Life in Ministry

Within the church there are misperceptions of shepherds. The mistaken assumptions are to view them as: “spiritual giants” who are immune to the pressures of life; or as men with an easy job without understanding of the weight of responsibility of ministry; or ignorance of

⁷ Dr. Powlison’s teaching on the Three Trees “A Biblical Model for Change” expanded by Timothy Lane and Paul David Tripp, “The Big Picture,” chapter 6, *How People Change*, (Greensboro, NC: New Growth Press, 2008), kindle edition.

the struggles shepherds face from the flesh according to the varied idols of the heart. The church and its leaders must grow in a more biblical perspective and practically strategic plan.

A. A Lack of Understanding the Unique Pressures of Church Leadership

1. The burden of the body carried by pastors and elders is immense: above reproach in their character; proving to be a workman who handles the Word of God with seriousness and faithfulness; who feed, guard, protect, counsel and care for the flock. Men with clay feet and remnant sin feel the weight of people's lives and their problems. "Like the weeping prophet Jeremiah, you too will weep over people's foolish idols and senseless rebellion against God's wise instructions."⁸
2. Studies reveal a discouraging report of the shepherding crisis in America with sad statistics about feelings of isolation and depression, often leading to ministry failure.
 - 80% of pastors and 85% of their spouses feel discouraged in their roles.
 - 70% of pastors do not have a close friend, confidant, or mentor.
 - 50% of pastors are so discouraged they would leave the ministry if they could but have no other way of making a living.⁹

⁸ Alexander Strauch, *Acts 20: Fierce Wolves are Coming; Guard the Flock* (p. 34). Lewis & Roth Publishers. Kindle Edition.

⁹ Bulleted points in the original. "Statistics in the Ministry" (covering a broad range of theological background, including those of a more liberal persuasion), <https://www.pastoralcareinc.com/statistics/>. Mark Dance, *Pastors Are Not Quitting in Doves*, lifewayresearch.com/2019/07/10/pastors-are-not-quitting-in-doves-2/ (July 10, 2019). Also, Dr. Richard J. Krejcir, "Statistics on Pastors: 2016 Update," churchleadership.org/apps/articles/default.asp?blogid=4545&view=post&articleid=Statistics-on-Pastors-2016-Update&link=1&fldKeywords=&fldAuthor=&fldTopic=0.

Over the last couple of years church leaders faced the added burden of the CV-19 pandemic as they attempted to care for their flocks under troublesome conditions of burdensome restrictions, fear, and anxiety.¹⁰

3. Even according to a more conservative study,¹¹ there are over 300,000 pastors in the United States, and if even 1% are leaving the ministry each year, the statistics are concerning.¹² The church ought to think through potential solutions. When a shepherd leaves a church under bad circumstances, the body experiences personal loss and the church will suffer consequences both organizationally and financially.¹³
4. To move from cold statistics to a more personal glimpse, thirty fulltime and parttime elders were contacted (recorded as *Appendix A*, which includes the email sent, the questions asked and the summary of their answers). Half of those contacted responded with at least “I’ve experienced severe hurt as a shepherd” and “this is an important topic.” Six responded and indicated some level of discouragement, and

¹⁰ Anna Hall, “Where Are All the Clergy Going?” *Convergence*, in CPR Connects, accessed July 22, 2021, <https://convergenceus.org/2021/07/22/where-are-all-the-clergy-going/>. “A more recent Barna survey in March of 2021 found that 29% of pastors had considered quitting in the past year.”

¹¹ “Fast Facts About American Religion,” Hartford Institute for Religious Research, Hartford Seminary, http://hrr.hartsem.edu/research/fastfacts/fast_facts.html#numcong Based on 2010 Census. More information in article online.

¹² “Reasons for Attrition Among Pastors Quantitative Report” Pastor Protection Research Study, LifeWay Research. August 2015. 3-4. <http://lifewayresearch.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/Reasons-for-Attrition-Among-Pastors-Quantitative-Report-Final1.pdf> Bold in the original. An excellent 33-page resource to consider. For instance, “54% of pastors agree the role of pastor is frequently overwhelming. More than 1 in 5 pastors agree their church has unrealistic expectations of them. More than 1 in 3 agree they feel isolated as a pastor.”

¹³ Ken Sande, “Strike the Shepherd,” *Relational Wisdom* 360, <https://rw360.org/2014/03/30/strike-shepherd/> March 30, 2014. *Evaluation by Ken Sande in footnote 5 in article.

some considered stepping off the shepherding team. While each received help, it was less than should be available to these shepherds.

B. The Necessity of Understanding by the Church Body, the Church Leadership

1. The church at large must grow in its aware of the statistics and not be naive to the challenges facing their shepherds, whether paid or unpaid elders.
2. The men leading the body of Christ must have a humble and biblically informed understanding of their weaknesses and potential to stumble. Like Paul (1 Cor. 15:9; 2 Cor. 12:11; Eph. 3:7, 8; 1 Tim. 1:13–16), they must see themselves in comparison to Christ and not as some sort of “spiritual elite.” Guarding their hearts (Pr. 4:23), they seek to strengthen their walk with God (Acts 20:28).
3. Both the shepherds and the church will benefit from a biblically understanding. If the pastors and elders are faithfully fulfilling their role as men who are at the same time “above reproach” (1 Tim. 3:2), as well as, sinners saved by grace and being changed by His grace (Tit. 2:11-12), over prolonged time the church benefits and grows strong in unity, love, and witness. The critical need is for shepherds to model godliness because “as the shepherds, so the sheep” and “a church will never rise above the level of its leadership.” As the church better understands its shepherds and grows in compassionate care for them, their leaders will benefit from help and better persevere.

III. Towards a Solution—The Biblical Perspective on the Problem Facing Shepherds

In this section, the diagnosis and then solutions available to struggling shepherds are discussed and evaluated. The supremely better help is found not in secular counsel (nor the attempted “mixture” of secular and sacred offered by integrationist counsel), rather in God’s

Word where His ways and wisdom give insight into the heart of the shepherd and soul-satisfying comfort.

A. An Evaluation of Man's Wisdom—Leaders and their Problems

1. The problem of men struggling with the burden of leadership is observed in the business world. Some of the pressures and pitfalls in pastoral ministry are similar (though minus the unique spiritual dynamic of the church). Resources abound for the secular leaders to manage organizations and the inevitable interpersonal conflicts.
2. The problem with the solutions offered is in the wrong presuppositions will lead to error-filled interpretations and eventually to damaging prescriptions for help. Most of the wisdom offered deals only with man's perspective and leaves God out (in relation to the leaders as men accountable to God for their decisions). The church is not equal to a secular organization. Due to the nature of the church as a spiritual organism, secular wisdom falls short neglecting the spiritual responsibility of its leaders nor their people's spiritual health. This is a crucial component to be missing and leads to error. "Best business practices"¹⁴ for leaders involves primarily financial gain and how to best manage its workers to promote and maintain financial efficiency. Sadly, too much has been incorporated into the church to its detriment.¹⁵

¹⁴ In over twenty years of ministerial life, to my dismay I've heard this term used many times by unpaid elders with only business background and little biblical training and has "excused" some cold-hearted decisions. When dealing with "people resources," the 'one-another' commands must be operative in the language and decisions of the leadership team.

¹⁵ I heard this "wisdom" while attending the 2012 "Sticky Teams" Conference hosted by Pastor Larry Osborne of North Coast Church (Chula Vista, Ca). See <https://northcoasttraining.org/leadership-conference-2021/> The district head for our EFCA gathering highly recommended this for our shepherds and staff. Furthermore, the recommended resource we read, Osborne's book, *Sticky Teams* is full of business principles and practices with little Scriptural content. For a book also advertised through the Gospel Coalition

B. An Evaluation of the Aid from Integration—Mixing Man’s Wisdom with “Christian Counsel” to Help Struggling Shepherds

1. The problem has been observed by the church at large and rightly so. Christians should seek solutions to the shepherding crisis and the solutions vary widely. Those integrating man’s wisdom and God’s Word, though misled, are for the most part not doing so with evil intent. For instance, in *How to Beat Burnout* the authors clearly state their desire “to help those who may be approaching burnout recognize the dangers before they become devastating.”¹⁶ Their motivation is admirable, but due to their reliance on psychological theory rather than God’s Word, the counsel offered is ultimately void of power to change hearts (Heb. 4:12-13). For instance, in chapter 7 “Jesus Treats Twelve Tired Men,”¹⁷ Mark 6:30ff is applied to dealing with burnout. Rather than seeing Jesus take the disciples aside, for rest yes, but also to teach them further lessons, this becomes the strategy Jesus used because He recognized their susceptibility for burnout.

While some sound advice is offered, the author’s search for a passage to fit his agenda is seen in the use of passages that sound correct but, in their context, have little to nothing to do with his point (this is called eisegesis). “Burnout can leave one so hardened or disillusioned with the world that one has little emotional or spiritual

(<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/justin-taylor/sticky-teams/>) for leadership team training within the church by the Gospel Coalition, there is little Scriptural instruction.

¹⁶ Frank Minirth, Don Hawkins, Paul Meier, Richard Flournoy, *How to Beat Burnout: Help for Men and Women*. Chicago, Il.; Moody Press, 1986. 22.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 97-102.

energy left to comprehend the supernatural or the meaning behind it.”¹⁸ The responsibility for the disciples’ inability to understand as Jesus explains results from their lack of faith.

There are other incidences where the disciples didn’t understand Jesus’ words or actions, yet they were not fatigued (for instance Matt. 16: 23 and Jesus’ rebuke of Peter for hindering Christ’s mission).

Other unbiblical teachings filled with man’s wisdom, such as focusing on self-worth, seep into their explanations and prescriptions, leading to misguided help and hope.¹⁹

2. The problem with the solutions offered when using man’s wisdom mixed with God’s Word is that man’s heart is “naturally” drawn to man’s wisdom and away from God’s Word that confronts the inner man. Man’s ears like to be “tickled” with the new and flashy. They pursue the worldly counsel with cool sounding terms and buzzwords. Due to sin’s effect on our minds, man’s ability to correctly discern between the truly helpful counsel and the unwise is suspect at best, disastrous at worst. This is like sifting through a garbage dump looking for fresh fruit to eat.

First, even those within the secular fields are criticizing the scientism which has created the prominence of the mental health language. Second, the reductionism of humanity to a simple biological entity is problematic because it is contrary to the biblical view that people are both body and soul. Third, the diagnoses dismiss the reality of sin and all of its effects on our humanity—both body and soul. For us as Christians it is a serious mistake to dismiss the noetic effects of sin (the effects of sin on the mind), the physiological decay of

¹⁸ Ibid., 102.

¹⁹ Ibid. For instance: “When we disobey God, our self-concept is lowered, and we experience a lower sense of self-worth.” (p. 131) Or, “Since we often tend to judge people on their ability to produce, there is often a parallel drop in feelings of self-worth.” (p. 146)

the body, and the biblical remedy provided for all the predicaments caused by the curse of the fall.²⁰

Furthermore, God’s wisdom is diluted through proof-texting. Integrationist approaches to lead Christians to shallow understandings and weak prescriptions for help. For instance, the following author offers some sound advice, but the Scripture offered out of Deuteronomy 30 is taken out of context.

It is “not too difficult for you” and “it is not beyond your reach.” Then, I love his words “the word is very near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart”. The life of blessing is mine for the taking. The life of emotional and spiritual health is within grasp.²¹

The author takes a passage intended to exhort the Israelites to obey God and forsake sin by living according to God’s revealed Word and massages it to apply to a self-help managing of priorities and time for the busy person. Scripture is diluted and unintended meanings are read into passages to reinforce one’s own agenda.

Christians are drawn further away from the hope in God’s Word rightly interpreted.

In Christ, the hardest struggles of life—whether from our own sins or the suffering that comes from living in a sin-broken world, can be redeemed. But if we rely on secular labels and the solutions that are attached to them, our hope will rise and fall upon the temporary effectiveness of those solutions.²²

Therefore, integrationist wisdom ought be rejected in favor of God’s Word for hope.

C. The Blessing from the Bible—Scripture’s View of Pastors and their Problems

Scripture’s perspective brings further help to shepherds if they remember that they too are in the same process of sanctification as all believers. Trials are then clearly perceived

²⁰ Johnson, 48-49. See also Jay Adams, *A Theology of Christian Counseling*, chapter 11 “How Sin Affects Thinking,” (Grand Rapids, MI: Ministry Resource Library, 1986).

²¹ Lance Witt, “Own It,” accessed November 26, 2021, <https://replenish.net/own-it/>

²² Johnson, 30.

to be purposed by God for their growth. With the help from fellow leaders and church members God has put around them, they find comfort in their struggles.

1. The biblical view of a shepherd as both leading the sheep and being a sheep is a critical balance to maintain. God's design for leadership is by appointed elders who are either unpaid "lay" elders or paid "pastor" elders. They are men from within the church body who exemplify the godly characteristics found in 1 Timothy 3:1-6; Titus 1:5-9; and 1 Peter 5:1-5. Paul charges them to watch over their personal lives (conforming to godliness) and to watch over the lives of the people under their care (Acts 20:28-35). This watchfulness, protection, and care fall under the term "shepherding." The term "pastor" is associated with shepherding and describes with vivid Old Testament imagery what an elder does in leading the flock.²³

At the same time, they are sheep who follow the Good Shepherd (Jn. 10). God is the One Who brings the growth of the believers (Phil. 1:6) and the increase in the harvest (1 Cor. 3:6-8). Shepherds do their part, but they are dependent on Christ to build His Church, including their own (Matt. 16:9).
2. The need for sanctification of a shepherd must be embraced by leaders in God's church. Shepherd, "know thyself!"²⁴ The man of God who wants to be used by God must have a biblically realistic view of himself and his own process of sanctification.

A. W. Tozer humorously confesses: "Do you know who gives me the most trouble? Do you know who I pray for the most in my pastoral work? Just

²³ In Acts 20:17, 28; Tit. 1:5-9; 1 Pet. 5:1-2, the terms are used for the same men functioning as leaders or shepherds of the church.

²⁴ I use this famous phrase to mean "be careful not to have an exalted view of self and your abilities and place, rather have an honest appraisal of yourself, including both strengths and weaknesses." For the many uses of this phrase: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Know_thyself

myself.” Proverbs aptly states the point: “Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life” (Prov. 4:23).²⁵

- a. All shepherds are first men who are deserving of nothing but the judgment of God (save the grace of God in Christ Jesus). This bedrock understanding fosters humility and a resultant praise to God. The saved shepherd is only useful by God’s grace.

Take heed, therefore, to yourselves first, that you be that which you persuade your hearers to be, and believe that which you persuade them to believe, and heartily entertain that Savior whom you offer to them. (Mk12:31)²⁶

- b. All shepherds must also be men committed to changing and growing in Christlikeness. To enjoy the peace of God from a guilt-free conscience (2 Cor. 1:12; 5:11; 1 Pet. 3:16), a shepherd must prioritize his pursuit of both the study and application of God’s Word (Acts 20:28; 1 Cor. 11:1; Phil. 3:15-17; 4:9).

One survey of pastors asked, “What are the most common obstacles to spiritual growth?” The top three were busyness (83 percent), lack of discipline (73 percent), and interruptions (47 percent). Most of these interruptions and most of our busyness are ministry related, not “worldly.”²⁷

The body will be encouraged by the living example of a humble man who pursue holiness, acknowledge weaknesses, and quickly admit sins and mistakes.

Ministers are not only sons of Adam, but sinners against the grace of Christ, as well as others; and so have increased their radical sin. ... It is

²⁵ A. W. Tozer, *Whatever Happened to Worship?* comp. and ed. Gerald B. Smith (Camp Hill, PA: Christian Publications, 1985), 78. Quoted from Strauch, *Acts 20*, 95.

²⁶ Richard Baxter, *The Reformed Pastor*, electronic ed. taken from the 1974 Banner of Truth ed. edited by William Brown. (Simpsonville SC: Christian Classics Foundation, 1996), 53-54.

²⁷ John Piper, *Brothers, We Are Not Professionals*, (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2013), Kindle Edition, 77.

most necessary, therefore, that men of so much infirmity should take heed to themselves and be careful in the oversight of their own souls.²⁸

- c. Shepherds should be ready to not only expect trials but also to appreciate them.

Shepherds must show by their teaching and example that God has purposes in trials: to create greater dependency (2 Cor. 12:9), character and furthering His greater plan through them (Gen. 50:20; Rom. 8:28-29; Jam. 1:2-4).

Both elders and their people must be alert to the dangerous tendency of elevating their shepherd as a spiritual superman that blinds them to the real struggles these men face. On the one hand, church leaders carry a heavy burden for their flock.

“John Newton called the minister’s work ‘a sorrow full of joy.’”²⁹ Therefore, the church must be on the alert to a leader who may isolate and suffer silently.

Pride can also creep in by the shepherd’s acclaim of their knowledge or numbers (1 Cor. 8:1-2; 12:7-10), or through the congregation’s undue elevation of the preacher (1 Cor. 1:12), or any other number of various reasons.

I would say once more what I am profoundly convinced is a terrifying truth, confirmed by my experience more and more, that to be a preacher, an expositor of God’s Book, is one of the most dangerous things in the world.³⁰

3. A Closer Look at the Shepherd’s Struggles

- a. Leaders in the church face particular inner man issues in pastoral ministry, such as taking more responsibility than they ought for the souls of those under their care.

²⁸ Baxter, 74.

²⁹ Thomas K. Ascol, *Dear Timothy: Letters on Pastoral Ministry*, ed. Thomas K. Ascol (Cape Coral, FL: Founders Press, 2004), 11.

³⁰ David Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *The Christian Warfare: An Exposition of Ephesians 6:10–13* (Edinburgh; Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 1976), 179–180.

While the shepherd will give an account for the spiritual oversight entrusted to them (Heb. 13:17), he must remember he is not their “savior.” He is called to vigilance (Acts 20:28), but needs to entrust their salvation to God.

Another temptation being the façade of perfection in family and ministry. As well, swelling numbers of congregants can increase the desire for prestige in both the church and community.

There are endless temptations appealing to the shepherd’s pride, waging war in the heart and he is called to keep a diligence on his coveting heart (Eph. 2:5; Col. 3:5; Pr. 4:23).

- i. First, the shepherd faces the fight with his flesh. He must not buy into the world’s diagnosis of man’s “mistakes” as due to upbringing (i.e., his parents raised him wrong, he grew up in the wrong part of town) or genetics (i.e., his parents were alcoholics so he will be too). The list of “why” man does what he does from secular wisdom is endless and confusing. Rather, his conviction must rest in God’s account of man, his heart, his problem with sin and solution. He must be committed to develop a plan to be in God’s Word and ways to daily fight his flesh’s revulsion against God sovereignty over his life and ministry.
- ii. Second, the wise shepherd will know the root of that fight which starts in the heart and the reality of idols of a shepherd’s heart.³¹ He must be on constant

³¹ This section is owed to the following helpful suggestions from Dr. Baker in a paper “Idols of a Pastor’s Heart” by Andrew Hadaway (MABC program, The Master’s University, Jan. 2013). Not every “idol” is discussed in Mr. Hadaway’s helpful thesis, but these 5 categories are a good summary of the major stumbling stones facing men in pastoral ministry.

alert to the snares of ministry. Charles Colson’s warning offered by Alexander Strauch deserves careful thought.

“Power is like saltwater; the more you drink the thirstier you get. The lure of power can separate the most resolute of Christians from the true nature of Christian leadership, which is service to others. It’s difficult to stand on a pedestal and wash the feet of those below.”³²

The following are categories of potential threats: the idols of the heart.³³

- 1) The Idol of Position—He loves title more than task.
- 2) The Idol of Peace—He loves comfort more than confrontation.
- 3) The Idol of Popularity—He loves praise more than principle.
- 4) The Idol of Protection—He loves to argue more than acknowledge (what others offer whether in criticism or contradiction to his ideas).
- 5) The Idol of Power—He loves control more than confidence in God.

At the foundation is pride where the shepherd buys into the original lie, “...and you will be like God” (Gen. 3:5). He grows self-sufficient and relies in his fleshly abilities.

These traps are like those ensnaring the religious leaders of Jesus’ day who loved the acclaim of man and status rather than the applause of God (i.e., Matt. 6:1ff; 23:6-8; Jn. 11:48). The humble shepherd remains keenly aware of

³² Charles Colson, *Kingdoms in Conflict* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987), 272. Quoted in: Alexander Strauch’s, *Biblical Eldership*, 87-88.

³³ Hardaway, 26.

his prideful heart and heeds the warning, “Pride is without doubt the chief occupational hazard of the preacher.”³⁴

- b. Shepherds also face particular outer man issues and need to pay attention to their physical body. They experience strain on their health due to the unusual schedule of ministry. Their day needs evaluation and often the simple prescriptions of rest, physical activity, healthy eating, etc bring great relief. Consider Dr. Martin Lloyd-Jones’ wise and practical counsel to a struggling pastor who had “no longer sensed a love for souls.”

The lesson he learned was simple—all the areas of our lives are interconnected. This man had neglected physical and emotional rest, and this had a telling effect on his spiritual life.³⁵

Regular visits to the doctor for health checks including bloodwork to evaluate overall health are essential, especially as aging progresses.

IV. The Biblical Hope and Help for a Struggling Shepherd

There is hope for the struggling shepherd in His Word, power, and ways. “The unbelieving world views hope as a fantasy. But the Bible declares that there really is such a thing as true hope—a hope that is absolutely sure. That hope is found in God and the unfailing promises of His Word.”³⁶

³⁴ John R. W. Stott, *Between Two Worlds: The Art of Preaching in the Twentieth Century* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 320.

³⁵ Conrad Mbewe, “Watch Your Life,” in *Dear Timothy: Letters on Pastoral Ministry*, ed. Thomas K. Ascol (Cape Coral, FL: Founders Press, 2004), 40.

³⁶ John Street, *Men Counseling Men* (p. 63). Harvest House Publishers. Kindle Edition. An excellent resource for men, for pastors!

When leaders persevere through trials of life, the body's trust grows as they see their shepherd's life on display. His life is their "case study." A shepherd's endurance must be more than a reprioritization of his schedule (contrary to man's wisdom for leaders). So much of world's diagnosis focuses on the circumstances (pressures of the job) and the symptoms (high stress). Their prescription focuses on such (lighten your load—delegate; take more me-time). The heart issues (the root that produces sinful, harmful actions) are left untended. The Lord wants a shepherd's heart (his motives) focused on honoring Him first (1 Cor. 10:31; 2 Cor. 5:9). To develop that kind of heart, they must commit to practicing the "ordinary means of grace"³⁷ provided by God to help them grow and persevere.

A. God's Intentional Plan for the Shepherd's Trials to Refine and Strengthen

Only the Lord can give a shepherd the true perspective for all his life and trials. God's perspective must be intentionally "rehearsed" during the intense struggles to interpret life correctly (Jam. 1:4). God's plan is to shape and conform the shepherd's heart and is working His plan for heart-change that all believers undergo.

B. God's Intentional Means for the Shepherd's Personal Growth and Perseverance

The shepherd must invest daily in God's provisions for spiritual health and strength.

³⁷ For an excellent summary, see Burke Parsons, "The Ordinary Means of Grace," accessed December 5, 2021, /tabletalkmagazine.com/article/2020/06/the-ordinary-means-of-grace/. "The means that God has appointed for our spiritual nourishment and growth in grace are what we call the ordinary means of grace—namely, the Word, prayer, the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper, and, necessarily joined to these, the church's discipline and care of souls. These means are appointed by God, are empowered by the Holy Spirit, and point us to Christ, and they sustain us and nourish us in our union with Christ as we rest in the sovereign ends of our triune God." An excellent resource is Donald Whitney's *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*.

1. The shepherd needs to recognize his wife as a critical means of God's providence for help. Genesis 2:18 clearly shows that man alone was incomplete and needed help. If married, the wise shepherd will invest in his God-given complement, his wife (Eph. 5:25-33). His wife will be his best help as well as his on-going sanctification project (both in helping her grow and in her role in helping him grow). Too many marriages fail in society, and sad to say, in the church as well. The diligent shepherd will discipline himself to pay attention to his wife (and children as the Lord provides) and not sacrifice her on the "altar of ministry."³⁸
2. The shepherd needs to commit to daily disciplining himself for godliness (1 Tim. 4:7-8) in the spiritual disciplines. While he is a "new creation in Christ" (2 Cor. 5:17) and is considered holy, yet in his daily life there is need for the practical changes of progressive sanctification. This cooperative effort with the Spirit (Gal. 5:24) requires diligence in the process of putting off sinful ways of living, being renewed in the mind, and putting on new godly patterns (Rom. 12:1-2; Eph. 4:22-24; Col. 3:8-9). Elements of the spiritual disciplines most often noted are daily time in the Scriptures (reading, studying, memorizing), prayer, regular participation in corporate worship,

³⁸ An excellent resource for the wives of shepherds is by Mary Somerville, *One with a Shepherd: The Tears and Triumphs of a Ministry Marriage* (Woodlands, TX.: Kress Christian Publishing, 2017). See also Dr. Baker's excellent article regarding the preparation of the wife of a pastor for the life and pressures of ministry, "Are Pastor's Wives Prepared for Ministry?" (August 14, 2020) biblicalcounselingcoalition.org/2020/08/14/are-pastors-wives-prepared-for-ministry/. He's exactly right: "I calculate that hundreds of precious people have been impacted by the marriages described earlier; in one case, the church closed. The flock says, "If my pastor's marriage can't survive, what hope is there for me?" This can be traced back, at least partially, to inadequate ministry training for both the husband and wife. We can and must do better."

consistently serving and caring for other Christians, stewardship of resources (giving financially and of time in the life of the church), and others.

Sage advice is found in Kent Hughes' *The Disciplines of a Godly Man*. Leaders must recognize their potential spiritual influence on the lives of the flock for either constructive or destructive consequences. They must apply "spiritual sweat" to borrow from Pastor Hughes in describing Paul's exhortation in 1 Tim. 4:7-8 to pursue steadfastness by putting off sin, evaluating distractions and to "strip ourselves to a lean, spiritual nakedness."³⁹ Hughes continues to remind shepherds that this hard work is always in the context of God's grace. Leaders must be careful to not fall prey to "trying harder" or works-sanctification. Such self-reliance will lend itself to burn out, depression and failure. Titus 2:12 reveals grace as training us to work out this process of sanctification as we walk in the Spirit's power enabling us to grow. From beginning to end, growth and steadfastness is a work of God's enabling grace in us.⁴⁰

C. God's Intentional Appointing of the Shepherding Team for Mutual Ministry

Leadership by a team (Acts 20:28; 2 Cor. 11:28-29; Col. 1:28-2:1; Heb. 6:11; 13:17) is God's good design for mutual encouragement as they share the burden (Gal. 5:22-6:2). For the solo pastor or as one having teammates who are not biblically qualified, his priority should be to patiently build a godly team. While the typical American church has a congregation between 100-150,⁴¹ the shepherding demands require a team of qualified

³⁹ R. Kent Hughes. *Disciplines of a Godly Man* (Paperback Edition) (pp. 14, 16). Kindle Edition.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 227-228.

⁴¹ George Barna, "State of the Church 2016" (September 15, 2016) barna.com/research/state-church-2016/ "Almost half (46%) attend a church of 100 or fewer members. More than one-third (37%) attend a midsize church of over 100, but not larger than

men who care for the flock (Acts 20:28). Such a pastor must begin building by teaching biblical leadership. God has specific instruction for their character and ability (elders—1 Tim. 3:1-5; Tit. 1:5-9; deacons—1 Tim. 3:6-9). The pastor will find his potential team over time as the evidence of servant's hands and hearts is made clear. He must spend intentional time both in teaching as well as sharing his heart (see Paul's example, Acts 20:31, 36-38).

In the short-term, the solo pastor should seek out other godly leaders in his area for prayer and wisdom. For times of crisis, he be prepared by seeking godly friendships in his church, as well as godly counselors outside the church (see p. 48 for recommended ministries). His may be a lonely road, but if he is patient and intentional, there is hope.

1. To grow in mutual care, God's appointed team of men must intentionally apply the 'one-another's' with each other in their meetings and social interactions (see Paul's personal care and commendation of himself to the Ephesians elders in Acts 20:17-38, esp. 36-38). "At the heart of endurance is one's relationship to the Lord and the belief that you are in the place of His will... Another source of enduring is having strong friendships with your fellow pastors and the people who are in your church."⁴² They

499." See also Hartford Institute For Religion Research's "Fast Facts About American Religion," hrr.hartsem.edu/research/fastfacts/fast_facts.html#sizecong (accessed December 6, 2021). "The median church in the U.S. has 75 regular participants in worship on Sunday mornings, according to the National Congregations Study (NCS) <http://www.soc.duke.edu/natcong/>. Notice that researchers measured the median church size — the point at which half the churches are smaller and half the churches are larger — rather than the average (186 attenders reported by the USCLS survey <http://www.uscongregations.org/character-cong.htm>), which is larger due to the influence of very large churches."

⁴² John F. MacArthur Jr., *MacArthur Pastor's Library on Pastoral Ministry* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2005), 309. In response to the question, "What kind of relationship do you try to build with staff pastors?"

should seek to be to each other like Barnabas was to Paul in helping him grow in his ministry opportunities to the larger church. “As one preacher aptly observed, ‘Barnabas was not a ministry hog.’ He didn’t have to do all the ministering or get all the glory.”⁴³

This priority for prayer and encouragement should be written into meetings. Ministry demands will scream for attention, but leaders must prioritize relationship building.

This begins with the lead pastor who is to serve as an example to his own team. “The least you can do is build your heart into them. ... That is the key. I think at the elders’ meetings I need to bare my heart—to be open and transparent about what moves me. That builds relationships.”⁴⁴

2. To better deepen spiritual friendships, it is important to encourage accountability by asking and answering personal questions. The time for personal questions to ask must be planned and a list of questions printed and ready. Not every meeting should be intensely personal but there must be a plan in place on the monthly calendar. Shepherds need to prepare their hearts to shed facades and begin to humbly admit their needs and shortcomings for relational bonds to develop (Eph. 4:25). Only then will the leadership team, and the church, experience what it means to be truly “members of one another” and grow in unity (Eph. 4:1ff).

⁴³ I. Howard Marshall, *The Epistles of John*, NICNT (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1978), 126. Quoted from Alexander Strauch, *Leading with Love*, (Littleton, CO: Lewis and Roth Publishers, 2006), 65.

⁴⁴ MacArthur Jr., *Pastoral Ministry*, 307.

3. Shepherds' families are strategically crucial to this process. Time together, while sharing meals in each other's homes, will serve to grow love between the families; moving outside the work-arena into family life and shared hospitality.

D. God's Intentional Gift of Purposeful and Caring Churches to Help Their Shepherds

The family of God manifested in the local church is no mere club created by mutual interest (i.e., AYSO parents), but a gift to help each other "hold fast the confession of our hope" and, as we obediently meet regularly, we also "stir up one other" to greater faith and love and ministry (Heb. 10:23-25). The church family will be blessed as they minister to its shepherds and seek to demonstrate love for each other (Phil. 1:4; 4:1; 1 Thess. 2:19-20; 3:8-10; 5:25; 2 Thess. 3:1,6; Heb. 13:17-19).

1. First, the church must be aware of the tendency to go beyond showing due honor as is appropriate to their shepherds (1 Thess. 5:12-13; Heb. 13:7,17) and begin elevating these men in an unhealthy way. The body ought to express appreciation in a way to help their shepherds not fall to fleshly pride, self-sufficiency, and self-exaltation. The church should hear from their shepherds about their own need for God's grace in their lives. Instruction from passages like Galatians 2 (Paul confronting Peter and Barnabas for their hypocrisy) and Acts 11 (Barnabas and Paul having a sharp disagreement and parting ways) help the body see that leaders are imperfect men in need of change. The body is an integral part of the shepherds' sanctification.
2. Second, the church needs to develop a strategy to care for their shepherds where help is available for the inevitable crisis times in their shepherd's lives. Local churches

should contact other churches to see what they have in place, as well as counseling ministries.⁴⁵

3. Third, the church needs to commit being one where this help is available from within their body. The church body needs to devote themselves to develop a culture of compassionate and persevering care. Yes, this happens under godly leadership, but the church must also buy in. Churches will be an ineffective help to struggling shepherds if they don't have the dual conviction about God's help in His powerful Word and through His people.

The cumulative result, however, is that many of the problems common to humanity are seen as outside the scope of the Scripture. When we become convinced that the Bible does not address these human struggles and sorrows, the church disengages from the work of soul care because we are convinced the tools we have been given to proclaim and the culture we have been asked to cultivate are powerless to overcome some of our most significant problems or provide hope in the midst of our sorrows.⁴⁶

Trials often come in the form of interpersonal conflict. Conflict does not have to mean destruction if met in a God-honoring way. The body must understand that trials will happen and thus be prepared to face them with compassionate.⁴⁷ A church committed to working through trials in the body and in the lives of its leaders will be amazed at God's transforming power if they stick to God's ways for dealing with

⁴⁵ See V. B. 2. Fellowship of Believers for suggested agencies for help and counsel.

⁴⁶ Johnson, 52.

⁴⁷ Carl S. Dudley, "Conflict: Synonym for Congregation," Faith Communities Today, May 1, 2011, <https://faithcommunitiestoday.org/conflict-synonym-for-congregation/>. "Much of the observed conflict might be avoided, reduced or redirected if congregational leaders learn how to deal openly with conflict."

conflicts. “But what happens when we fail? Preventive methods of teaching and discipleship in the church are primary methods of proper care.”⁴⁸

A healthy culture of counseling each other (Rom. 15:14) and showing love (Matt. 22:39) and kindness (Eph. 4:32) begins from the top-down in the teaching, training, and modeling by its leadership. Bringing hope and help through biblical counseling in the local church must be intentionally encouraged among the body in all the relationships of the church ministries (i.e., men’s small groups, women’s small groups, youth ministry staff teams, home groups, etc.). This culture of “mutual care” (Eph. 4:1-3), must be intentionally built into the life and conversation of the church.⁴⁹

V. Biblical Practices of Fostering Care for Struggling Shepherds⁵⁰

What follows are some practical ideas to grow a leadership team that will be a place of help when one or more of its shepherds faces trials and suffering.

A. Preventative Practices—Investing for Future and Expected Trials

1. Shepherding practices that better balancing the business of ministry and personal care begin with the staff meetings. Those leading a paid staff of a larger church begin to create this culture of relational leadership by consistent teaching from the

⁴⁸ Johnson, 154.

⁴⁹ An excellent resource for shepherds is Alexander Strauch’s *Leading with Love*. A good devotional to have everyone in the church read each day for a month is Stuart Scott’s *31 Ways to Be a "One-Another" Christian: Loving Others with the Love of Jesus*.

⁵⁰ What follows is suggested for the shepherd with a team and the planned meetings (whether paid staff or only a lay team). For the solo pastor, these suggestions will be for the future as God provides through his faithful prayer and patient instruction other men to join his team. Even with a team of unqualified board members, the solo pastor can lay foundations by planning relationship building into the meetings and his example of transparency.

Word and from personal example of transparency. Likewise, when the larger group meets, they focus to the hard work of relationships and attempt to include personal updates, praises, and prayer requests. Additionally, one meeting every 3 to 4 months should be planned where the men break into smaller groups of 2 or 3 to focus primarily on asking about their personal lives. Involving a meal, these meetings would increase relational time together.

2. Whereas the typical annual review is task-oriented, not so in a church seeking to be relationally oriented. The annual review ought to include evaluation of the shepherd's life shared within the team and the church. The review⁵¹ must move beyond the job description.
3. Church leadership should also plan time away as a team. An example of this practice is NorthCreek Church who plan an every-other-year (built into the church's budget) pastor-spouse retreat away from the church and city. It is built around food fellowship, morning, and evening meetings where each couple shares the highlights of their year (both personal and ministerial). "There is never a time where we don't shed tears and take time to pray for each other. This practice has drawn us together over the years like no other."⁵² As well, each year the entire

⁵¹ Also, a good set of questions to be used as a supplement (with some revisions—recorded as Appendix B) is found in the book by Lance Witt, *Replenish*. This book was suggested by the website BiblicalEldership.com and is associated with Alexander Strauch. Used with "a grain of salt" I believe this book can serve as a very practical starting point for discussion.

⁵² Pastor Steve Mawhorter (NorthCreek Church, formerly overseeing Biblical Counseling, now a LifeStage Pastor) and his comment to me on the relational value of those retreats.

paid shepherding team attends a conference together with planned meetings and dinner as a team each day to debrief.

4. Books to help this process along should be utilized by the team for discussion and growth. Balance between books on pastoral theology and those with a more devotional nature is key. For instance, the 9Marks series on “Building Healthy Churches” are excellent short reads on various aspects of the church and are meant to be discussed. Books like Dane Ortlund’s *Gentle & Lowly: The Heart of Christ for Sinners and Sufferers*, promote a more relational discussion. Both types of books should be on the reading diet of a relationally healthy and growing shepherding team. Another being *Instruments in the Redeemer’s Hands* (Tripp) with accompanying study guide would serve to build relationships.

B. Corrective Practices—Ready Help Amid Trials

The preventative practices are small doses of cure for future trials. The corrective practices are the “spiritual ER workers” who handle the emergencies. Local churches must embrace its responsibility for the care of their shepherds and not default to outside help. The following are critical elements to have in place.

1. Developing a biblical counseling ministry within the church is crucial. This helps the church obey the commands to practice the ‘one-another’s’ and to provide real help to struggling people. This intentional choice encourages a “culture of care”⁵³

⁵³ Many good teaching materials and videos are available from ministries such as the Association of Certified Biblical Counselors (biblicalcounseling.com), the Institute for Biblical Counseling and Discipleship (ibcd.org), Christian Counseling & Education Foundation (ccef.org), One-Eighty Ministries (oneeightyministries.org), Relational Wisdom 360 (RW360—rw360.org), Low Country Biblical Counseling Training (onlineschoolbc.com).

in all its ministries. Within the church, gifted people should be equipped to counsel and organized into that ready “crisis counseling.”

2. Other churches can be brought into this strategic plan. There are more churches beginning to open their biblical counseling ministries for training other churches.⁵⁴ Some denominations also provide counseling ministries.⁵⁵

The following ministries and conferences are for leadership teams: Shepherd’s Conference (Grace Community Church, shepherdsconference.org); Association of Certified Biblical Counselors (biblicalcounseling.com); 180 Ministries (Dr. Stuart Scott, oneeightyministries.org); Institute of Biblical Counseling Discipleship (ibcd.org); First Baptist Church of Jacksonville’s “School of Mediation” (fbcjax.com/what-is-biblical-counseling).

The following are excellent resources to read as a team: *The Peacemaking Pastor* (Poirier); *Dear Timothy: Letters on Pastoral Ministry* (Ascol); *Acts 20: Fierce Wolves are Coming*; *Guard the Flock* (Strauch); *Leading with Love* (Strauch); *Instruments in the Redeemer’s Hands* (Tripp); *How People Change* (Lane, Tripp);

⁵⁴ For example, NorthCreek Church in Walnut Creek, Ca (northcreek.org). I was on staff 90-91 (intern), then later fulltime pastoral staff 98-05. It was there that I first learned about and was trained in biblical counseling by Pastor Jon McNeff and Pastor Steve Mawhorter. They offer biblical counseling (led by Pastor Jeremy Pray, northcreek.org/need-help/counseling/) for their people and the community. They are also an official ACBC training site, as well as, available to help churches begin their own biblical counseling team.

⁵⁵ The Evangelical Free Church of America (EFCA—efca.org) has resources devoted to caring for hurting pastors and their families (pastoral-care.ministries.efca.org). I personally watched this in action on a couple occasions. Furthermore, in my research I contacted Wycliffe Bible Translators to research the help for their missionaries. My grandparents were WBT missionaries (1942-90) and experienced severe family trauma while overseas in the early 60s. Though the help in the past for my grandparents was weak at best, there is a much better understanding of the problems associated with life and ministry abroad on families.

The Leadership Opportunity (Sande); *Redeeming Church Conflict* (Barthel; Edling); and *Men Counseling Men* (Street).

The following are helpful booklets: *Burned Out?* (Smith); *Depression* (Welch); *Help! I'm Depressed* (Trahan); *Overcoming Depression* (Tautges); *Help! I'm in a Conflict!* (Baker); *Replenish* (Witt, use with discernment).

C. Change Projects Samples—Practical Resources for Shepherds and Churches

See *Appendix B* for Evaluation Questions from *Replenish* for personal use or as part of the monthly leader's meetings. Used with discernment *Replenish* has practical questions that would be worthwhile for shepherding teams.

See *Appendix C* for a sample accountability questions that can instigate deeper feedback from each other (honesty is critical for this to be effective, Eph. 4:25).

See *Appendix D* for a sample of an *Annual Ministry Review* from NorthCreek Church, Walnut Creek, Ca, which includes relational evaluation questions.

VI. Conclusion

In an increasingly hostile culture, churches need men who stand firm in preaching and teaching the Word of God and ministering into people's lives. While these men are mature in faith, they are still imperfect men prone to sin or respond poorly to trials (often from within the church).

The church needs to be equipped to help shepherds keep close watch over their hearts. And shepherds need to humbly admit that they need help from their church. By God's powerful Word and the Spirit, the church is equipped uniquely to provide exactly what struggling shepherds need to be cared for and strengthened to persevere in the Gospel efforts.

Bibliography

- Adams, Jay Edward. *A Theology of Christian Counseling: Introduction to Nouthetic Counseling*. Grand Rapids, MI: Ministry Resource Library, 1986.
- Ascol, Thomas K. (editor). *Dear Timothy: Letters on Pastoral Ministry*. Cape Coral, FL.: Founders Press, 2004.
- Ashmore, Margaret. *Depression: The Sun Always Rises*. (The Gospel for Real Life series) Phillipsburg, NJ.: P&R Publishing, 2013.
- Baker, Ernie. "Are Pastor's Wives Prepared for Ministry?" Biblical Counseling Coalition. Accessed October 2, 2021. <https://www.biblicalcounselingcoalition.org/2020/08/14/are-pastors-wives-prepared-for-ministry/> (August 14, 2020).
- Barna, George. *1996 Index of Leading Spiritual Indicators*. Nashville, TN.: Thomas Nelson, 1996.
- _____. "The State of the Church 2016." (September 15, 2016) barna.com/research/state-church-2016/
- Richard Baxter, *The Reformed Pastor*, electronic ed. taken from the 1974 Banner of Truth ed. edited by William Brown. Simpsonville SC: Christian Classics Foundation, 1996.
- Barthel, Tara, and Edling, David. *Redeeming Church Conflicts: Turning Crisis into Compassion and Care*. Peabody, MA.; Hendrickson Publishers Marketing, LLC, 2012.
- Beeke, Joel R. and Thompson, Nick. *Pastors and Their Critics: A Guide to Coping with Criticism in Ministry*. Phillipsburg, NJ.: P&R Publishing, 2020.
- Bridges, Jerry. *The Pursuit of Holiness*. Colorado Springs, CO.: Navpress, 1996.
- Calvin, John. Great-Quotes.com, Gledhill Enterprises, 2011. Accessed May 25, 2011. <http://www.great-quotes.com/quote/5233>.
- Dudley, Carl S. "Conflict: Synonym for Congregation." <http://faithcommunitiestoday.org/conflict-synonym-for-congregation/> (May 1, 2011).
- Freudenberger, Herbert J. "Staff Burn-Out," *Journal of Social Issues*, 30, no.1 (1974):159–165, doi:10.1111/j.1540-4560.
- Grudem, Wayne. *Systematic Theology*. Grand Rapids, MI.: Zondervan, 1994.
- Hall, Anna. "Where Are All the Clergy Going?" Convergence, in CPR Connects, <https://convergenceus.org/2021/07/22/where-are-all-the-clergy-going/> (July 22, 2021).

- Hambrick, Brad. *Burnout: Resting in God's Fairness*. (The Gospel for Real Life series) Phillipsburg, NJ.: P&R Publishing, 2013.
- Hughes, Kent and Barbara. *Liberating Ministry From the Success Syndrome*. Wheaton, IL.: Crossway Books, 2008.
- Johnson Jr., T. Dale. *The Church as a Culture of Care: Finding Hope in Biblical Community*. Greensboro, NC.: New Growth Press, 2021.
- Krejcir, Richard J. "Statistics on Pastors: 2016 Update," accessed December 2, 2021. <http://www.churchleadership.org/apps/articles/default.asp?blogid=4545&view=post&articleid=Statistics-on-Pastors-2016-Update&link=1&fldKeywords=&fldAuthor=&fldTopic=0>.
- Lane, Timothy S., and Tripp, Paul David. *How People Change*. Greensboro, NC.; New Growth Press, 2008.
- Lloyd-Jones, D. Martyn. *Spiritual Depression: Its Causes and Cure*. Grand Rapids, MI.: Eerdmans, 1965.
- _____. *The Christian Warfare: An Exposition of Ephesians 6:10–13*. Edinburgh; Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 1976.
- London, H.B. Jr., and Neil B. Wiseman. *Pastors at Greater Risk*. Ventura, CA.: Regal, 2003.
- MacArthur, John. "Counseling and the Sinfulness of Humanity." In *Introduction to Biblical Counseling: A Basic Guide to the Principles and Practice of Counseling*, eds. John F. MacArthur and Wayne A. Mack, 112-113, Dallas, TX.: Word Publishing, 1994.
- _____. *MacArthur Pastor's Library on Pastoral Ministry*. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2005.
- Mack, Wayne, and Joshua Mack. *The Fear Factor*. Tulsa, OK.: Hensley Publishing, 2002.
- _____. *Out of the Blues*. Bemidji, Mn.: Focus Publishing, 2006.
- Martin, Albert N. *Pastoral Theology, Volume 1: The Man of God: His Calling and Godly Life*. Montville, NJ.: Trinity Pulpit Press, 2018.
- Minirth, Frank, Meier, Paul D., Hawkins, Don. *How to Beat Burnout: Help for Men and Women*. Northfield Pub, 1999.
- Osborne Osorne, Larry. *Sticky Teams: Keeping Your Leadership Team and Staff on the Same Page*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010. Kindle Edition.
- Owen, John. *Temptation and Sin*. Evansville, IN.: Sovereign Grace Book Club, 1958.

- Parsons, Burke. "The Ordinary Means of Grace." Accessed December 5, 2021.
/tabletalkmagazine.com/article/2020/06/the-ordinary-means-of-grace/.
- Piper, John. *Brothers, We Are Not Professionals*. Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2013.
Kindle Edition.
- Poirier, Alfred. *The Peacemaking Pastor: A Biblical Guide to Resolving Church Conflict*. Grand Rapids, MI.: Baker Books, 2006.
- Prime, Derek J. and Begg, Alistair. *On Being a Pastor: Understanding our Calling and Work*. Chicago, IL.: Moody Publishers, 2004.
- Sande, Ken. "Strike the Shepherd—Losing Pastors in the Church," Accessed September 22, 2021.
http://www.peacemaker.net/site/c.aqKFLTOBIpH/b.1084263/apps/nl/content3.asp?content_id={7A3375ED-91B4-4CC9-91D0-228B9375D2C2}¬oc=1 (14 July 2010).
- Scott, Stuart. *From Pride to Humility*. Bemidji, MN.: Focus Publishing, 2002.
- Smith, Winston. *Burned Out? Trusting God with Your "To-Do" List*. Greensboro, NC.: New Growth Press, 2010.
- Somerville, Mary. *One with a Shepherd: The Tears and Triumphs of a Ministry Marriage*. Woodlands, TX.: Kress Christian Publishing, 2017.
- Somerville, Robert B. *If I'm a Christian, Why Am I Depressed?* Xulon Press, 2014.
- Spurgeon, C.H. *Lectures to my Students, Complete & Unabridged*. Grand Rapids, MI.: Zondervan, 1954.
- Stott, John. "Pride, Humility & God." *Sovereign Grace Online*, September/October 2000.
- Scott, Stuart, and Jin, S. Andrew. *31 Ways to Be a "One-Another" Christian: Loving Others with the Love of Jesus*. Wapwallopen, PA.; Shepherds Press, 2019.
- Street, John D. *Men Counseling Men*. Eugene, OR.: Harvest House Publishers, 2013.
- Strauch, Alexander. *Acts 20: Fierce Wolves Are Coming; Guard the Flock*. Colorado Springs, CO.; Lewis & Roth Publishers, 2021.
- _____. *Biblical Eldership*. Littleton, CO.: Lewis and Roth Publishers, 1995.
- _____. *Leading With Love*. Littleton, CO: Lewis and Roth Publishers, 2006.
- Tautges, Paul. *Overcoming Depression*. Counseling One Another, 2019.

Trahan, Carol. *Help! I'm Depressed*. Wapwallopen, PA.; Shepherds Press, 2014.

Tripp, Paul David. *Dangerous Calling: Confronting the Unique Challenges of Pastoral Ministry*. Wheaton, IL.: Crossway, 2012. Kindle Edition.

_____. *Instruments in the Redeemer's Hands: People in Need of Change Helping People in Need of Change*. Glenside, PA.; P&R Publishing, 2002.

Welch, Edward T. *Blame it on the Brain?* Phillipsburg, NJ.: P&R Publishing, 1998.

_____. *Depression: The Way Up When You're Feeling Down*. Greensboro, NC.; New Growth Press, 2011.

_____. *Pastoral Ministry: A Sure Way to Be Dishonored*, Dec 4, 2012.
<http://www.ccef.org/blog/pastoral-ministry-sure-way-be-dishonored>, (Dec 18, 2012)

_____. *When People Are Big And God is Small*. Phillipsburg, NJ.: P&R Publishing, 1997.

Wikipedia. "Occupational burnout,"
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Occupational_burnout#cite_note-WHO-2019-1. (Oct 12, 2021).

Willis, Charles. "Forced Terminations of Pastors, Staff Leveling Off."
www.lifeway.com/about_pr08011.asp.

Wilson, Michael Todd, and Brad Hoffman. *Preventing Ministry Failure*. Downers Grove, IL.: Inter Varsity Press, 2007.

Witt, Lance. "Own It," <https://replenish.net/own-it/> (Accessed Nov. 10, 2021).

_____. *Replenish: Leading From A Healthy Soul*. Grand Rapids, MI.: Baker Books, 2011. Kindle edition.

Appendix A—Shepherds Questionnaire

To my friends in ministry.

I am in my final semester of the Master of Arts in Biblical Counseling at The Master's University. I have as an assignment to write a research paper to serve as my final—sort of a culmination of my studies, incorporating many facets of what I've learned. I have enjoyed the equipping for shepherding through this program and have applied so much of it in my role as a pastor over the years (currently at Bethany Bible Church in Thousand Oaks).

The point of this email questionnaire is to get feedback from you, my friends, in the shepherding of the flock in local churches (whether presently or in the past). You all have had years of the hard labor of working with people who are hurting, with people who are flourishing, and everyone in between.

You know the long hours of sermon prep, class research, book selection for men's & women's ministry, prayer for direction in the next counseling session with the almost-divorced couple, etc. The list goes on, with much to rejoice over and many tears shed.

I have over twenty years in church ministry in various roles—starting with junior high students all the way to being the senior pastor of a small church. I'm so thankful for the many sweet and loving people who have invested and cared for me and my family. I also know the pain of betrayal and false accusations. It's no easy road we walk.

That being said, over the years and especially in recent years, I have counseled (formally and informally) many elders and pastors who have felt levels of discouragement, depression, grief, etc. I have experienced the same.

As a result, for my paper, I decided to focus on pastors & elders and the specific suffering (& sins) we experience, and how to bring hope & help from God, in His Word and ways, to this unique group.

My Title: "Hope and Help for the Discouraged Shepherd (How do you counsel a struggling shepherd?)"

I have lists of books to read up on, articles to reference, research to do. But, I wanted firsthand witness from you, if you'll allow. I don't have many questions, but I'd love your honest and as-transparent-as-you-feel-comfortable responses. In referencing you in my paper, I'll leave your names out and anything specific to you and your church or family information. Your feedback will make this no mere academic paper. I want to use what I've learned over the years, combined with your input, to be more effective in helping other elders (unpaid, paid-pastors).

If you are not comfortable sharing, no worries. I'm grateful for your time, your friendship and partnership in ministry over the years.

See below for the questions. I'd appreciate your responses as soon as possible (August deadline for my paper submission).

Thank you and blessings!

In Christ, your brother
Chris Bruynzeel
bruynzeelc@gmail.com
805-796-9958 cell/best

Questions for Elders & Pastors on their Experience in Ministry

1. How many years have you been in ministry?
2. Who has been used by God to bless you—how?
3. Who has been used by God to “test” you—how?
4. What has been your greatest joy?
5. What has been your greatest sadness?
6. Maybe you have many, but please pick one specific time in your life where you experienced severe emotional “turbulence” in your ministry (and family—most likely affected them too).

Please detail:

- (a) Trial—Some of the circumstances (the heat of the trial).
- (b) Fruit—Your responses (the fruit seen in your outer man—responses, attitudes, words, emotions, etc) to the circumstances
- (c) Root—Your heart yearnings and reactions in the midst of the trial—the “wantings, cravings, intentions, thoughts, desires, etc” (the root in your inner man, causing the outer man responses)—what was going on in your heart in the midst of the trial? What “idols of the heart” were being exposed to yourself (Lk 6:43-45)
- (d) Cross—What did you learn about yourself and how Jesus still had work to do in you? How did the our Great High Priest help you (Heb 4:14-16)?
- (e) Counsel—Who provided good counsel and comfort (& exhortation?) to you that proved a blessing—and what did they say or do—how did they minister to you? What resources proved helpful in your trial?
- (f) Redemption—What changes happened in you, your life, your beliefs, your perspective, your process for dealing with trials, etc? How did you grow & change because of this trial (Jam. 1:2-4; Rom 8:28-29)?
- (g) Benefit—How are you better able to help others in their trials because of what you endured and learned (2Cor 1:3-4)?

Any other feedback?

Questions for Elders & Pastors on their Experience in Ministry

Summary Responses

For the purposes of the paper, I contacted 30 experienced pastors and elders by email. I received 15 responses. 9 apologized due to inability to respond at time, too busy. Also indicated they had suffered deep hurt in ministry and thought this was an important topic. 6 replied—see below.

*Pastor—fulltime, paid elder

*Elder—unpaid elder

1. How many years have you been in ministry?

Pastor A—38

Elder B—12 as an elder, 35 as either a teacher or youth leader.

Elder C— I assumed the office of lay elder in 2016, so I have been in church leadership for five years. Before that, I was involved in ministry in a variety of areas going back about 15 years.

Elder D— Close to 40 years serving first as a youth pastor for two years and then as an elder.

Pastor E—(he didn't fill out the entire questionnaire—gave me short summary):

Hey, thanks for giving me the “out” on this one. I'm taking it.

In all my years, I've had only one that really got to me, but man did it get to me.

Still affects me. It was the deepest betrayal I could have ever imagined and I don't want to relive it nor share it. There's too many connections within our little community. That said, I'm very glad you are doing this project. One of the hard parts was that I had no one to talk to about. I mean no one. Even guys from out of town like you or [name of ACBC counselor/friend]. Too many connections and too personal. It crushed me. Nearly quit ministry. Ok, sharing too much. I hope this goes well and turns into a book. It's needed.

You might be able to use my book as a reference. The story itself is not in the book, but Chapter 29 and 30 might be helpful.

I'm not sure people in general can understand the depth of hurt a pastor experiences unless he is a parent or a pastor.

Sorry, bro.

Elder F— I was first an elder at the age of 22. I taught Sunday School and was active in my church. I really loved serving others, but had a limited understanding of what an elder was. I loved the LORD, but still allowed hidden sin to rule in me, and did not repent for many years. Obviously I did not value the grace shown to me.

2. Who has been used by God to bless you—how?

Pastor A—My wife. Pastors who preached the Word.

Elder B— Once you gave me and [my wife] good counseling. Pastor [name] backed me up and supported me many times when parents were concerned that my teaching was too "rigid".

Elder C— I was discipled by the previous pastor of [name] Church. His name is [name] and he discipled me for 5 ½ years. In that time, I grew in spiritual

maturity. I was also disciplined after I felt a call to the office of elder. The time was very valuable as I was able to learn more about the office of elder and discern through prayer and study of the Word whether the call was of God or my own idea. I also explored the motivations for why I aspired to the office of overseer. I considered those years pivotal in my preparation to assume the office of elder. I have also been blessed by the current elders with whom I currently serve. I have benefited from their example and experience. Some of the men along whom I serve have more experience and wisdom than I do in serving as an elder. I have observed them and learned from their example. Finally, other mature Christians have blessed me through their example. I have not been formally disciplined by these people but observing them has helped me in my spiritual growth.

Elder D— My mother and father by supporting me in the decisions I made to go to Biola and then seminary and then encouraging me as I served in various ways., different pastors by encouraging me to be ordained, by trusting me with personal information, by allowing me to serve in a variety of ways., Christian friends who have been appreciative of my teaching and leadership.

Pastor E—(he didn't fill out the entire questionnaire—See #1 above):

Elder F— God used [name] in my life, and I am forever grateful for this. Other pastors had some influence in my life – [name], when I was nineteen and wanting to rededicate (?) my life to the LORD, and another pastor who encouraged me to commit the first fifteen minutes of the day to reading the Word, starting the annual reading through the Bible. God brought [name] into my life at [church name]. When [name] was asked to pastor [church name] my wife and I starting attending there because we lived in [city name]. From the start [name] was an encouragement to me. The [church name] was a small church, and it took everyone serving to make it work. It was a joy to serve along side [name]. He encouraged me to lead a life group, and it was about this time when God in His steadfast love and mercy broke my heart with His grace, setting me on a path to forsake the sin that had plagued me, and with His continuing grace to fight the battle of the flesh that will be with me until I'm with Jesus. It was [name] who encouraged me to once again serve as an elder, the very things that my heart desired to do. He showed me by example, as well as encouraged me, in leading and discipling. We prayed together, met in discipling situations, worshiped together, and went through some difficult church situations as well. This period of my life was one of the best and most satisfying times. I had no greater joy than to love Jesus and serve others, praying and doing all I could to build others up in their faith. I am so thankful for the ministry [name] has had in my life. It was just a joy in serving with him. There were some times as elder that I was really discouraged, even depressed. [name] allowed me to share my struggles and hurts with him, not condemning, but encouraging and praying.

3. Who has been used by God to “test” you—how?

Pastor A—Some people I have sought to pastor.

Elder B— When the pastor that replaced [former sr. pastor's name] jettisoned my ministry without consulting me, I felt betrayed and it took a while to forgive,

finally trusting in God's direction and purpose. I did go for a bout 1-2 years in the "wilderness" without having a ministry in the church.

Elder C— Elders with whom I have disagreed or whose approach, style and philosophy differ from my own. The testing could be how they relate to me— perhaps their personality is very different than mine. It could be that I do not “click” with them and therefore need more grace to be able to work with them of feel comfortable being myself in front of them. I do not like to disagree with any of my fellow elders. When I do so, it pains me. I have also been tested by church members who are critical of everything or who have written me scathing emails attacking my performance aa Sunday school teacher or singer leading worship in Lord’s Day services.

Elder D— Parents of students I had when I served as a youth pastor by expecting me to entertain and teach their kids without their personal involvement. Other elders and deacons who wouldn't do the job they were asked to do and then leave it to me to do.

Pastor E—(he didn’t fill out the entire questionnaire—See #1 above):

Elder F— God has used my wife to “test” me. We haven’t always had the same ministry goals and desires. It has been difficult for me to seek after her interests before mine, to build her up in her faith.

4. What has been your greatest joy?

Pastor A—Forgiveness of sin, and that God would allow me to pastor a church that wants to hear the Word.

Elder B— It continues to be discipling people younger than myself and equipping the people that " fall through the cracks" in the normal affairs of church/life.

Elder C— My great joy is the full knowledge that the Lord sees fit to use me to minister to others. I am grateful for the times I have been used by him to make a difference. I derive joy knowing that the lord is prospering the work I do in ministry.

Elder D— Ministering to a few men who were new in the faith and really desired to grow in their knowledge and walk with the Lord.

Pastor E—(he didn’t fill out the entire questionnaire—See #1 above):

Elder F— The greatest joy has been to meet serve in the church, from setting up, being behind the scenes, being available to assist where needed, praying, and also meeting with young guys to help and encourage them in their faith. A part of this was in the small group that my wife and I had in our house. It was such a joy to see it grow, not just in adult attendance, but in the growing number of kids these young adults were producing. We soon had nearly as many kids/babies in our life group as we had adults. It was one of the periods of great joy for me to serve this life group. The other duties of an elder were also a joy – teaching, setting up church each week, visiting those in the hospital, praying for so many. We had fun together serving the church.

5. What has been your greatest sadness?

Pastor A—Disloyalty by people who were once thought to be “trusted.”

Elder B— Seeing the kids/adults that I've ministered to give up and fall into worldly ways.

Elder C— My great sadness has come when I try to compare myself to others. When I see fellow elders with more success or a more fruitful ministry than I. I have struggled with feeling like I am not doing as much as the other elders and that God is not using me the way he used others who are also elders. I have felt weak and ineffective.

Elder D— People leaving the church for what seemed like very poor reasons. People who've walked away from their faith in Christ

Pastor E—(he didn't fill out the entire questionnaire—See #1 above):

Elder F— The greatest sadness was when this time of serving at [church name] began to end. I could blame my wife, but I don't. God is sovereign in ALL His ways.

6. Maybe you have many, but please pick one specific time in your life where you experienced severe emotional “turbulence” in your ministry (and family—most likely affected them too).

Please detail:

- (a) Trial—Some of the circumstances (the heat of the trial).

Pastor A—Accusations against me personally, and seeing half of the church leave in 2004.

Elder B— I'm going to give 2.

(A) Had a fellow elder whose wife embezzled over \$120K. How do we do justice to the wrong but keep tending the flock?

(B) As mentioned above, a new pastor came in and (with another new "youth pastor") essentially dismantled the college group [wife] and I were leading and then jetissoned my 5th/6th grade Sunday School class, without receiving my input on either one.

Elder C— My wife's father died of covid-19. Before his death I had a different perception of the virus and what the church ought to do in response to it. My wife and I were generally on the same page when it came to the virus and how the church ought to deal with it. After my father-in-law died, my wife had a complete change of opinion about the virus and how the church ought to handle it.

Suddenly, my wife and I found ourselves on opposite sides of the covid debate. She had one view, and I had another. It was difficult for our marriage. I had never considered the opposite view about the virus and how those who have lost loved ones (both saved and unsaved) must be affected. I had the obligation to remain impartial as an elder of the church while at the same time being sensitive to the needs of my wife, whose views seemed at odds with church leadership. I felt trapped. If I supported the views of church leadership, I would risk coming off as unloving and not loving and serving my wife. I was greatly concerned about ministering to her in a time of great loss. At the same time, if I support my wife, I risked coming off as partial when I needed to be impartial as a member of the elder board. I had no idea how to minister to a spouse who had lost a parent. I also had no idea how to navigate being at odds with some members of the elder

board. I wanted to continue to serve in unity while at the same time maintaining my view which informed by my conscience.

Elder D— When my son came down with Spinal Meningitis as a 7 month old and we almost lost him. It was a period of intense anguish in my life not knowing if his life would be spared or not. I prayed as never before and we had people from across the U.S. and other countries praying for him and us.

Pastor E—(he didn't fill out the entire questionnaire—See #1 above):

Elder F— The very joy in serving often put me at odds with my wife. One other thing – while joyfully serving at [church name], right at the very time the we as a church were launching to be our own body separate from [previous church name], I was in a car accident that laid me up for many months. It was a struggle both physically and mentally to get the things accomplished that I was responsibly for in the church launch.

- (b) Fruit—Your responses (the fruit seen in your outer man—responses, attitudes, words, emotions, etc) to the circumstances

Pastor A—Depression, wanting to quit.

Elder B—(A) I was just coming off of "active" eldership when it occurred, so I was "glad" I didn't have to deal with the dirt of the matter, but still ministered to the children of the pastor who had to deal the elder and eventual split of the church.

(B) I met with the pastor and elders with witnesses and told him he was making a terrible mistake, not for me, but that a "Rehoboam attitude" is going to kill the church leadership and church. I at first felt like I was being "put out to pasture" from "my" ministry, and at first harbored bitterness, but actually felt pity for the pastor and leadership. I eventually had to step away from the church so I would not be a dividing rod for other people.

Elder C— My attitudes alienated my wife at times. I tended to side with church leadership who were at odds with my wife's views about covid. Other times, I was siding with my wife and appearing to be partial when I could have remained impartial (I never sought to be partial, but it could have been perceived that way). I felt anger toward my wife and the eldership of my church at the same time.

Elder D— My response was to call the elders to his hospital bed and anoint him with oil and pray over him. He spent a month in Cedar's Sinai hospital battling the sickness and then recovering. My faith and trust in the Lord grew as I saw [name] recover and be finally released from the hospital.

Pastor E—(he didn't fill out the entire questionnaire—See #1 above):

Elder F— I don't know if my responses to the trials were godly or not. I pressed on in serving without my wife's full support, causing friction in our marriage. Ultimately I gave up rather than fight. It was important to meet the needs of my wife, although it was hard for me to understand and accept that this meant giving up some of the ministry that I loved. As to the trial from injuries in the car accident, God's mercy and grace is new every morning. He continues to draw me closer to Him, giving me a desire for Him and His Word, to know Him more, to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, and to fight the daily battle with sin and run the race to the glory of God. Are there times of discouragement

and depression? Oh yes! God is faithful. This world is not my home, and I desire more and more to be at home with Jesus.

- (c) Root—Your heart yearnings and reactions in the midst of the trial—the “wantings, cravings, intentions, thoughts, desires, etc” (the root in your inner man, causing the outer man responses)—what was going on in your heart in the midst of the trial? What “idols of the heart” were being exposed to yourself (Lk 6:43-45)
- Pastor A—Thinking that it is about me, missing that God was in control and that the problems were for my good! (Eventually I did begin to get this!)
- Elder B—(A) The only "desire" I had was to "hunker down and get through this." (B) The idol of my heart was that I "resented" something that so many parents liked had been taken away from them. Also, I was highly disappointed in the pastoral/elder staff that no one defended me after serving the church for 25 years. I wasn't mad at them, but it was illuminating to see so many people with feet of clay.
- Elder C— The reason for my anger was because I hated the fact, I found myself in these circumstances. I did not like the fact that there was a virus causing heart ache and division. I did not like that my wife lost her father to the virus and there was insensitivity from some in the church. I did not like the fact that I disagreed with some in leadership and that my wife was struggling as member of the church. I hated the fact that I might be perceived as a man in the church who can't “control” or “keep his wife in line” due to her views on covid. I did not want to be one of those men who had a wife that was not submissive. The idols being exposed were ones of comfort, no conflict and being perceived as having it all together and upholding an image as a model elder with a model wife.
- Elder D—nothing...
- Pastor E—(he didn't fill out the entire questionnaire—See #1 above):
- Elder F— See above (b)
- (d) Cross—What did you learn about yourself and how Jesus still had work to do in you? How did the our Great High Priest help you (Heb 4:14-16)?
- Pastor A—See (c)
- Elder B—(A) Look to help the people that are on the sidelines. (B) "What is that to thee? Follow thou me" .
- Elder C— I was reminded that an elder is first and foremost disciple of Christ. I was reminded that even elders are a work in progress and have areas on which they need a lot of sanctification and growth. The great high priest reminded me that I could come to him in my time of need. That he was interceding for me, and that holy spirit can change hearts and attitudes. I found hope and forgiveness for overcoming my struggles.
- Elder D— As a result of our experiences with [name], God has prepared us to minister to special needs people. We've been actively involved in a program called [ministry name] for at least 10 years at the [name] Church in [city name]. We've also served with [ministry name] in Peru on four different occasions.

Pastor E—(he didn't fill out the entire questionnaire—See #1 above):

Elder F— The older I get the more I know two things are true – I am a great sinner. Jesus Christ is a great Savior. It is my God's grace that He is drawing me closer to Him, to love Him more. He is my Great High Priest, who intercedes for me daily, through Whom I can enter the holy of holies, and come before the throne of grace to receive mercy every day. It is by His blood that I have been washed clean from my sin, have been made righteous, and now have an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, unfading, reserved in heaven for me. It is even protected by the power of God!!

I am so thankful every day. My serving right now is in praying for so many each day, and praying specifically for salvation for five people, that God will change their hearts, give them faith to believe, and save them. Occasionally God brings people into my life and gives me the opportunity and boldness to share my testimony and the gospel. I look for these opportunities. Maybe it's age, maybe it's that I don't care what people think of me anymore, but there is a boldness to share Christ. God is not finished with me yet. Even with a broken body that doesn't work well, and is weakened by constant pain, and with a brain that just isn't the same, God still wants to glorify Himself through me.

Even through the trials, even though I am not serving in the church that brought me so much joy, God's grace is sustaining. My desire is to know Him more, to love Him more, to fight sin every day. It is more difficult without a church body to encourage me. (We are starting to attend [church name] in [city name].)

- (e) Counsel—Who provided good counsel and comfort (& exhortation?) to you that proved a blessing—and what did they say or do—how did they minister to you?
 Pastor A—❶ My wife. ❷ Spurgeon (my wife and I read all three volumes of The Treasury of David together). ❸ One colleague in ministry (from another state) who said “The life will vindicate the ministry.”

Elder B—(A) No one provided me counsel.

(B) A parent of the Sunday school class was so upset that she went before the elders to confront them with her disappointment. She then contacted a Christian private school to tell them to hire me to teach my SS curriculum. I have now been doing that for 3-4 years.

Elder C— I received counsel from fellow elders and other brothers and sisters in Christ. I was reminded of the role I need to play as a leader and how God is in control. I was reminded that I needed to keep my eyes on the Lord and trust in him through all my circumstances.

Elder D— I didn't really receive any special counseling from anyone at that time. However God used it to prepare [wife's name] and I to minister to special needs people. [name] as a result of the meningitis was left with severe learning disabilities and a seizure disorder. We have spent 40 years learning how to deal with his special needs and how to train him to follow Jesus.

Pastor E—(he didn't fill out the entire questionnaire—See #1 above):

Elder F— [name] provided a listening ear, counsel, and support. The solutions were not easy. He has been a constant encourager, for which I am very grateful. I

know that what I was going through also affected him, likely hurt him deeply because we were close in the ministry.

- (f) Redemption—What changes happened in you, your life, your beliefs, your perspective, your process for dealing with trials, etc? How did you grow & change because of this trial (Jam. 1:2-4; Rom 8:28-29)?

Pastor A—Less committed to ministry tasks and organization, and more committed to the Lord and to my wife. We did a year-long “simplicity” make over in the church.

Elder B—(A) You simply see people, and yourself, as we really are, with very few searching for righteousness, but for self-validation.

(B) I was reinforced in the lesson I've learned many a time, that the people you think will help you tend to let you down, and God always supplies you with someone (or Himself) that brings you to a better path. "You and God make a majority."

Elder C— I realized that I had issues of pride in my life that I needed to deal with and that even an elder should seek counsel when he has a struggle. It drove me to greater concern about what kind of husband I needed to be for my wife. How can I best minister to her in all circumstances?

Elder D—see “g”—combined responses

Pastor E—(he didn't fill out the entire questionnaire—See #1 above):

Elder F— God has sustained my by His love, to know that He is Sovereign in ALL things, that He is using ALL things for my good, to conform me into the image of Christ. Most often I don't know what to do to handle the trials, to change the circumstances. In most cases I can't just easily fix the trials. But God still has given me a joy in the trials knowing that the testing of my faith can, and will, bring Him glory. I perspective has changed, as I have a view more toward heaven than on earth, that my citizenship is in heaven with Christ. Because of this my eyes are more on Him.

- (g) Benefit—How are you better able to help others in their trials because of what you endured and learned (2Cor 1:3-4)?

Pastor A—I became much more gospel & grace oriented.

Elder B—(Both) Let people know you are there for them, and that "Where God guides, He provides."

Elder C— I am not sure about this yet. I pray that the Lord makes the answer to this question clear to me at some point.

Elder D— God has used my whole experience in raising [name] to get me involved with special needs ministry and has changed my whole attitude from one of ignorance and neglect about special needs people to one of love and desire to share God's love with them through teaching and discipling them.

Pastor E—(he didn't fill out the entire questionnaire—See #1 above):

Elder F— I have learned to me much more honest with people, acknowledging my sin and shortcomings, sharing of God's mercy and grace. I think I've always had compassion for people, but now I have firsthand experience of weakness, failure, as well as successes and joy in all God has given me. The joy and benefit

of reading the Word each day for so many years is changing me. It really motivates me to encourage other believers to read, read, read!! There is so much that I don't know; but I do know that I have a Savior whose steadfast love is better than life.

Appendix B—Sample Evaluation Questions for Staff Discussion⁵⁶

[Leadership in the Church, p.22]

1. How should leadership in the church look different than leadership in the marketplace?
2. When you read troubling statistics about pastors, what is your response?
3. Parker Palmer said we have to pay attention to what’s going on inside us, “lest the act of leadership do more harm than good.” What are some ways in which leadership could do more harm than good?
4. How is your ministry doing at helping your leaders be spiritually healthy? What could you do better?

[Hard Questions for each other about the Soul, p28]

1. How well does your team engage in [personal, transparent] conversations? How well do you personally engage in [personal, transparent] conversations?
2. Who in your life has been helpful with your [personal, transparent]? How has that relationship been helpful?
3. If someone asked you today, “How is it with your soul?” what would you say?
4. What in ministry most pokes holes in your bucket and drains your soul? What steps could you take to keep this from happening?

[Focus on Christ, not Job, p. 34]

1. Share a little from your story of how you came to know and follow Jesus.
2. Share about a time or season when ministry felt like a burden. For you personally, when ministry becomes a burden, what are the signs?
3. How do you know when you are living in God’s power?
4. What are some ways you can keep the focus on the “gift” [Christ] instead of the “box” [job]?

[Re: Inner Man Attention, p. 38]

1. What are some signs when someone’s outward and inward lives aren’t integrated?
2. What is one area of gifting where you could be tempted to lead out of skill and not dependence on God?
3. When are you most vulnerable to propping up an external image that doesn’t match your internal world?
4. When you read the following statement, what thoughts and feelings are stirred in you?
“The older I get, the less concern I have with what I have or have not done and the more concern I have for what I have or have not become.”

⁵⁶ Summarized from Lance Witt’s *Replenish*. The questions are from the end of each chapter.

[Re: Ambition that is God-honoring, p. 44]

1. What is godly ambition? How is that different from personal ambition?
2. God wired us to have both a “fire in the belly” and a healthy soul (“spiritual recliner”). Which one gets the most attention in your life? What can you do to bring greater balance?
3. Solomon said that fire tests the purity of silver and gold, but a person is tested by being praised. Think of a time when success or achievement has been a test for you personally.
4. How can you be proactive to make sure personal ambition doesn’t hijack what God is doing in your ministry or church?

[Humility, p. 48]

1. What is meant by the statement, “When you’ve been in ministry leadership awhile, you learn how to cloak ambition in kingdom language. You can wrap ambition in God talk and sanctify it”? Give some examples.
2. What helps you discern God-motives from self-motives?
3. James says, “Wherever there is jealousy and selfish ambition, there you will find disorder and every kind of evil.” How does selfish ambition foster disorder and evil in a ministry context?
4. How do you have godly ambition and true humility?

[Isolation vs Accountability, p. 56]

1. Do you agree that “expanded leadership influence often goes hand in hand with increased relational isolation”? If so, what could be some reasons for this?
2. Proverbs 11:14 says that without wise leadership, a nation falls; there is safety in having many advisers. How are you personally and your ministry organization doing at having “many advisers”?
3. Do you have appropriate accountability in your life?
4. Practically speaking, what would it look like for you to be more accountable?
5. Solomon said, He who listens to a life-giving rebuke will be at home among the wise. How can a rebuke be life-giving?

[Slowing Down, p. 60]

1. Where does hurry show up in your life and ministry? What would the people who know you best say?
2. “Hurry is a devious soul enemy.” In what ways is that true in your own life? In your ministry life?
3. How might your ministry change if you learned to slow down?
4. What would it look like for you to “unstuck” your life’s (and your ministry’s) accelerator? Share one practical way you could slow down this week.

[Busyness vs Stillness...Martha syndrome in ministry, p. 66]

1. How would you describe the pace of your life over the past month?

2. How has busyness impacted the health of your soul? Your relationships?
3. From a practical perspective, what would it look like for you to do life and ministry at a reasonable pace?

[Re: Sunday “Show” and Numbers as “Success”, p. 72]

1. How does your ministry currently measure success? What gets celebrated?
2. Should your ministry adjust its view of success? If so, how?
3. How much has your sense of significance been tied to your ministry’s outward success?

Appendix C—Sample Accountability Questions⁵⁷

What is God teaching you today?⁵⁸

Are you regularly spending time in the Word of God and prayer?

Are you working on a particular area of growth in your walk with Christ and how are you progressing in it?

Do you and your [wife] regularly read the Word of God and pray together? Do you keep a weekly date night or at least some time alone together seeking to make your relationship stronger in the Lord?

Are you actively seeking to disciple your children?

Have you purposely spent time with an unbeliever, prayed for an opportunity to share Christ, and actually had a chance to give a witness if the Lord opened the door?

How are you seeking to multiply your efforts by making another disciple?

⁵⁷ Somerville, 327.

⁵⁸ Not part of the original. I've added it to start the questions and encourage thinking.

Appendix C—Sample Annual Evaluation⁵⁹

Employee: _____ **Date:** _____
Responsible to: _____ **Supervises:** _____

SUMMARY

The primary functions of this position are to provide oversight for the college and singles ministries and local outreach efforts of NorthCreek Church.

The following scale is to be used: + (strength), = (adequate), or – (developing) when rating each section below. **Your supervisor will then be making notations on the areas of strength and developing areas.**

I. Qualifications

- _____ Must be a person of true Christian experience and example, demonstrating maturity, stability and dependability (1 Peter 5:3). He will meet the qualifications of an elder, as set forth in the Scriptures (Titus 1:7-9; 1 Tim. 3:1-7) and the church bylaws.
- _____ Must be in full and continuous accord with the Statement of Faith of NorthCreek Church and will accept and work within the philosophical parameters of the church as established by the Senior Pastor and the Board of Elders. Shall be/become a church member.
- _____ Must be proficient in teaching the Scriptures, and demonstrate an affirmation of his calling, character, and abilities as a pastor and leader, preferably with experience working with college students and singles.
- _____ Must be ordained or licensed or will commit to pursuing ordination or licensing with the EFCA.
- _____ Must model a personal commitment to the church's mission to worship God, walk in love, and witness to the world. Thus, he must regularly worship God in the main worship service, walk in love in some form of community life outside of being on staff, and engage in some form of witness for Christ.

II. Relationships

⁵⁹ NorthCreek Church's *Ministry Review Form for Pastor of College & Singles*. Excellent questions covering ministry responsibilities but also relationships. This, in my opinion, is good example that helps promote both task and people in the thinking of those leading ministries.

_____ He will be responsible to the Lord Jesus Christ as the Head of the Church (Eph. 1:20-23).

_____ He will functionally and administratively report to the Executive Pastor but will be accountable to both the Senior Pastor and the Executive Pastor for his personal walk, his family life, and his ministry.

_____ He will participate in church staff meetings and church staff events as required.

III. Responsibilities

_____ **College:** Will provide leadership and oversight for Impact and all college ministries.

_____ **Singles:** Will provide leadership and oversight for Kaleo and Lighthouse.

_____ **Local Evangelism:** Will provide leadership and oversight for local outreach and evangelistic efforts of the church.

_____ **Pastoral duties:** Will perform normal pastoral duties including preaching and teaching, performing funerals, baptizing, and leading in communion, and counseling as needed by the church or delegated by the Senior Pastor.

_____ **Administrative:** Will set annual ministry goals, submit and administer an annual budget, and prepare an annual report.

_____ **Website:** Will provide oversight and direction for the ministry sections of the church website that he oversees.

Answer the following questions based on your reflections on your Job Description:

List three strengths...

-
-

List two to three areas where you might improve or further develop...

-
-

Comments on objectives from prior year:

-
-

Your supervisor(s) offer(s) the following feedback:

Three strengths to affirm are...

-
-

Two to three areas to stretch toward next year are...

-
-

Comments on objectives from prior year:

-

Objectives for the coming year:

-
-

A signature on this Annual Review does not necessarily mean that the employee agrees with the Annual Review but indicates that he/she acknowledges the Annual Review and has had an opportunity for discussion.

Employee Signature

Date

Executive Pastor Signature

Date

Senior Pastor Signature

Date
