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COVENANT THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

**RESTORATION OF PASTORS WHO LEFT THE MINISTRY
IN AN HONOR-SHAME-BASED SOCIETY LIKE SINGAPORE**

A Dissertation Submitted to the Faculty
of Covenant Theological Seminary
in Candidacy for the Degree of
Doctor of Ministry

By
Simon Nagarajan
Singapore

Saint Louis, Missouri

Covenant Theological Seminary

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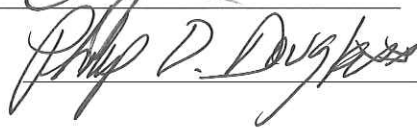
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Abstract

Not everyone who goes to Bible College ends up in the ministry. Not all who enter vocational ministry leadership remain in and serves until their last breath. Pastoral ministry is one of the most challenging professions one could have. Many pastors endure their vocational pressures with hard toil and tenaciously stay in the pastoral calling. Others, regardless of whether they are from East or West, leave ministry due to the difficult and problematic circumstances. Many never consider returning to serve full time as a pastor again. This mind-set is especially true of pastors who come from the honor-shame-based cultures.

Quitting ministry leadership has serious and long-term implications for Asian pastors. When pastors leave the vocational ministry in honor-shame-based cultures, they ran the risk of being unkindly labeled and cited as poor examples for the ministry. A few ex-pastors, after a season of rest and reflection, will seek to return to “finish the race” of their initial vocational calling despite the culturally embedded challenging obstacles. It is not easy for these Asian pastors to re-enter vocational ministry. Such attempts may go very poorly, and the returnee may suffer further shame and embarrassment through unkind remarks and unfriendly body language. The failed pastor’s family and close relatives undoubtedly will suffer embarrassment, shame, and emotional duress. In an Asian community, when one becomes a pastor surely calls for a big celebration, on the contrary, if he quits the ministry it becomes a big-time embarrassment.

Unable to weather post-return effects, some reinstated pastors will leave a second time. After this decision, they would hardly entertain the thought of attempting another return ever again.

The Asian church must face deep culturally-based challenges to apply love, grace, and mercies to the situation of ex-pastors trying to return to the pastorate. The local cultural practices of honor-shame-based cultures easily overshadow the scriptural injunctions in the church. For the church to offer the failed pastor a second chance, these churches must put up with local ethnic, cultural overtones, leaders' theological inaccurate perceptions and persuasions, and the congregants' mixed reactions towards the ex-pastors. The failed pastor may, fortunately, find grace in the eyes of the leadership, but in certain ethnicities, the congregation is the greatest obstacle

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Quitting vocational ministry has serious and long-term implications for pastors in Singapore. When pastors leave the ministry, they run the risk of being labeled as the New Testament Demas, one who loved the world and forsook his calling.¹ Largely, most pastors who left the ministry rarely return to vocational ministry leadership. However, some, after a season of rest and reflection and despite challenging obstacles, return to “finish the race” of their initial vocational calling.² It is not easy to re-enter vocational ministry.

In the context of a shame-honor-based society, past failures inexorably cast a deep and long shadow on the path of these pastors. Singapore, though a multi-racial society, is primarily composed of Asians and is profoundly fashioned with an honor-shame-based culture.³ Culture “patterns a way of thinking, feeling, and reacting to various situations and actions.”⁴ It is common in the city-state of Singapore for institutions to employ “the carrot of honor and stick of shame” to enforce desirable behavior.⁵ For instance, to deter littering, the Singapore National Environment Agency introduced Corrective Works

¹ 2 Timothy 4:10.

² 2 Timothy 4:7.

³ “Singapore Culture,” *Best Singapore Guide* (blog), accessed August 11, 2017, <http://www.best-singapore-guide.com/Singapore-culture.html/>.

⁴ Bob Burns, Tasha Chapman, and Donald Guthrie, *Resilient Ministry: What Pastors Told Us about Surviving and Thriving* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2013), 132.

⁵ Jayson Georges and Mark D. Baker, *Ministering in Honor-Shame Cultures: Biblical Foundations and Practical Essentials* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2016), 118.

Order in November 1992, that serves as a “stick of shame.”⁶ The courts will impose up to 12 hours of trash pick up in public areas on litter offenders. During the work, offenders are required to wear a fluorescent yellow vest that carries an abbreviation C.W.O to highlight their offense and shame them. This embarrassing measure serves to reform the offenders and deter others from littering in public places.

The Problem via a Personal Story

The researcher is a native of Singapore. He ordained as a pastor in 1994. Over the years, like a rock in the hands of the sculptor, God gradually and carefully chipped away unwanted and undesirable pieces from his life, punctiliously shaping him through the tools of experience, and polished him through the various seasons of pastoral ministry in Singapore. In the ministerial journey, some of the numerous challenges proved disheartening and demoralizing. There were moments where the harsh cultural climate came close to squashing the researcher’s fervency and ministerial calling. Many times, the author contemplated quitting the ministry, which serves to illustrate a few things. First, the vocational pastoral ministry is very challenging, since the cultural environment suffers an acute lack of grace, putting an enormous amount of performance expectations onto pastors. Uncertain which way to go, the researcher applied for a study leave for a year to pursue the M.A at a University in the USA. During this period, he engaged in serious reflection and gained new perspectives on the ministry work.

⁶ Nureza Ahmad, “Corrective Work Order,” Singapore Infopedia, Singapore National Library, 2012, http://www.eresources.nlb.gov.sg/infopedia/articles/SIP_469_2005-01-25.html.

Near the end of the author's time of the study, the momentous 9/11 tragedy took place, an incident that not only had a serious impact globally, but its aftermath was also unfavorable on the researcher as well. After September 11, a confused situation hung over the land of America, and the paranoia towards non-Americans could easily be felt in supermarkets, malls, and eateries. Activist, consultant, and writer Arjun Sethi wrote, "In the days and weeks following the attack, many religious and ethnic minorities were bullied, harassed and assaulted. On 15 September 2001, Balbir Singh Sodhi, a Sikh American, was murdered in a violent hate crime in Mesa, Arizona."⁷ Fearing hate crimes, and taking the advice of well-meaning people, the researcher cut short his studies, swiftly packed his bag, and fled for home.

Upon re-joining the ministry after over a year of sabbatical, the researcher ran into an unexpected and painful situation. This time, this crisis, proved to be the straw that broke the camel's back. In his darkest hour, his mind-voice very much resonated with Gary Kinnaman: "Maybe God didn't call me to the ministry. Maybe I should just quit...I know Jesus wants me to pay the price, but this is too much for my family and me to bear."⁸ After much contemplation and struggle, he left the ministry for good.

Unfortunately, the researcher fell into the statistics where research shows that 50% of new pastors will not last five years.⁹ There was no doubt in the researcher's mind that his

⁷ Arjun Sethi, "9/11 Was 15 Years Ago. Why Do So Many of Us Feel Less Safe?" *The Guardian*, September 8, 2016, <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/sep/08/9-11-us-safety-ethnic-racial-religious-profiling>.

⁸ Gary D. Kinnaman and Alfred H. Ells, *Leaders that Last: How Covenant Friendships Can Help Pastors Thrive*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2003), 13.

⁹ Bo Lane, "Why Do So Many Pastors Leave the Ministry?: The Facts Will Shock You," *Expastors*, January 27, 2014, <http://www.expastors.com/why-do-so-many-pastors-leave-the-ministry-the-facts-will-shock-you/>.

decision to quit would firmly shut the door from ever returning to vocational ministry. Briggs, in his book *Fail*, mentions “The crisis of failure is a fork in the road: it has the potential to transform or destroy.”¹⁰ Only the future will tell the outcome of the researcher’s decision.

Rarely pastors who quit the ministry show up at the church’s door-steps to seek re-entry into vocational ministry, let alone, to the same church they served before! Leaving the ministry is a very humbling and reprehensible experience, especially so in a shame-honor-based community. The “humble pie” served to the returnee is much bigger. The severity well demonstrated when the researcher’s mother, at her deathbed, in the final moments of her life, refused to speak to him for the shame and disappointment she and her family experienced because of his resignation from the pastorate.

In total, the researcher was away from the ministry for six years. There were several moments during this period when he felt the Lord’s prompting in his heart to consider his ways and return to the pastorate seriously. On the sixth year, the Lord brought him under great conviction through a variety of situations that created sufficient pressure on him to relent to the Lord’s leading and will. It was no longer possible to ignore the heavy hand of the Lord.¹¹ To borrow Kinnaman’s words, “people change ...when the pain to change becomes less painful than the pain to remain the same.”¹²

Moreover, the Lord made it plain to him through a specific situation to return to the very church he left. He approached the church leadership, expressed in writing to the

¹⁰ J.R. Briggs, *Fail: Finding Hope and Grace in the Midst of Ministry Failure* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2014), 42.

¹¹ Psalm 32:4.

¹² Kinnaman and Ells, 1.

Board of Elders his regretful decision, and unreservedly apologized for his action. The Pastors and Elders graciously considered his request to return. They held a series of interviews to ascertain his genuineness and to highlight the seriousness of his past decision. The leadership, to establish the researcher's genuineness to return to the ministry, he was dispatched for a short stint to do missions in a tough place half way across the globe. In the past, before he left the ministry, he avoided going to this mission field for reasons only known to him. This time round, the researcher submitted without a qualm. The leaders inducted the researcher into the church with a reasonable measure of discipline, and after serving his probational period through congregational elections to his former office. Through these experiences, the researcher's observation, experience, and learning will serve valuable insights for churches in the shame-honor-based communities.

The Problem of Pastoral Sustainability and Renewal

Ministry in the church is unlike any other vocation. Not all who come into the pastoral ministry remain in it until the last breath. Standing Stone Ministry's website suggests that 75% of pastors in America want to quit. Further, it highlights that 2000 pastors are leaving the ministry each month.¹³ Highly reliable data on the statistics of people leaving the pastorate are not available. However, many authors during the past decade considering the situation a crisis. Undoubtedly, pastors start with colossal energy, with fire in their bones, and with reformers' vision and enthusiasm, yet, over time various factors seriously undermine this impressive beginning in the ministry. As Wayne pointed

¹³ "Top 2 Causes for Pastors Leaving Ministry and More Statistics," Standing Stone Ministry, accessed August 3, 2017, <https://www.standingstoneministry.org/top-2-causes-for-pastors-leaving-ministry-and-more-statistics/>.

out, “zeal and good intention can fuel us in the beginning, but they won’t last for a long haul.”¹⁴ Ministerial work is often a thankless job that demands everything from the minister without a commensurate return. Pastors face conflictual leaders, pockets of obstinate congregants, members “hard of hearing,” endless work, unfair treatment, lack of appreciation, misconstrued and extravagant expectations, and the relentless struggles with sin and self. Also, the cry of the pastor’s family often goes unheard. Quoting from a participant in the research published in *Resilient Ministry*, “People think that if you marry a pastor, you will get pastored all the time. But this is far from the truth. Some pastors are so focused on others that they fail to be aware of how their spouses are doing.”¹⁵ Quoting author and pastor Philip Wagner, “Ninety percent of pastors said the ministry was completely different than what they thought it would be like before they entered the ministry.”¹⁶

These harsh and exacting conditions have driven many pastors to the point of desperation. A survey released in September 2015, shows the real-life challenges pastors face: 84% stay on call 24 hours, 80% expect conflict in their church, 54% find the role of pastor frequently overwhelming, 48% often feel the demands of ministry are far more than they can handle.”¹⁷

¹⁴ Wayne Cordeiro, *Leading on Empty: Refilling Your Tank and Renewing Your Passion* (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House Publishers, 2009), 31.

¹⁵ Burns, Chapman, and Guthrie, 25.

¹⁶ Philip Wagner, “The Secret Pain of Pastors,” *Church Leaders*, September 5, 2018, www.churchleaders.com/pastors/pastor-articles/167379-philip-wagner-secret-pain-of-pastors.html.

¹⁷ Heidi Hall, “Hard Job, High Calling,” *Pastors, Christianity Today*, December 28, 2015, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/pastors/2016/winter/hard-job-high-calling.html>.

To compound the situation, these busy pastors often have not created a small pastoral care group where they can share their burdens, or from whom they can seek counsel or emotional support. “Isolation is bad self-care...”¹⁸ Consequently, discouraged and disappointed preachers and pastors often resign from their sacred callings and find an alternative vocation in the marketplace. This phenomenon is not exclusive to pastors in the western world, for their counterparts in Asia suffer no less but with an additional dimension that is unique to shame-honor-based societies.

The Asian church’s perspective of ministry allows little or no space for pastors to contemplate quitting the ministry for any reason other than serious disciplinary issues which church leaders would initiate. Asian pastors over time have taught the congregation a ministry philosophy derived from the words of Christ, “If anyone would come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow Me.”¹⁹ Often in the Asian church, this statement is applied to pastors uniquely in combination with Jesus’ words, “No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God.”²⁰ These passages shape a foundational belief in the hearts of the pastors, church leaders, and congregants: pastors, despite tough times and terrible experiences, will persevere but never, ever contemplate leaving the ministry. It is a till-death-do-us-part commitment in these churches. In the same vein, not all pastors have the tenacity, courage, and strength to combat the physical, emotional, and social challenges

¹⁸ Burn, Chapman, and Guthrie, 20.

¹⁹ Luke 9:23.

²⁰ Luke 9:62.

of the ministry with fortitude and resilience. Some pastors collapse under the immense pressure.

The data summaries of statistics of pastors leaving the ministry in the USA are quite a revelation.²¹ The statistics indicate 70% of pastors constantly fight depression, 50% are unable to meet the demands of the ministry, and 50% feel so discouraged that they want to leave the ministry. The Fuller Institute reports that in 2015, each month 1,700 pastors left the ministry. Consequently, many denominations report an “empty pulpit crisis” for lack of pastors willing to fill the positions.²² Eugene Peterson in his forward for J.R. Briggs’ book “Fail” wrote, “...he (Briggs) became aware of the dimensions of pastoral failure, grimly underlined by the statistic that fifteen hundred pastors abandon their pastoral vocation every month because of either burnout or contention in their congregations.”²³

From rigorous searching, the researcher did not find reliable data on the Internet or in published documents regarding the number of Asian pastors who left the ministry in parts of East Asia. Neither are there books and periodicals primarily written in the context of pastors leaving the church ministry in East Asian churches, let alone the issues faced by such pastors seeking re-entry in the ministry. *Impact Magazine* (the only Christian journal in Singapore), has no research on this topic.

²¹ “Statistics in the Ministry,” Pastoral Care, Inc., accessed September 29, 2016, <http://www.pastoralcareinc.com/statistics/>.

²² “Statistics in the Ministry,” Pastoral Care, Inc., accessed September 29, 2016, <http://www.pastoralcareinc.com/statistics/>.

²³ Briggs, 9.

The lack of research and literature amplifies the Asian's negative perception of pastors who leave the ministry. Pastors who left the ministry regarded by the Christians poorly. It is a stigma in shame-honor-based society. Another slogan Singaporeans apply on pastors is, "No retirement in the Lord's service." In the face of this Asian culture and ministerial perception, a pastor who left the ministry would rarely consider returning to the ministry. Leaving ministry is a one-way ticket with the added lifetime burden of public shame from being a failure.

The researcher spoke to a Korean pastor who confirmed this truth and also admitted the lack of written documents on this specific issue.²⁴ A Vietnamese pastor reiterated this fact.²⁵ This unfortunate condition only adds considerable strain to the shortage of pastors in the ministry.²⁶ Jesus underlined in bold and pre-empted the general labor shortage in his words to the disciples, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into His harvest field."²⁷

Ironically, in the face of critical clergy shortages, Asian churches are not ready to welcome pastors who seek to return to the ministry. The shame-honor-based cultural perception and the perceived biblical injunctions for the pastoral vocation, which are held by the gate-keepers of the church, pose steep challenges to pastors seeking to re-enter into the ministry. To further add to the plight, even when pastors manage a return to the ministry, the unfavorable perceptions by some leaders, including the pastors, may

²⁴ Rev. Lee Donghyun, interview by author, Singapore, August 4, 2017.

²⁵ Rev. Vo Hoang Phong, interview by author, Singapore, August 4, 2017.

²⁶ Rev. Freddy Yong Kai Siew, interview by author, August 8, 2017

²⁷ Matthew 9:37-38.

severely hinder and impede the re-joining-pastors' renewed commitment and favor for service. The "body language" of the church constantly reminds such pastors how they failed in the past to be faithful to their calling.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to explore, from a cultural and biblical standpoint, how Asian pastors in Singapore describe best practices for restoring those who have left the pastorate back into employment as pastors.

Research Questions

The following research questions guide this study:

1. In what ways and to what extent do honor-shame-based cultural perceptions factor into those who have left the pastorate back into employment as pastors?
2. How are those who have left the pastorate received by the church when returning to employment as pastors?
 - a. How are they treated by the existing Church pastors?
 - b. How are they perceived by the existing Church pastors?
 - c. How are they treated by the existing congregants?
 - d. How are they perceived by the congregants?
3. What scriptural principles do pastors reference when describing best practices for restoring those who have left the pastorate back into employment as pastors?
4. What cultural practices do pastors reference when describing best practices for restoring those who have left the pastorate back into employment as pastors?

The Significance of the Study

The significance of the study is to inform the church of the hindrances and challenges that failed pastors face when they decide to return to the ministry. This study recognizes that some pastors, who started well in vocational ministry, later departure from the ministry due to high pressures from internal and external factors.

Next, this study seeks to help the church recognize that through divine providence, some pastors who left the ministry may decide to return to the ministry. Rather than being a hindrance for returning pastors, the church may gain ways to encourage and help the returning process from this research. This research can help to prepare church leaders to take steps to prime the congregation for the incoming ex-pastor's smooth transition back into the pastorate. Exercising such care could enable the incoming pastors to settle quickly and work comfortably in the given area of service. Therefore, the health of the church might greatly increase by acting from the findings of this research.

Thirdly, this research can help the church to give careful attention to the scriptural teachings on grace, comfort, and restoration. The research findings will necessarily raise questions concerning the Asian culture's impact and the theological interpretations that influence the dilemmas faced by pastors around these issues. The finding will provide suggestions that could help the church leaders to facilitate a smooth transition for the incoming ex-pastor back into the pastorate. The research findings will also provide the key pastors and lay leaders, who serve as the gatekeepers of the church, new information about the process of rehiring previous pastors so that those who hire pastors might reconsider cultural norms and perceptions of biblical injunctions. The findings will help church leaders consider more grace-based approaches to helping pastors who have quit

the pastorate. Thus, the church might benefit by having more pastors due to the applications of these research findings.

Definition of Terms

Re-drafting—The process of pastors who have left the ministry for certain reasons seeking to come into vocational ministry again.

Asian Culture—This refers to countries in Southeast Asia: Thailand, Vietnam, Indonesia, India, Korea, Japan, Singapore, Malaysia, Philippines, Brunei, Cambodia, Myanmar, Laos.

Shame-Honor-Based (or Shame-Based) Culture—The type of culture, as opposed to “guilt-based” cultures, imposes its designation of moral behavior and when violated will shame the individual thus forcing the guilty to compliance or else will suffer ostracism from the community.

Grace-Based—Is a Christ-focused ministerial approach where experiencing God’s unmerited favor is kept at the forefront of one’s mind and at the integral part of one’s heart in processing all analysis and the formulation of all decisions.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

The purpose of this study is to explore, from a cultural and biblical standpoint, how Asian pastors in Singapore describe best practices for restoring those who have left the pastorate back into employment as pastors. This chapter explores and identifies the challenges faced by Asian pastors who left the ministry due to certain personal or ministerial pressures. After years away, some pastors seek to return to the pastoral work. This chapter surveys four literature areas to provide a foundation for the qualitative analysis of the interview data: challenges pastors face in ministry sustainability, shame-based cultural obstacles to re-entering the pastorate, misperception of certain biblical injunctions, and biblical basis for pastors to return to ministry.

Challenges Pastors Face in Ministry Sustainability

This area of the literature review briefly explores some of the reasons why pastors, who started well with enthusiasm and a clear sense of calling from God for a lifetime of ministry leadership, find themselves contemplating and eventually making the tough decision to quit the ministry. Eugene Peterson writes, “Pastors have an extremely difficult job to do, and it’s no surprise that so many are discouraged and ready to quit.”²⁸ In another book Peterson comments, “Failure is the not the last word in the pastor’s life. But you can’t deal with it by yourself. The pastoral vocation is fraught with danger.” Briggs describes a sorry state of church affairs,

²⁸ Marva J. Dawn and Eugene Peterson, *The Unnecessary Pastor: Rediscovering the Call* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2000), 183.

As I survey the landscape of churches, I see an overwhelming amount of lonely, wounded and discouraged pastors whose soul seem to be on life support. The thought jolts me, is this what Jesus had in mind for pastors—a life absent of joy and peace, and with omnipresent stress and emotional hardship.²⁹

Two seasoned and mature pastors were conversing with fellow pastors regarding the difficulties of the ministry and the temptation to flee. One minister said, “ On really bad days the only light in the tunnel was the light of a train to take him away.”³⁰

To amplify the point, the researcher takes the liberty to quote the statistics³¹ that Briggs has gathered from numerous sources to project the poignant state of the pastoral ministry in North America.

Statistics:

- 1,500 pastors leave the ministry for good each month due to burnout or contention with their churches.
- 50% of pastors marriages end in divorce.
- 80% of pastors (and 84% of their spouses) are discouraged in their role as pastors.
- 40% of pastors seriously considered leaving the pastorate in the past three months.
- Pastors who work fewer than 50 hours a week are 35% more likely to be terminated.
- For every 20 pastors who go into ministry, only one retires from ministry.
- 80% of pastors report ministry adversely affected their family.

²⁹ Briggs, 16

³⁰ Derek Prime and Alistair Begg, *On Being a Pastor: Understanding Our Calling and Work*, (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2004), 289.

³¹ Briggs, 46-47

- 50% of pastors say they are unable to meet the demands of their job and are so discouraged that they would leave the ministry if they could, but have no other way of making a living.
- 25% of pastors have been forced out or fired from their ministry at least once.
- 90% of pastors say that they were inadequately trained to cope with their job.
- 45% of pastors say they have experienced depression or burnout to the extent they need to take a leave of absence.
- Almost 40% of pastors polled said they had an extramarital affair since the beginning of their ministry.
- Of 1,050 pastors surveyed by the Schaeffer Institute, every one of them—100% -- had a close associate or friend from the seminary who had left the ministry because of burnout, conflict in the church, or from a moral failure.
- 37% of pastors admit internet pornography is a current struggle.
- 70% of pastors say they do not have a single close friend.
- 70% of pastors say they have lower self-esteem than when they entered the ministry.
- Denominational health insurance agencies report that medical cost for clergy is higher than for any other professional group.
- Additionally, the Alban Institute published a report finding that of their sample group, 62% of pastors reported having little spiritual life.

Tim Keller who has written several bestsellers explains that God's love and forgiveness have the power to pardon any and every kind of sin or wrongdoing. It doesn't

matter who you are or what you have done. It doesn't matter if you have deliberately oppressed or even murdered people, or how much you have abused yourself."³² The Bible heralds the God purpose and intention that He is reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And He has committed to us the message of reconciliation.³³

The following section identifies some of the common yet potent areas that give pastors enormous trouble possibly leading to vocational failure. Briggs from his observation writes that some failures are on a systematic level, others on a personal level. Some failures are tragic and devastating; others are smaller and less discernible. Some failures are moral; others are merely practical.³⁴

This research will not attempt to provide an exhaustive list of conditions that contribute to vocational failures. However, consider the most common causes below that eventually drives a pastor out of the ministry.

Moral Failures

There is a variety of moral failures where the integrity of pastors is called into question. The failures may be the outcome of their overtone of power, ego, pride, and greed driven pursuits. Pastors who succumbed to these problems are often counseled and supported to change. However, when it comes to sexual sins, the church leadership is usually quick to expel the pastor from their community, as the Jews of old would with a

³² Timothy Keller, *The Prodigal God, Recovering the Heart of the Christian Faith* (New York: Penguin Books, 2008), 24.

³³ 2 Corinthians 5:19

³⁴ Briggs, 24

leper. With testosterone and estrogen being produced in the body continuously unless impeded by aging or impairment—sexual temptation will remain a major threat that has the potential to ruin any pastoral ministry.³⁵

It is not uncommon, for people facing marital problems, financial struggles, challenges in the marketplace, and other difficulties to approach their pastors for comfort, counsel, and guidance. The challenge of sexual temptation is a specific problem when women counselees work with male pastors. While doing this ministry, over time, the development of semi-intimacy becomes very possible. In such sessions, secrets, graphic details, passionate longings are confided in confidentially. Over time, given the “favorable” environment, steady flow of intimate details, frequent and necessary pastoral counseling sessions can fire up imaginations and activate the bodily pharmaceutical chemicals in both parties that will drive the instinct towards improper sexual behavior.

This undesirable situation becomes all too possible when marriage bonds in either or both parties are very weak. When all the wrong ingredients fall rightly in place, both parties may be swept away into sexual sin, followed by a tsunami of shame and despair. When exposed, the ecclesiastical judicial system steps in to sort things out. In general, with the expected outcome, the pastor works towards a quick departure from the ministry and would never imagine ever coming back to the ministry. Plus, the culturally induced communal shame pressures the pastor not to entertain the thought of returning to ministry.

³⁵ G. Lloyd Rediger, *Beyond the Scandals: A Guide to Healthy Sexuality for Clergy* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2003), 11.

The question before the church is, is there no possibility what so ever of restoring a pastor who has committed sexual transgression? The answer to this question comes from two camps in the ecclesiastical world. The first camp completely denies any provision in the Bible that could entertain restoration for a pastor who committed sexual sins. The differing camp argues that there isn't a sin that cannot be taken care by the atonement of Christ on the cross.³⁶ The guilty only requires repenting, returning and restoration in the path of righteousness.

No-Return Camp

John MacArthur vehemently objected to the idea of taking failed pastors back into the ministry. He said,

“Some have claimed that a leader's failure makes him more effective in shepherding fallen people. That is ludicrous. Should we drag the bottom of sin's cesspool for the most heinous sinners to lead the church? Are they better able to understand the sinner? Certainly not!”³⁷

The renowned Bible Commentator further highlighted that church leaders must reflect Christ through their blameless and disciplined character. Once a pastor had fallen into sin, he is irreparable and restorable to lead the church. He ridiculed the notion that fallen pastors can minister more effective because they have stumbled in life. He considered such proposition as unbiblical. MacArthur conclusively said that trust forfeited, and purity sacrificed, obliterate the possibility for any pastor to lead the flock by example.

³⁶ 1 John 1:9.

³⁷ John MacArthur, “Should Fallen Pastors Be Restored?,” Grace to You, OnePlace, accessed September 30, 2017, <https://www.oneplace.com/ministries/grace-to-you/read/articles/should-fallen-pastors-be-restored-8881.html>.

Hughes and Armstrong highlighted in their article a similar position to MacArthur's. Firstly, they have no issues exercising forgiveness towards a repentant fallen pastor. They have no qualms absorbing the failed pastor into the body of believers in fellowship and service. However, no pastoral office considered for the failed pastor. They are focusing on a specific nature of sin that disqualifies a failed pastor. Mentioned in their article, "The "forgiveness approach" is inadequate because it does not deal realistically with two facts: First, adultery is a great sin; and second, pastoral adultery is an even greater sin."³⁸

Hope-of-Restoration Camp

Jody Seymour is the Senior Pastor of David's United Methodist Church in Davidson, North Carolina. In one of his books "A Time for Healing," he acknowledges this common perspective,

"One of my greatest pains is to see how we treat those of our own who fall victim to passions, especially the sexual ones. It is as if sexual misconduct is the unforgivable sin. Once the minister steps over this line, there is no going back."³⁹

Here again, sadly, ministers leave the ministry with a heavy and broken heart, laden with guilt and stigma, demolished of all standing and destroyed as a human with no prospect of returning. The globe is not void of examples where churches exercise grace and demonstrate Christ like love for the fallen. Christian Post periodical carries a report of

³⁸ R. Kent Hughes and John H. Armstrong, "Should Adulterous Pastors Be Restored?," *Christianity Today*, September 4, 2015. <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/1995/april-3/should-adulterous-pastors-be-restored.html>.

³⁹ Jody Seymour, *A Time for Healing: Overcoming the Perils of Ministry* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1995), 28.

Bishop J.T Jakes in his potter's house ministry restoring his senior pastor who had fallen into adultery.

Three months after resigning as senior pastor of The Potter's House Church of Denver over an alleged affair with a married parishioner, Pastor Chris Hill says he is ready to come back following counseling and a public show of repentance Sunday. His mentor, Bishop T. D. Jakes of Potter's House of Dallas, laid hands on him and declared restoration. 'God said that if we confess our sins, that He is faithful and just to cleanse us from ... all unrighteousness. I just believe that this is what the grace of God is for,' Jakes said as he laid his hand on Hill's shaved head in a video clip from T.D. Jakes Ministries Sunday."⁴⁰

On May 2012, National Association of Evangelical magazine reported that almost all evangelical Christian leaders, including denominational heads, agree that a pastor guilty of adultery can be restored to a pastoral position, according to the Evangelical Leaders Survey. Only 5% of the participants in the survey indicated that adultery would disqualify one from ever holding another pastoral position. In the same periodical, Leith Anderson, President of the NAE states that Evangelical leaders are adamant that the grace of God extends even to ministry leaders who commit adultery. said which recently released the NAE Code of Ethics for Pastors to provide a standard professional ethical guideline for evangelical pastors.

John Jenkins, a megachurch pastor, explains that the gospel aims to restore. Therefore pastors should not be exempted from that same grace. Likewise, Berten Waggoner, National Director of Vineyard USA, voiced his persuasion saying that there is

⁴⁰ Leonardo Blair, "With Blessing From TD Jakes, Chris Hill Says He's Ready for Ministry 3 Months After Affair Scandal," *The Christian Post*, August 9, 2017, <http://www.christianpost.com/news/with-blessing-from-td-jakes-chris-hill-says-hes-ready-for-ministry-3-months-after-affair-scandal-194914/>.

no sin that a person, including pastors, cannot be both forgiven of and restored in every way. This is the message of grace and the hope of resurrection life.”⁴¹

The NAE survey provided a good harvest of practical and grace centered suggestions that could help guide the church in the exercise of restoring pastors who had fallen into sexual sins. To begin with, most of the participants recommended that the fallen pastor not return to the same church.

Requirements for restoration mentioned include:

- The immediate breaking of the adulterous relationship
- Genuine repentance
- Cessation of pastoral ministry for at least one year
- Completion of a restoration process under denominational direction.

Leaders gave varied responses regarding the time required for this process, ranging from at least one year to at least three years.

- Submission and accountability to a council of overseers
- Restorative counseling including family repair and renewal
- Supervised preaching
- Recommendations from others regarding the person’s fitness to return to ministry
- Restoration to a different church, community or position
- Restoration to a position other than the senior pastorate
- A church’s desire to receive the restored pastor

⁴¹ “Can Pastors Be Restored After Adultery?,” National Association of Evangelicals, May 2012, <https://www.nae.net/can-pastors-be-restored-after-adultery/>.

- Commitment to ongoing, systematic accountability⁴²

John Piper gently and graciously gives his answer to this hot-button question-can a pastor fallen into sexual sin, if repentant, can be restored or is such a pastor disqualified because he no longer meets the qualification of being "above reproach"? He highlights the fact that many evangelical authors in the USA seem to take the position that a pastor who has sinned sexually can be a pastor again. They cite the reason being the grace of God provides for this and the fact that "above reproach" can be restored, probably. But there is a catch. Forgiveness comes quickly, expensively, and immediately, on repentance. But the people's trust does not and cannot. Piper argues, if a pastor has betrayed his people via sexual sin, and it has wounded a church and his wife grievously, he can receive forgiveness. The evangelical congregants will hold that the blood of Jesus covers his sin and the love of God empowers others to forgive him. But as far as reestablishing trust, which is essential to a shepherd/sheep and wife/husband relationship, how long does that take, he asked. He answers, it takes a long time, a long time, until memories healed.

Piper continues saying that many fall, and then insert themselves quickly into another kind of ministry leadership. "And that's just, I think, evidence that they don't fathom what has happened."⁴³

Alfred Ells brings to our attention the passage in the New Testament, "Brothers if anyone caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of

⁴² "Can Pastors Be Restored After Adultery?," National Association of Evangelicals, May 2012, <https://www.nae.net/can-pastors-be-restored-after-adultery/>.

⁴³ John Piper, "Is It Possible to Restore a Pastor Who Has Sinned Sexually?," *Desiring God*, April 20, 2009, <https://www.desiringgod.org/interviews/is-it-possible-to-restore-a-pastor-who-has-sinned-sexually>.

gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted.”⁴⁴ In response to the passage, he endeavors to provide a template for restoration ministry for fallen pastors, especially, fallen into sexual sin. The following gracious steps may work for the restoration of failed pastors for other reasons as well. Ells writes:

Restoration is a worthwhile endeavor, which requires wisdom. ...

Make sure the person is a good candidate for restoration.

While many are sorry they have sinned, only some are truly penitent and willing to be restored. A candidate for restoration must declare and exemplify a willingness to do whatever is necessary to be healed. He or she must be broken in spirit. This means that the individual must surrender control of his or her life to God and those in authority and recognize that he or she got into trouble by not doing so in the first place. Unwillingness on any part of these efforts is a signal that the person is not ready for restoration.

Strike a balance between public and private disclosure.

A too public or too negative declaration of transgression and the resulting shame makes restoration harder for offender and family while serving no fruitful purpose for the church. A good rule of thumb is to share only generalities within the individual’s circle of influence or audience participation. ...

Involve the key people in the fallen individual’s life.

No matter the cause of the downfall, restoration requires a coordinated effort of the key people in the individual’s life. If a male leader has been unfaithful, his wife, possibly his adult children, his pastoral authority, a counselor, an assigned elder, and his best friends must be involved. ...

Appoint a restoration team to oversee the process.

Gather a group of individuals willing to serve as a restoration team. Appoint a leader, provide the team with resources and charge them with the task of diligently seeking the restoration of the fallen one. A team of three or more will always work better than the pastor alone. Teamwork provides perspective, shares the workload, helps break through denial and defensiveness, and allows for better accountability.

Choose respected and qualified individuals for the team. ...

⁴⁴ Galatians 6:1.

Have a written plan of restoration.

The team should work out a plan to follow. It is best to write it out and give a copy to the fallen leader. Bob Mumford, a known Christian leader, advises that a sound plan should be built around the following six goals:

1. Forgive the person before you do anything else.
2. Suspend the person from his or her duties – take him or her out of the front lines of battle.
3. Instruct the fallen person – counsel, teach, disciple, etc.
4. Support the individual and his family. This means emotionally, spiritually and especially financially.
5. Test the person when you think he or she is ready. If he or she passes the test, great! If not, reassess.
6. Restore the individual to a place and position of ministry with your full support and announcement that he or she has been restored.

Have patience — restoration takes time.

The sin at hand did not develop overnight, but most likely built up over time. Therefore, it will take time—weeks, months, maybe years—to undo. The fallen leader will need ample amounts of prayer, humility, and counsel to overcome the problem. Be patient, forthright with the individual and diligent. A restored leader has a life message that can touch countless other lives. This is what the gospel is all about.⁴⁵

In the endeavor to practice grace, restoring a failed pastor, the receiving church must take steps to establish the genuineness of the failed pastor's repentance and his sincerity to serve with a servant-heart attitude in appreciation of the second chance given to him. The senior pastor must work out a plan to walk with the restored pastor for a season to readjust to ministry demands, help cope with possible lack of self-esteem, and dealing with his past. Next, the leading pastor of the receiving church in consensus with his leadership discloses information wisely and carefully without adversely affecting the failed pastor's future ministry as well as his family's well-being in the church. Minimize the shame and embarrassment but maximize effort to encourage love and grace. In the restoration process, very often, the failed pastor's family is overlooked. Some

⁴⁵ Al Ells, "Catching the Fallen," 1997, http://www.leadersthatlast.org/pdfs/restoring_fallen_leaders.pdf.

arrangements must be considered to walk the failed pastor's wife and children through a support group.

Leadership Conflicts

The book *Conflict Ministry in the Church* defines conflict: "A conflict is a situation which two or more human beings desire goals which are perceived as being attainable by one or the other but not by both."⁴⁶ Lewis gives his definition as, "Conflicts is two or more objects aggressively trying to occupy the same space at the same time."⁴⁷ Coser frames the idea of conflict as, "a struggle over values and claims to scarce status, power, and resources in which the opponents aim to neutralize, injure or eliminate their rivals."⁴⁸ These definitions indicate a strong drive to establish and develop in others how one's thought, goals, and perception is superior to the rest and pushes towards securing it for oneself.

Loehr comments, "Conflict happens, whether we want it to or not. Most of us have a strong, visceral reaction to conflict, including (but not limited to) fear, avoidance, excitement and dread. However, when you boil it down, conflict is just when one person's desires are different from the other person. The emotions that conflict evokes can often make situations seem explosive."⁴⁹ Loehr's definition plainly states that each

⁴⁶ Larry L. McSwain and William C. Treadwell, Jr., *Conflict Ministry in the Church* (Nashville, TN: Broadham Press, 1981), 25.

⁴⁷ G. Douglass Lewis, *Resolving Church Conflicts: A Case Study Approach for Local Congregations* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1981), 73.

⁴⁸ Lewis A. Coser, *The Functions of Social Conflict* (Glencoe, IL: The Free Press, 1956), 8.

⁴⁹ Anne Loehr, "Leadership Guide for Handling Conflict," *HuffPost*, May 15, 2014, https://www.huffpost.com/entry/leadership-guide-for-hand_b_5327795.

person is hard wired uniquely and differently formed by various elements that inevitably will cause conflict in the cause of interaction of ideas and the realization of those ideas.

From the Biblical account, there are a variety of situations that evoke conflicts between persons. In the Garden of Eden, the residences violated stipulated “company’s rules” that immediately ensued with conflict and blame-shifting to save one’s skin.⁵⁰ Between Cain and Abel, the conflict resulted out of jealousy.⁵¹ Next, between Sarah and her maid Hagar “employer-employee” conflict born out within the camp to secure privileges and inheritances.⁵² The infamous conflict between Saul and David highlights the cause of insecurity of the king of Israel.⁵³ The conflict between Jonah and God underlines the strong personal persuasions that influence unrest within and without.⁵⁴

The co-author Shelley in her book *Mastering Conflict & Controversy* comments on the account in Acts 2:44-47 that very soon the peace and harmony in the early church quickly transformed. Not only is the church threatened by outside enemies, but the extraordinary unity within was apparently short-lived. Complaints arose about the way the church was caring for the widows. Later, the church was divided over lifestyle expectations for the new converts. Still later, Paul and Barnabas sharply disagreed over a

⁵⁰ Genesis 3:8-13.

⁵¹ Genesis 4:3-8.

⁵² Genesis 16:4-6.

⁵³ 1 Samuel 18:7-9.

⁵⁴ Jonah 4:1-4.

staffing decision, and they parted ways. Procedures, prerequisites, and personnel—are all areas that continue to challenge unity today.⁵⁵

In the New Testament, there are two familiar incidents where serious conflict arose in leadership. Paul in his letter to the Galatians mentioned that he stood up against the Apostle Peter when he was found wrong.

When Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned. For before certain men came from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles. But when they arrived, he began to draw back and separate himself from the Gentiles because he was afraid of those who belonged to the circumcision group. The Jews joined him in his hypocrisy, so that by their hypocrisy even Barnabas was led astray. When I saw that they were not acting in line with the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas in front of them all, “You are a Jew, yet you live like a Gentile and not like a Jew. How is it, then, that you force Gentiles to follow Jewish customs?”⁵⁶

The conflict arose when Paul found Peter to be inconsistent in his theological practice. On the other hand, Peter was more careful of his Jerusalem office and wanted to keep it free from conflicts that may arise because of his association with the Gentiles.

Harry A. Ironside an internationally renowned Bible teacher, who authored several commentaries on the Old and New Testament books explains that Peter belonged to the time where Jews and gentiles don't entertain the idea of providing hospitality or fellowship for one another. Despite, the marvelous revelation that he had when the sheet was let down from heaven and the Lord instruction not to regard anything unclean when God has made clean. At the sight of the legalists, he very quickly reverted

⁵⁵ Edward G. Dobson, Speed B. Leas, and Marshall Shelley, *Mastering Conflict & Controversy*, (Portland, OR: Multnomah Publishing, 1992), 15-26.

⁵⁶ Galatians 2:11-14.

to his old practices ignoring all about Pentecost, all about the blessing that had come, all about Acts 10:28.⁵⁷

Dr. Krejcir remarks that our human nature loves to be in competition and fights, but God has a higher call for us. He borrows the words of the Apostle James to highlight the cause of fights, quarrels, wars, and conflicts; and they all come from one source, that is the conflict that resides in our hearts-(James 4:1-3)! Our desires are at war with the precepts of our Lord and the call He gives us.”⁵⁸

The second incident found in the book of Acts where a fierce conflict arose was between Paul and Barnabas over John Mark.

Sometime later Paul said to Barnabas, “Let us go back and visit the believers in all the towns where we preached the word of the Lord and see how they are doing.” Barnabas wanted to take John, also called Mark, with them, but Paul did not think it wise to take him because he had deserted them in Pamphylia and had not continued with them in work. They had such a sharp disagreement that they parted company. Barnabas took Mark and sailed for Cyprus, but Paul chose Silas and left, commended by the believers to the grace of the Lord. He went through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches.⁵⁹

Kent Hughes, in his commentary on the Book of Acts, suggests that John could have pulled out of the mission trip at Pamphylia for a variety of reasons. The reasons could be very typical of any modern missions. Could be on going conflicts on the trip or discomfort, sickness, or unprepared for hardship. As far as Paul is concerned Mark’s desertion was unacceptable. Hughes underlines the truth that even the best Christians do not always agree. When two believers disagree over an important issue, at least one of

⁵⁷ Ironside H.A, Galatians, Ephesians (NJ, Loizeaux Brothers Inc. 1981), 79.

⁵⁸ Richard J. Krejcir, “Why we have Conflicts,” Practical Leadership, ChurchLeadership.org, accessed September 29, 2017, <http://www.churchleadership.org/apps/articles/default.asp?articleid=42396&columnid=4544>.

⁵⁹ Acts 15:36-41.

them must have something wrong in his life, if not in his walk, at least in his viewpoint. All Christians walk with limps. We all rely on the grace of God.”⁶⁰

Laymon in his article mentioned that it is for our learning that such unpleasant and unbelievable conflict between spiritual giants captured in the scriptures. Firstly, the account tells us believers and church leaders then and now have many commonalities. It must not surprise people in the church today to hear or involved in the actual conflict in the Lord’s work. The element of humanity and imperfection is very loud. The outcome of such scenarios serves instructions to do church better today.⁶¹

Commonly, tension in pastoral leadership primarily attributed to pride. Dr. Stan, in his book *Pastoral Ministry: In the Eye of the Storm*, relates this story, “I overheard a group of pastors talking about the areas of potential pastoral pitfalls. Laughingly, they stated girls, greed, and golf. The third is not golf; it is the glory.”⁶² Pride easily drives a wedge between leaders in the church.

John Hillard in his blog quoted Jeff Cook the author of *Seven: The Deadly Sins and Beatitudes*—“Pride is not thinking too much of myself. Pride is thinking of myself too much. As a leader pride can be a subtle but devastating sin.”⁶³ Pride corrupts collaboration resulting in distortion of vision, confusion of directions, stalling progress, and gradually suffocating the church to death. Peter Hess, Pastor of Christ Fellowship in

⁶⁰ Hughes and Armstrong, 202-203.

⁶¹ Kevin Laymon, “Paul and Barnabas Split: The Progression of John Mark” Define Grace, September 26, 2014, <http://www.definegrace.net/paul-and-barnabas-split-progression-john-mark/>.

⁶² Stan DeKoven, *Pastoral Ministry: In the Eye of the Storm* (Ramona, CA: Vision Publishing, 1995), 127.

⁶³ John Hillard, “The Pride of Sin,” Leadership Connexions (blog), accessed August 5, 2017, <http://lcileaders.org/blog/sin-pride>.

Williamsburg, Virginia, succinctly states, “Leadership conflict in the church is tough. It’s scary, disorienting, confusing and damaging.”⁶⁴

According to Shelly, “Pastors who survive church wars unscathed are a small minority; those who left pulpit under less than happy circumstances are legion.”⁶⁵

Struggles with Sin within

The Apostle Paul, in an autobiographical account, explains his struggle with sin going on inside himself while in the ministry.

We know that the law is spiritual, but I am unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin. I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good. As it is, it is no longer I who do it, but it is a sin living in me. For I know that good itself does not dwell in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For I do not do the good, I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it.⁶⁶

According to Laurin, this ongoing struggle in believers gives a clue why men and women who are materially prosperous yet spiritually poor. They may possess physical strength and remain spiritually weak. They may experience material successes, however, suffer moral failures. They may win in every battle except the most important one. How often monarchs who have been sovereign and despots over large empires wretchedly unable to rule themselves.⁶⁷

⁶⁴ Peter Hess, “Nine Lessons for Pastors Facing Leadership Conflict,” 9Marks, May 8, 2017, <http://www.9marks.org/article/nine-lessons-for-pastors-facing-leadership-conflict>.

⁶⁵ Dobson, Leas, and Shelley, 79.

⁶⁶ Romans 7:14-20.

⁶⁷ Roy L. Laurin, *Romans: Where Life Begins* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1988), 219.

Pastors in the ministry put up a relentless fight with sin. Such battle not always realized in victory; neither is the victory sustained for a substantial duration. The sin may not always be realized in action but percolates in thought. Such a condition has proven hard for some pastors to be consistent with their walk and talk. In his book, “Overcoming the Dark Side of Leadership, the author highlights this inner battle with sin:

The dark side sounds quite sinister, is a natural result of human development. It is the inner urge compulsions and dysfunctions of our personality that often go unexamined or remain unknown to us until we experience an emotional explosion.⁶⁸

This inner battle that contributes to the fear and tension that resides in the pastor’s inner being who suffers the draw of certain embarrassing inclination to a particular sin and constantly worried when under “favorable” circumstances the minister may succumb to it and only to fall into shame and disgrace. The struggling minister imagines to himself the best favor he could do for the church, family and himself is to bow out of the ministry while everything is well and favorable.

American author and founder of New Life Fellowship Church, Peter Scazzero also points out the challenge of fighting one’s sinful tendencies:

Everyone has a shadow; your shadow is the accumulation of untamed emotions, less-than-pure motives, and thoughts that, while largely unconscious, strongly influence and shape your behaviors. It is the damaged but mostly hidden version for who you are.⁶⁹

He further frames the ugliness of this shadow as a sin that manifests itself as anger, jealousy, resentment, lust, greed or bitterness. These sins are not easily detectable,

⁶⁸ Gary L. McIntosh and Samuel D. Rima, *Overcoming the Dark Side of Leadership: How to Become an Effective Leader by Confronting Potential Failures*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2007), 28.

⁶⁹ Peter Scazzero, *The Emotionally Healthy Leader: How Transforming Your Inner Life Will Transform Your Church, Team, and the World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2015), 55.

neither can remain under for too long. These innate hazardous sins could easily throw the minister into a whirlwind of troubles.

Daniel Walker in his book, *The Human Problems of the Minister*, points out that what the city does to the people, it does to pastors. Pastors are involved in this caldron of modern evil, just as anyone is. Ministers are subject to temptation as anyone, and they are as likely to yield as anyone. Quoting John Knox, Walker adds, “Demas is not the last minister to forsake his calling, having loved the world.”⁷⁰ He continues saying that, “Some men fell with the thud and surrender their parchment, but the rest of us, possibly guiltier because of our duplicity, continue both our preaching and sinning.”⁷¹ Pastors have always imagined to themselves that they need to be “honorable vessels”⁷² to handle the sacred word and do the kingdom work without guilt and shame. But who is absolute of such making. Despite man’s shortcomings God knowingly deposited heavenly treasure in an earthly vessel, amplifying God’s grace and mercies.

Burn-Out

What is burn-out? Burnt-out has become the umbrella word commonly used to describe maladies ranging from simple frustration or boredom to clinical depression.⁷³ Daniel and Rogers pointed out that burnt out condition will soon bring the affected

⁷⁰ Daniel D. Walker, *The Human Problems of the Minister* (New York: Harper & Row, 1960), 1.

⁷¹ Walker, 1.

⁷² 1 Timothy 2:21.

⁷³ Gary L. McIntosh, and Robert L. Edmondson, *It Only Hurts on Monday: Why Pastors Quit and What You Can Do About It* (Carol Stream, IL: ChurchSmart Resources, 1998), 12.

person into a host of physical issues such as exhaustion, fatigue, frequent headaches, gastrointestinal disturbances, weight loss, sleeplessness, depression and so on.⁷⁴

They further mentioned that the high demands and expectation of the ministerial vocation peppered with pitfalls and dangers only adds on to the duress.⁷⁵ The journal further elaborated on the hazards of the vocation, “Ministers operate under a heavy burden and often pay a very high price. The responsibility for people’s souls seems to take its toll with the average stay at a parish being two years.”⁷⁶

It is not uncommon pastors to operate under the renowned Welsh Preacher Christmas Evans’ famous banner, “I’d rather burn-out for Christ than rust out in the service of the Lord,” Pastors with this mindset, allow their work load and ministry demands to take away their weekly days offs, create immense pride in long working hours, to a point feeling guilty if they retire to bed early, frowning at social fellowship and recreational games. Barton captured it neatly by saying, “repress what is real in our lives and just keep soldering on, we get weary from holding it in and eventually leaks out in ways that are damaging to ourselves and others.”⁷⁷ Pastors must be busy in contrast to a lazy clergy. However, one must be appropriately busy, sensitive to God, self, and others. Otherwise, the inevitable happens, where years of unending workload, mounting stress, lack of rest, poor health, and emotional exhaustion will inevitably drain the

⁷⁴ Stephen Daniel and Martha L. Rogers, “Burn-out and the Pastorate: A Critical Review with Implications for Pastors,” *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 9 no. 3 (Fall 1981): 232-233.

⁷⁵ Daniel and Rogers: 232-233.

⁷⁶ Daniel and Rogers: 232-233.

⁷⁷ Ruth Haley Barton, “Sacred Rhythms in the Life of the Leader,” Pastors, *Christianity Today*, July 27, 2016, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/pastors/2016/july-web-exclusives/sacred-rhythms-in-life-of-leader.html>.

ministry “dry.” Essentially, pastors are to followers of The-God-Who-Rested.⁷⁸ In the New Testament, Jesus practiced Sabbath.⁷⁹

James Berkeley firmly disagrees to Evans famous slogan saying, “I admire the bravado. It sounds dedicated, bold, and stirring. However, when I view the burnt-outs and almost burnt-out who lie by the by the ecclesiastical road, the glory fails to reach me.⁸⁰ Pastors who operated under an unrealistic ministry philosophy often neglected to take care of their physical, mental, social, and spiritual well-being. Christianity Today, Karl Vaters reports,

Another pastor announced to his stunned congregation that he couldn't do it anymore. He loved them. He was proud of the kingdom work they'd done together for years. But he'd gotten his priorities out of whack. He'd put all his time and energy into the church and had neglected his own spiritual and emotional health.⁸¹

Going against God's design which invokes work followed by rest and rest followed by work is going bring upon himself, others and the church the obvious consequences.

Daniel Sherman uploaded an article where he describes pastor burnout as the silent ministry killer. In his write up he describes the devil craftily uses pastor's burnout as a weapon with great efficiency. Though on the surface it appears nothing serious yet it delivers a brutal impact on the unsuspecting victim. Burnout begins by encouraging us to do what we do best and do ministry with confidence. Overtime, at first, confidence leads

⁷⁸ Abram Kielsmeier-Jones, “Sabbath-Keeping for Pastors,” Pastors, *Christianity Today*, accessed January 5, 2018, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/pastors/2016/august-web-exclusives/sabbath-keeping-for-pastors.html>.

⁷⁹ Mark 6:31.

⁸⁰ Burns, Chapman, and Guthrie, 60.

⁸¹ Karl Vaters, “Epidemic: Another Pastor Burned Out and Quit Last Sunday,” Pivot (blog), *Christianity Today*, September 13, 2016, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/karl-vaters/2016/september/epidemic-another-pastor-burned-out-and-quit-last-sunday.html>.

us to some great expectations. Soon failure crouches at the ministerial door steps. Peter states that Satan is prowling around looking for someone to have for lunch (1 Peter 5:8). Unexpected failures, lack of appreciation, work unrecognized will soon spiral down to despair and burnout.⁸²

Dave Gibbons offers another saying to push back against the common view that pastors must work so hard: “It is about burning on, not burning out. I don’t know if many of us can finish well unless there is some rhythm of rest and restoration and relationship in our lives.”⁸³

Obstacles to Re-Entering the Pastorate

This section explores literature that details the various obstacles and describes the steep challenges faced by Pastors who left the ministry and attempts to return to the pastorate.

Asian Honor-Shame-based Culture

The Asian, honor-shame-based culture is the primary obstacle that prevents failed pastor’s return to the ministry. Further, the Asian cultural element subtly colors the Asian pastors’ theological persuasion when considering the allowance to permit failed pastors to re-enter ministry in Singapore. From the era of horseback riding to Airbus 380, many changes in various fields have transformed and continue to transform the way people live

⁸² “Pastor Burnout: The Silent Ministry Killer,” accessed September 30, 2017, <https://www.my-pastor.com/pastor-burnout.html>.

⁸³ Dave Gibbons, *The Monkey and the Fish: Liquid Leadership for a Third-Culture Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009), 160.

on this planet. However, some things have stubbornly remained unchanged, for instance, the cultural aspects of certain communities.

Largely, the West is very different from the East when it comes to ethics, virtue, morality, and value systems when compared with shame-honor-based cultures. Western shame is more private and personal, centered on individual, internal feelings. Eastern shame is experienced in public and communally, resulting from others' negative evaluation and community reputation.⁸⁴ Therefore, contrary to the West's guilt-based culture, certain outlooks and practices of the Asian shame-based cultures provide a different perspective and experience for people.

A memorable, well publicized event well illustrates Asian shame-based culture. At the Boston Marathon, April 15, 2013, two pressure-cooker bombs went off claiming three lives and wounding 260 people, which then set off a media frenzy and relentless pursuit to capture the two Tsarnaev brothers. Their uncle, outraged by the social repercussions, lashed out at his two nephews saying, "You put a shame on our entire family—the Tsarnaev family. You put a shame on the entire Chechen ethnicity... Everyone puts the shame on the entire ethnicity."⁸⁵ Though it was a shameful crime committed by two radical youth, the uncle interpreted the event as such that it implicates the whole community.

Similarly, the renowned Christian apologist Ravi Zachariah once accounted how his family was very displeased and embarrassed with his sub-par school results. Such

⁸⁴ Jayson Georges and Mark D. Baker, *Ministering in Honor-Shame Cultures: Biblical Foundations and Practical Essentials* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2016), 119.

⁸⁵ Michael Martinez, "Uncle Calls Boston Marathon Bombers 'Losers,'" *CNN*, April 19, 2013, <http://www.cnn.com/2013/04/19/us/marathon-suspects-uncle/index.html>.

occasions resulted in a humiliating thrashing from his father. His poor academic performance reflected poorly on his parents. At the age of 17, motivated by shame, he pondered, “A quiet exit will save my family from further shame.”⁸⁶ He attempted suicide by overdose. He esteemed his family reputation above his own life.

One of the primary concerns that impede the process of redrafting pastors into the ministry is the Asian shame-based culture. In the western world, shame principally is experienced as an individual’s perception. By contrast, in the Far East, the community’s opinion and perceptions are of paramount concern. What the community practices and believes fashions and governs why people do something or behave in a certain way. A Korean American blogger highlighted the difference, “In the Western understanding, internal shame arises when one feels he or she has not lived up to his or her expectation of the self. However, internal shame in Korea comes when a person has not lived up to the community’s rules and expectations. This internal shame is very prevalent among Asians and Koreans. It functions to build group harmony and unity.”⁸⁷

American anthropologist, Ruth Benedict, in her book *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword: Pattern of the Japanese Culture*, researched how to recover honor in a different culture. She explains, “The shame cultures rely on external sanctions for good behavior, not as true guilt cultures do, on an internalized conviction of sin. Shame is a

⁸⁶ Ravi Zacharias, “Antidote to Poison,” *Christianity Today*, April 26, 2013, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2013/april/antidote-to-poison.html>.

⁸⁷ Sam Louie, “Asian Shame and Honor: A Cultural Conundrum and Case Study,” *Minority Report* (blog), *Psychology Today*, June 29, 2014, <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/minority-report/201406/asian-shame-and-honor>.

reaction to other people’s criticism....”⁸⁸ The external factors—which determine the depth and degree of shame—influence shame-based or outer-directed cultures. Consequently, external factors also determine the extent of the sanction as well as the level of guilt people feel.

A Japanese chief executive made a laudable move, according to shame-based cultural practices, though this action makes no sense to Western guilt cultures. Tadashi Ishii, the Chief Executive Officer of Dentsu, Japan's largest advertising agency, said that he would resign in January to take responsibility for alleged violations of Japanese labor law following the suicide of a young employee late in 2016. Officials ruled the suicide as “karoshi,” a Japanese term for “death from overwork.”⁸⁹

For instance, in the Indian culture, the community leaders, who are very much influenced by the community at large, hold power over whether a family will prosper or suffer shame and eventually diminish. Claire O’Sullivan reported, “One woman is raped every 20 minutes in India, according to the National Crime Records Bureau. But police estimate only four out of 10 rapes are reported, largely due to victims’ fear of being shamed by their families and communities.”⁹⁰ These data may sound bizarre in the Western context but normal and understandable in the shame-based community. All sorts

⁸⁸ Ruth Benedict, *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword: Patterns of Japanese Culture* (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1946), 222.

⁸⁹ Jena McGregor, “A Japanese CEO Resigned After an Employee’s ‘Death from Overwork.’ Why It Won’t Be Enough,” *The Washington Post*, December 30, 2016, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/on-leadership/wp/2016/12/30/a-japanese-ceo-resigned-after-an-employees-death-by-overwork-why-it-wont-be-enough/?utm_term=.875cecb2258f.

⁹⁰ Claire O’Sullivan, “India’s Rape Shame,” *The Irish Examiner*, March 23, 2013, <https://www.irishexaminer.com/lifestyle/features/indias-rape-shame-226260.html>.

of blemishes and failures in an individual or family are hidden quickly and quietly in an Asian honor-shame-based culture for fear of reputations tarnished.

Incidentally, the researcher comes from Indian culture. At the introduction, he mentioned the agonizing moment where his mother refused to speak to the him on her death bed only underscores the cultural shame she experienced. To be more precise she was experiencing a “loss of face.” she suffered the loss of honor and self-esteem. Augsburger explains, “Face must be honored, respected, preserved, and enhanced in all human relationships. In the East...the concept of face cover both self-esteem and the esteem of others...”⁹¹ On the one hand, she is disappointed from the scriptural standpoint that her son disobeyed the Lord’s calling.

Yancey captured in his book a saving face incident that took place in Japan. A Japanese prisoner served for fifteen years jailtime for murder. During this period no one visited him in the prison. After doing his time in prison, his wife and son met him only to tell him not to return to their village. His three daughters, now married, refused to see him. Sadly, he was not given the pictures of his four grandchildren. A culture that values “saving face” has no room for those who bring disgrace.⁹²

The Bible is framed in an honor-shame-based culture as well. Careless reading will lead to the wrong conclusion that seems to fortify the misnomer of Asian perception of honor and shame. Citing a few examples: In the Old Testament, Saul knew the battle is going in favor of the Philistines. To escape shame and contempt from the hands of his

⁹¹ David W. Augsburger, *Conflict Mediation Across Cultures: Pathways and Patterns* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1992), 84.

⁹² Philip Yancey, *What’s So Amazing About Grace?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1997), 37.

enemies, he requested his armor bearer to kill him. When he refused, he took his life.⁹³ In Judges, King Abimelech the son of Gideon grievously injured when a millstone fell on his head; he requested his amour bearer to draw his sword and kill him lest it goes down in history that a woman killed him.⁹⁴ Ahithophel came up with a great plan for Absalom as to how he will defeat king David. When his plan fell through the crack, to avoid suffering shame, rejection, humiliation, he went home “put his house in order, and then hanged himself.”⁹⁵

In the New Testament, Judas Iscariot confronted by his failure and dysfunctionality as a disciple decided first to set the record straight with the temple leaders and then refusing to live on with his shameful life terminated it by hanging himself on a tree.⁹⁶ On a lighter note, Jesus said, when attending a function, don’t go for the seats of honor but to the less honorable seats. Wait until the host move you to a higher seat of higher honor. It is more honor when you are promoted than to be told to move down to a lower or less honorable seat.⁹⁷

With this Asian cultural backdrop, it is not surprising why pastors who left their ministries hesitate to come back to the Lord’s work. The communities’ unkind words, baseless speculations, horrible caricatures, and stigmatic treatment will surely seal the failed pastors’ fate. In an Asian shame-based culture, failure is not accepted well in contrast to the west. The pain and shame in many ways affect even the pastor’s family at

⁹³ 1 Samuel 31:3-5.

⁹⁴ Judges 9: 50-55.

⁹⁵ 2 Samuel 17:23.

⁹⁶ Matthew 27: 3-4.

⁹⁷ Luke 14:7-11.

large. Furthermore, Christians living in an honor-shame-based culture may draw careless conclusions from certain passages in the Bible imagining that the examples in the Bible reinforce their cultural norms, practices, and values.

Richards and O'Brien vividly captured the struggle of serving two masters: the cultural mores and the other the scriptural mores. Authors explained, "our choices are always between saintly or sinful, holy or unholy. Living in this tension is difficult. So, we are happiest when we can satisfy two conflicting mores with some sort of compromise..."⁹⁸ Generally, the attempt to keep the scriptural and the cultural in tandem quite easily generates tension amongst church leaders, more so when confronted with the possibility of accepting or rejecting a failed pastor. The coveted outcome is to be right both culturally and biblically, and it is near impossible. Richards and O'Brien underlined the same truth,

"What can be more dangerous is that our mores are a lens through which we view and interpret the world. Because mores are not universal, we may not be aware that these different gut-reactions to certain behavior can affect the way we read the Bible. Indeed, if they are not made explicit, our cultural mores can lead us to misread the Bible."⁹⁹

Thus, in this tug-of-war between culture and scripture, the biblical truth and application is lost in the translation. The fate of restoring ex-pastors to the pastorate will remain challenging under the Asian skies.

⁹⁸ E. Randolph Richards and Brandon J. O'Brien, *Misreading Scripture with Western Eyes: Removing Cultural Blindness to Better Understand the Bible*, (Downers Grove, IL, InterVarsity Press, 2012), 33.

⁹⁹ Richards and O'Brien, 34.

Self-Denunciation

Self-denunciation is a common response to a personal failure in shame-honor communities. When a self-confident individual fails to measure up to his and others' expectations in a shame-based culture, that person will inevitably slip into a season of self-denunciation. He essentially becomes a broken man. The predominant thought of "I am not good enough for God" becomes deeply entrenched as a result of the public nature of the shame. The ultimate point of self-denunciation is killing oneself, committing suicide. Louie, a therapist in Seattle, explains, "Unlike the West, where religions like Christianity view suicide as a sin carrying a negative connotation, suicide among Asian countries is seen as a means of atoning disgrace, defeat, or any other dishonorable action or event."¹⁰⁰

The Old Testament prophet Elijah provides an example of shame-based cultural behavior. He was at the height of his ministry power and success after the Mount Carmel ministry. However, soon after this victory, he fell into a defective and self-denunciation mood. When Jezebel threatened to take his life, he fled for his life.¹⁰¹ Instantly, he went on a "defiance journey, seeking no renewal, but release" from prophetic office. Patterson and Hermann comment,

"Elijah played into Jezebel's hand. Had she really wanted Elijah dead, she surely would have seized him without warning and slain him. What she desired was that Elijah and his God be discredited before the new converts who had aided Elijah by executing the prophets of Ball. Without a leader, the revolutionary movements

¹⁰⁰ Sam Louie, "Asian Honor and Suicide: The Difference Between East and West," *Minority Report* (blog), *Psychology Today*, June 30, 2014, <https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/minority-report/201406/asian-honor-and-suicide>.

¹⁰¹ 1 Kings 19:1-3.

usually stumble and fall away. Just when God needed him the most, the divinely trained prophet was about to prove a notable failure.”¹⁰²

Jezebel seems to be relying on public shaming to discredit the prophet and his God. A renowned prophet who recently experienced a high-level success at Mount Carmel now confronted with the possibility of treatment of contempt and to suffer public shame was not fathomable by the prophet. Hence, he fled from the scene. His action is consistent and normal in an honor-shame-based culture.

In despair, Elijah prayed that the Lord would take his life. He was convinced that he was a failure and deserved no longer to hang around in the ministry.¹⁰³ In the shame-based cultures, taking one’s life comes to mind very conveniently. When Jonah felt convicted of his disobedience, he instructed the mariners to throw him overboard, and that was an attempt at suicide. He strapped with no life jacket, nor a rescue boat at sight, let alone to imagine a fish coming to his rescue.

Pastors from the shame-based cultures, when they fail big time, will quickly slip into an “emotional black-hole” as Elijah. They are ashamed of their incompetence, weakened by the community’s discriminatory remarks and consequently conclude that God cannot and never will use them again. That is not true! God, through various merciful and fearful means, gains Elijah’s attention and finally, in a still small voice, restores him back to the ministry.¹⁰⁴ God provided him a fresh mandate to pursue.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰² Richard D. Patterson and Hermann J. Austel, *1 Kings-Job*, The Expositors’s Bible Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1988), 148.

¹⁰³ 1 Kings 19:4.

¹⁰⁴ 1 Kings 19:11-12.

¹⁰⁵ 1 Kings 19:15-17.

In the New Testament, the Apostle Peter is another example of a minister responding in a shame-based culture. When Jesus told him that he would deny Jesus three times,¹⁰⁶ Peter responded in his usual over-confident manner that this would not happen.¹⁰⁷ The Apostle Peter denied Jesus three times.¹⁰⁸ At the third denial, the cock crowed, and Peter remembered Jesus' words. In response to this shame, Peter went out and wept bitterly over his failure. As a leader of the disciples, as well as a member of Jesus' inner circle, Peter could not come to terms with his public failure. Soon after Jesus's crucifixion, Peter summoned the others to return to their secular job of fishing.¹⁰⁹ Peter simply believed that there is no longer any ministerial scope available and furthermore, he resigned, on a personal account, he is no longer worthy to do ministry.

The Lord came to the shore of Galilee to shore-up the failed and discouraged disciples, especially Peter, the representative of the band. He profoundly grieved by his failure to stand and identify with his Master and Teacher, Jesus, in His hour of anguish and trial. Jesus ministered to Peter by the fire with the sole intention to restore him back to the ministry. Bloom points out a crucial point that shame over past failures and sins can haunt and inhibit believers in many ways. Satan seeks to steal and destroy our faith by shoving our failures in our face. But Jesus intends to redeem us completely.¹¹⁰ Jesus

¹⁰⁶ Matthew 26:34.

¹⁰⁷ Matthew 26:35.

¹⁰⁸ Matthew 26:69-75.

¹⁰⁹ John 21:3.

¹¹⁰ Jon Bloom, "Jesus Chooses and Uses Failures," *Desiring God* (blog), February 3, 2012, <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/jesus-chooses-and-uses-failures--2>.

knew this reality; therefore, immediately after His resurrection, He gave top priority to restore His beloved disciples.

Consequently, God used Peter and the band of disciples to propagate the Gospel and spur the growth of the early church. God uses failures, trials, and hardship to make fallen preachers a greater servant when they are willing to take the “humble pie” and go through the painful process of gradually being restored. Elijah and Peter by any measure are no superhumans. God who graciously restored his servants then will likewise restore the failed pastors of today. God’s steadfast love, faithfulness, and mercy can heal the broken servant and to be restored ministry.¹¹¹

Misconstrued Bible Passages

Along with the shame-based cultural barriers, another significant obstacle that stands in the way of failed pastors returning to ministry is the perception of, and response to, certain Bible passages. Asian churches interpret certain Bible passages in a way that hampers the possibility of these pastors’ restoration to the ministry. An accurate interpretation of these Bible passages will provide a biblical template that is built on grace-based theology, which will facilitate pastors and leaders in the church best practices to restore failed pastors as well as to tackle cultural resistance that seeks to hamper the process.

What is a grace-based theology? The answer is capsuled in the words of Jesus highlighting how Christians are supposed to do their life in a fallen world as well as ministry in a church that is composed of imperfect and flawed people saved by the grace

¹¹¹ Lamentations 3:22-23.

of God. The apostle John writes, “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen His glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.”¹¹² John again mentioned the same truth few verses down the same chapter, “...grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.”¹¹³ Hobbs comments,

“The Christ who tabernacled among men was “full of grace and truth.” These consist of the moral qualities which dwelt in Him and which out of His fullness He bestowed upon others.”¹¹⁴

Hobbs’ comments on verse 17,

“...grace following grace. He gives grace after grace in an unending supply. One is saved by grace and kept save by grace.”¹¹⁵

For the church to function well in the ministry, she must look through these two lenses of truth (Theology) and grace consistently and simultaneously. Phillips explains,

...if we have received God’s grace at the cross of Christ, let us love and desire through the Word of Christ, so that we might glorify God through our lives of humble, obedient, and Christlike service...to minister, feed, teach, visit, heal, and witness in Christ’s name...¹¹⁶

To pedestal truth without grace will put out love, and kindle self-righteousness. A form of legalism will develop in the church. Yancey’s annotation, “Nowadays legalism has changed its focus. In a thoroughly secular culture, the church is more likely to show *un-*

¹¹² John 1:14.

¹¹³ John 1:17.

¹¹⁴ Herschel H. Hobbs, *An Exposition of The Four Gospels* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1996), 2:32-33.

¹¹⁵ Hobbs., 2:33.

¹¹⁶ Richard D. Phillips, *John*, Reformed Expository Commentary (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2014), 61.

grace through a spirit of moral superiority...”¹¹⁷ He is so troubled to see the church losing her testimony as the capital of grace in a world shattered by wars, violence, economic oppressions and other global and communal breakdowns.¹¹⁸

To subordinate truth and podium grace soon develops an extreme or hyper grace approach that will blind the church from her moral duties and weaken her arms to deal with unrighteousness. Timothy Keller twits, “Truth without grace is not really truth, and grace without truth is not really grace.”¹¹⁹

Jesus set the example for His disciples to apply truth and grace faithfully. In the context of receiving failed pastor, the church leaders need to apply biblical truth to highlight the importance of commitment, faithfulness, and perseverance in the pastoral ministry. In the same vein, the leaders prepared to apply grace on repentant failed pastors the hope of rehabilitation and restoration. Bridges gives a fair suggestion, “We cannot exercise grace as God does, but we can relate to one another as those who received grace and who wish to operate on the principle of grace.”¹²⁰ This is how grace-based theology supposed to operates in the church.

The New Testament reports Jesus saying, “If anyone would come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow Me.”¹²¹ The idea is no turning

¹¹⁷ Phillips, 33.

¹¹⁸ Phillips, 29.

¹¹⁹ Timothy Keller (@timkellernyc), Twitter, February 1, 2017, 11:30 a.m., <https://twitter.com/timkellernyc/status/732276960798347264?lang=en>.

¹²⁰ Jerry Bridges, *Transforming Grace: Living Confidently in God’s Unfailing Love* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 1991), 51.

¹²¹ Luke 9:23.

back once an individual had pledged his allegiance to follow Jesus. There will be many challenges and temptations to annul discipleship commitment.

The Bible commentator, Green, explains that Jesus openly states to those who were considered to be His disciples to prepare themselves for hardship, or even death. The world through its habits and pattern will do anything possible to deter and cause great sufferings to them to prevent them from fulfilling God's purpose.¹²²

William Hendriksen agrees with Green's interpretation and elaborates that Christ followers not only the twelve but also many others must be prepared to face tough times and heavy resistance in doing God's will. Such resolve is not possible if one is not prepared to walk the path with entertaining self altogether. Otherwise, it is impossible to suffer boldly for God's purpose the pain, shame, and persecution that eventually will come.¹²³

Jimmy Agan's explain that our nature is such that we will cow away when it hurts our self-gratification. It is hardly an easy thing in deny self in a world of so much of convenience, entertainment, and immediate gratification. This is true not just for a selected few, but for anyone who wishes to be his disciple."¹²⁴

The various explanation of the text puts it plainly that Jesus was referring to anyone who is considering becoming His disciples. He was not talking about pastors who came under certain unfortunate situation had to desert the ministry. Though, they may be

¹²² Joel B. Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 1997), 371-372.

¹²³ William Hendriksen, *The Gospel of Luke*, New Testament Commentary (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1979), 497-498.

¹²⁴ C.D. Agan III, *The Imitation of Christ in the Gospel of Luke: Growing in Christlike Love for God and Neighbor* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishers, 2014), 121-122.

out of the ministry but remain somewhere as a hurting and ashamed disciple of Jesus Christ.

Another passage that is commonly cited to denote the unworthiness and incongruity for failed pastors to return to the ministry comes from Luke 9, Jesus said to him, “No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God.”¹²⁵ In this passage, Jesus highlights the ministry of God’s kingdom and fitness to serve in that kingdom. This passage paints a stark, demanding picture of discipleship. Here an unnamed person volunteers for discipleship. Jesus highlights that he is a homeless traveler who is dependent on the hospitality of others. Secondly, Jesus explains the possessions and cares of this world cannot be allowed to interfere in this mission that God has set for His disciples.¹²⁶

Analysis of this text suggests that Jesus was not referring to his twelve disciples who had been serving him faithfully. Jesus was not forewarning them that at some point in time would they leave the ministry as result of an oppressive situation that proved too hard on them and made judgmental errors. He was not forewarning future ministry leaders that if they fail and leave the ministry will suffer no possible return to the ministry. Furthermore, the three would-be-followers are only ready to follow Christ if their proviso is acceptable to the Lord. They are not even ministry leaders, to begin.

Darrell Bock explains, “If one confesses Jesus, only to renounce that confession permanently later, then the apparent confession is false, and one’s position is as perilous

¹²⁵ Luke 9:62.

¹²⁶ Green, 406-407.

after the ‘departure’ as before the confession...¹²⁷ James Edwards agrees and elaborates, “These brief illustrative exchanges differ from the classic “call” stories in the synoptic (5:11, 27-28, Mark 1:16-20). In earlier stories, each call is issued by Jesus to named persons, and each follows without resistance or delay.”¹²⁸

The Old Testament prophet Elisha made a similar proviso of kissing his parent's goodbye.¹²⁹ However, his mentor, Elijah, saw no deficit in his commitment. Immediately after Elijah’s call to follow, Elisha put away his plow and oxen and followed. In contrast, John Phillips notes that the man in Luke’s story may not be all that sincere as he appears to be.¹³⁰ Jesus may have spotted a similar weakness in the other two men. Graham Ryken’s points out a good biblical precedent set by Elisha when he answered God’s call. He was granted permission to kiss his father and mother good-bye (I Kings 19:20). Elisha went home, burnt his plow, slaughtered his oxen, and held a farewell feast for his family and friends. He made a definitive break from the old way of life.¹³¹

Albert Barnes adds, “to put one's hand to a plow is a proverbial expression to signify undertaking any business. In order that a plowman may accomplish his work, it is necessary to look onward - to be intent on his employment - not to be looking back with

¹²⁷ Darrell L. Bock, *Luke*, The IVP New Testament Commentary Series (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 983.

¹²⁸ James R. Edwards, *The Gospel According to Luke*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 2015), 299.

¹²⁹ 1 Kings 19:19-21.

¹³⁰ John Phillips, *Exploring the Gospel of Luke: An Exploratory Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2005), 154.

¹³¹ Philip Graham Ryken, *Luke*, Reformed Expository Commentary (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2009), 506.

regret that he undertook it. ... He that comes still loving the world ... is not fit for the kingdom of God.”¹³²

Various commentators make sense of why Jesus from the beginning is keen to highlight the rough and tough road that his disciples are expected to journey. Jesus is not like an anxious salesman who, seeking to meet his sales target, will say only the pleasant things and do all necessary to keep the true condition and demand of his product (Gospel) hidden. Jesus explained that his disciples must not allow distractions of loved ones interfere with their ministerial focus. The focus on Christ must reign supreme their lives. Therefore, fairly Christ explains the gravity of discipleship commitment to his would-be-disciples before they decide to follow him. Thus, he said, “For which of you, desiring to build a tower, does not first sit down and count the cost, whether he has enough to complete it...or what king, going out to encounter another king in war, will not sit down first and deliberate whether he is able with ten thousand to meet him who comes against him with twenty thousand?”¹³³

Kent Hughes explains that great multitudes were constantly around the Lord because of his Kingdom preaching and power. He said that even in our time there are throngs, of “gapers,” hangers-on with no commitment. And they conducted themselves as if they were on the way to a holiday feast. So, Jesus gave them a reality check as he laid out in unforgettable terms the cost of being a disciple.”¹³⁴

¹³² Albert Barnes, “Barnes’ Notes on the Bible,” Luke 9:62, accessed October 9, 2017, <http://biblehub.com/commentaries/luke/9-62.htm>.

¹³³ Luke 14:25-34.

¹³⁴ R. Kent Hughes, *Luke: That You May Know The Truth*, Preaching The Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1998), 124.

Ellis resonates in the same vein, “no prudent man will build a “tower” or go “to war” without estimating the ‘cost,’ so no one should assume the responsibility of discipleship lightly. The lukewarm disciple, . . . in the end will find himself rejected, thrown out like worthless, polluted salt. Jesus purpose is not to dissuade prospective disciple but to awaken the half-hearted follower to disastrous consequences of his kind discipleship.”¹³⁵

These Bible passages do not address pastors, evangelist, or missionaries who have left the vocational ministry for certain constraining reasons. Rather these Bible texts highlight that people need to carefully consider the costs to their lives before deciding to become a disciple of Jesus Christ.

From these passages, there are not any specific conditions that specifically apply to an office in the church. These scriptural documents stipulate the entry considerations for converting to the Christian faith. The various commentators explain that the conditions stipulated by Jesus apply to all disciples in general. Hence, to employ this passage to establish that a failed pastor forfeits the opportunity to return to full-time ministry is not a good representation of the contextual meaning of the passages. As a result, a recipient church should not exercise reluctance in accepting returning failed pastors.

Agan comments on the passage Luke 22:54-62, “Peter is not denying himself nor serving as a positive role model. However, Peter’s action does have something to teach us. . . . in his denial he is saying of Jesus, ‘I have no allegiance to him, he has no authority

¹³⁵ E. Earle Ellis, *The Gospel of Luke* (Eugene, OR:Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2003), 195.

over me, no significance for my life, no claims on how I think or live .”¹³⁶ The fact remains that Peter did not renounce his faith in Christ. In a spur of the moment fear for his life and his loved ones, Peter, a three-year-old disciple, quickly withdrew his association with Jesus. When a pastor leaves the ministry, he does not withdraw his association as a disciple of Christ. Leaving vocational ministry is not the same as abandoning the faith. These passages do not speak directly to the situation, though shame-based cultures have used them this way.

Spirit of the Elder Brother

“The older brother became angry and refused to go in. So, his father went out and pleaded with him. But he answered his father, ‘Look! All these years I’ve been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders. Yet you never gave me even a young goat, so I could celebrate with my friends.’¹³⁷

In the Asian church, after a failed pastor successfully overcomes the challenges posed by the cultural elements and survives the application of misconstrued scriptural injunctions, there is yet another hurdle for returning to the pastorate. The phrase the “Elder-Brother-Self-Righteous-Spirit can summarize it.” The failed pastor is constantly reminded of his past failure again and again. Thus, the process of healing takes much longer, and the failed pastor carries himself with a load of guilt in his heart.

“Many ministers are among the walking wounded. Someone once said that the ministers tend to shoot their wounded ministers...a very judgmental group of professionals.”¹³⁸ Pastors who left the ministry have their moments of profound

¹³⁶ Agan, 123.

¹³⁷ Luke 15:17-20, 28-29.

¹³⁸ McIntosh and Edmondson, 96.

reflections on their decision to depart from ministry. Green explains, “In Jesus narration, the phrase ‘he came to himself’ marks a turning point in the younger son’s story...the internal monologue leads him finally to return home and finally acknowledge his sin...shades of repentance is clearly seen.”¹³⁹ God orchestrates the circumstances paving the way and crafting the moment for the pastors “come to themselves” and perchance rise to their feet, notwithstanding the challenges awaiting but head right back to the ministry.

The pastors and ministry leaders currently serving in a church may have the privilege to interview failed pastors. When they do, it would be a great help to the one desiring to return to the pastorate if they did not adopt the proud and self-righteous spirit of the elder brother in the parable. Rick Warren describes the condition of believers as one who is deeply flawed, yet deeply loved by God.”¹⁴⁰ Keller captures this idea vividly; If the elder brother had known his own heart, he would have said, ‘I am just as self-centered, and grief to my father in my own way as my brother is in his. I have no right to feel superior.’ Then he would have had the freedom to give his brother the same forgiveness that his father did. But elder brothers do not themselves this way. Their anger is the prison of their own making.”¹⁴¹

When the elder brother hears from the servants, that his younger brother has returned and has been reinstated by his father, he is furious. Now it is his turn to disgrace the father.¹⁴² Arends| in his article quotes the comments of Kenneth Bailey, a theologian

¹³⁹ Green, 581.

¹⁴⁰ Rick Warren, “If You Want to Change, Change Your Thinking” Daily Hope (blog), June 15, 2015. <http://pastorrick.com/devotional/english/if-you-want-to-change-change-your-thinking>.

¹⁴¹ Timothy Keller, *The Prodigal Son: Recovering the Heart of the Christian Faith* (New York: Dutton, 2008), 57.

¹⁴² Keller, *Prodigal Son*, 25.

who spent 40 years living in the Middle East, striving to resituate Jesus' stories in their original Palestinian context, “the older son's conduct—refusing to join the party for his brother and arguing with his dad in front of the guests—is no less egregious. Hospitality was of supreme value in 1st-century Palestine. The entire village would likely have been invited to the party, and the oldest son would be expected to co-host the proceedings. His refusal is another round of humiliating rejection for the father.”¹⁴³

What is going on in the heart of the elder brother? “...the elder brother, whose behavior typifies that of a self-assessed, self-professed, righteous person. Who believes that they deserve all they get from God by merit of their conduct or abilities and do not understand why others cannot shape up and be as good as they are. They also believe that God's love is conditional on them being good enough and expect the same of others and judge them accordingly.”¹⁴⁴ Tim Keller mentions in his book, “Elder brother self-righteousness not only creates racism, but the personal level creates an unforgiving, judgmental spirit.”¹⁴⁵

What troubles the mind of these well-serving pastors is that by taking these failed pastors in will some degree markdown the high standard demanded of the pastoral office. Keller again, “This elder brother cannot pardon his younger brother for the way he has to weaken the family’s place in the society, disgrace their name, and diminished their

¹⁴³ Carolyn Arends, “The Other Prodigal Son: The Prodigal's Coming-Home Gala Was For Both Sons,” Views, *Christianity Today*, February 13, 2012, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2012/february/prodigal-son.html>.

¹⁴⁴ Frank Bolaji Irawo, “Self-Righteousness (‘Elder Brother Syndrome’),” ChristianBlog.com, January 4, 2007, “<https://www.christianblog.com/blog/breadoflife/self-righteousness-elder-brother-syndrome/>.”

¹⁴⁵ Keller, *Prodigal Son*, 55.

wealth.”¹⁴⁶ Maxey adds to this point, “This is a truth many "elder brothers" in the church of our Lord Jesus Christ today need to understand. By cutting themselves off from those brethren who are not cut off by the Father, they are harming and depriving themselves of joyous fellowship. When brethren reject brethren; when congregations reject congregations ... the elder brother syndrome has raised its ugly head once more among the sons of the Father.”¹⁴⁷

The researcher has observed cases where the returnee pastor faces difficulty trying to impress the interviewing pastor that he, the returnee, is genuinely seeking to make things right by getting behind the “plow” again. In other cases, even when accepted, the former failed pastor experiences an uncomfortable treatment that makes him lesser or a second class in the ministerial team, serving like a “bird with broken wings!”¹⁴⁸ The key pastors in service must be mindful to do what he can to help the failed pastor to regain confidence and assist in catering to spiritual healing. Keller notes, “Even though both sons are wrong, however, the father cares for them and invites them both back into his love feast.”¹⁴⁹

Biblical Basis for Pastors to Return to Ministry

In this section, the researcher traces the theme of grace that runs through the Bible and how God amplifies that grace in the lives of his servants. Those who were under

¹⁴⁶ Keller, *Prodigal Son*, 55.

¹⁴⁷ Al Maxey, “The Elder Brother Syndrome: A Prodigal Son Who Stayed at Home,” Reflections (Blog), March 5, 2004, <http://www.zianet.com/maxey/reflx110.htm>; Luke 15:25-32.

¹⁴⁸ Rev. Dr. Yap Beng Shin, interview by author, Singapore, August 8, 2017.

¹⁴⁹ Keller, 44.

awful vocational strain, stress or sin, who were on the verge of leaving or left the ministry.

The God of the Bible is a God who not only gives a second chance but again and again another chance for his people and servants to get out the mess they find themselves in. Adam and Eve enjoyed a second chance. Moses given a second chance. Samson in the final hours of his life God answered his prayer as another chance to fulfill his role as a judge of Israel. King David despite his moral failure, God restored Him and realized His plan for Israel through the man after His own heart. As a final example, even the nation of Israel fell many times out of favor with God. God faithfully restored them again and again. The Psalmist puts it in this manner, “But you, O Lord, are a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness.”¹⁵⁰ The prophet Micah says, “Who is a God like you, pardoning iniquity and passing over transgression for the remnant of his inheritance? He does not retain his anger forever because he delights in steadfast love.”¹⁵¹ The life of Prophet Hosea, “The prophet’s name means “salvation,” likely a reference to Hosea’s position in Israel as a beacon of hope to those who would repent and turn to God because of his message.”¹⁵²

In the Bible, God’s servants who struggled in ministry provides to the modern church a glimpse of what ministry entails, and His weak, troubled and fallen servants need. God’s gracious acts, timely counsel, patience, and comfort all working towards restoration and not convenient repatriation from ministry. Restoration is the template to

¹⁵⁰ Psalm 86:15.

¹⁵¹ Micah 7:18.

¹⁵² Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (Boston, NY: Houghton, Mifflin and Co, 1906; repr., Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1996), 448.

apply to preachers and pastors who falter and fall in the ministry a way to extend the same grace and comfort and to restoration.¹⁵³

The following explores the example of restoration for the prophet Jeremiah, the prophet Jonah, the twelve apostles, John Mark, and the prodigal son.

The Old Testament Examples

The Prophet Elijah

Every man at some point in time will arrive at a breaking point. Under the right circumstances, he will say, “I had enough.” The prophet Elijah was completely dejected when he reviewed his ministry and quickly went into the ancient and universal pit of depression.¹⁵⁴ Stuart comments, how Elijah at the height of his ministry he handled the wicket and powerful king Ahab without any problem, confronted and rounded the 450 prophets of Baal with ease, and had fearlessly challenged an apostate nation to review their spiritual allegiance. There was no sign of breaking down, no hint of impending emotional collapse, but he did.¹⁵⁵

At the lowest point of his ministry, in solitude, he asked that he might die.¹⁵⁶ Ironically, for the very sake of his life, he fled swiftly from Jezreel to Beersheba, and yet while safely away from danger, he wished death to come upon him. In any era, ministers come under extreme duress normally do not process the situation well. God worked with

¹⁵³ 2 Corinthians 1: 3-4.

¹⁵⁴ 1 Kings 19:1-16.

¹⁵⁵ D. Stuart Briscoe, *One Year Book of Devotions for Men* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale, 2000), 308.

¹⁵⁶ 1 Kings 19:4.

Elijah, his discouraged servant, by graciously restoring him physically,¹⁵⁷ counseled him gently,¹⁵⁸ spiritually redrafting him, and sending him off with a new assignment.¹⁵⁹

The Prophet Jonah

The prophet Jonah was given an uncomfortable foreign mission assignment by God¹⁶⁰ that required him to move out of his comfort zone and proclaim the gospel to Israel's enemies, who were infamous "great city." Unable to deal with it, for reasons only known to him, Jonah decided to pull out from the mission and planned his exit by running off to Tarshish.¹⁶¹ There are possibly several reasons for his resignation from the mission, Keddie suggests the following, "Perhaps Jonah had great doubts about the success of such a mission. Every Christian missionary at home or abroad has known that feeling. Will they listen? Will they respond? John Calvin suggested, feared the hostility of the Ninevites towards his message and person. Many a missionary has to face great peril, and not a few have lost their lives because of their faithful witness for Christ."¹⁶² While on the run, God intervened and put Jonah through a close to death experience before he submitted to God's call.¹⁶³ God reiterated his calling to Jonah and redrafted him

¹⁵⁷ 1 Kings 19:5-8.

¹⁵⁸ 1 Kings 19:9-14.

¹⁵⁹ 1 Kings 19:15.

¹⁶⁰ Jonah 1:1.

¹⁶¹ Jonah 1:3.

¹⁶² Gordon J. Keddie, *Preacher on the Run: The Meaning of Jonah*, Welwyn Commentary Series (Welwyn, UK: Evangelical Press, 1986), 19.

¹⁶³ Jonah 2:9.

into ministry. God sent him off to Nineveh again.¹⁶⁴ God, through both internal and external factors, seeks to draw back His servants to the calling and Kingdom tasks He has originally given them. In the closing chapter, Keddie explains, “And the Lord said, “You pity the plant, for which you did not labor, nor did you make it grow, which came into being in a night and perished in a night. 11 And should not I pity Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than 120,000 persons who do not know their right hand from their left, and also much cattle?”¹⁶⁵

Jonah was beyond all reasoning, but the Lord continued to reason with him and teach him something of the meaning of free grace and his need for a change of heart. Here one can see the wisdom, as well as the grace of God in the way He dealt with Jonah.”¹⁶⁶ The silver line that runs through the book evidently of God seeking to re-employ his servant back to his work.

Israel

When God called Israel, there wasn't anything impressive or uniquely different from other nations. The Bible highlights,

“It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the Lord set his love on you and chose you, for you were the fewest of all peoples, 8 but it is because the Lord loves you and is keeping the oath that he swore to your fathers, that the Lord has brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt.”¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁴ Jonah 3:1-2.

¹⁶⁵ Jonah 4:10-11.

¹⁶⁶ Keddie, 121.

¹⁶⁷ Deuteronomy 7:7.

Barnes in his writing pointed out, “¹⁶⁸ The fewest of all people, God chose for himself Israel, when yet a single family, or rather a single person. Abraham; though there were already numerous nations and powerful kingdoms in the earth.” Israel hardly appreciated the privilege and constantly forsook their calling as God’s witness to the whole world. Nevertheless, God is faithful to His commitment to Israel. For His Namesake He will not abandon them, or any believer and pastors today, He instructs Ezekiel saying, “Therefore, say to the house of Israel, thus says the Lord God: It is not for your sake, O house of Israel, that I am about to act, but for the sake of My Holy Name, which you have profaned among the nations to which you came.”¹⁶⁹ In Psalm 23, David says, “He restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for His Name's sake.”¹⁷⁰

The prophet Hosea was instructed to take his estranged wife Gomer who was deeply flawed in her character who again and again, was unfaithful to her husband and driven by her unbridled lust.¹⁷¹ McComiskey comments, “Blindly the people removed themselves from their God to worship gods who were but an ephemeral projection of their own hopes and lusts.”¹⁷² Habitually, they kept defecting from their faith and calling again and again!

¹⁶⁸ Albert Barnes, “Barnes’ Notes On The Bible,” Deuteronomy 7:7, Biblehub.com, Accessed October 17, 2017. <http://biblehub.com/commentaries/deuteronomy/7-7.htm>.

¹⁶⁹ Ezekiel 36:22.

¹⁷⁰ Psalm 23:3.

¹⁷¹ Hosea 1:2.

¹⁷² Thomas McComiskey, “Hosea,” *The Minor Prophets: An Exegetical & Expository Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI, Baker Book House, 1992), 1.3

Hosea was repeatedly instructed to do the unthinkable and embarrassing task to go to the place where she prostitutes herself and to redeem her back.¹⁷³ The prophet's wife symbolizes the adulterous spiritual condition of Israel who constantly went to the foreign gods.¹⁷⁴ Though they are disloyal and ungrateful to God, God was passionately committed to His covenant people and willing to forgive and restore the people if only they will repent and return to Jehovah.¹⁷⁵ John MacArthur puts it in a nutshell, "the theme of Hosea is God's loyal love for His covenant people, Israel, in spite of their Idolatry."¹⁷⁶

New Testament Examples

The Twelve Apostles

But go, tell His disciples and Peter that He is going before you to Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you."

—Mark 16:7

Here we have the key verse laser points to the Gospel of Grace and Gospel of Second Chance. The Lord Jesus, during his earthly ministry, called twelve disciples and commissioned them as apostles.¹⁷⁷ Jesus commissioned them to carry the gospel to the four corners of the world.¹⁷⁸ When the crisis came into their lives, all twelve disciples were lost and confused. Not sure how to go about in that terrifying moments of their

¹⁷³ Hosea 1:2.

¹⁷⁴ Hosea 3:1.

¹⁷⁵ Hosea 14.

¹⁷⁶ John MacArthur, study note on Hosea, in *The MacArthur Study Bible: The New American Study Bible* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2006), 1225..

¹⁷⁷ Luke 6:13.

¹⁷⁸ Matthew 28:18-20.

lives. When Jesus was arrested,¹⁷⁹ and put on trial, and awaited the possibility of crucifixion. Fear gripped that so hard they fled for their lives, abandoning their calling and the Master and Lord Jesus Christ. They went into hiding.¹⁸⁰ Hendriksen pinpoints the truth that Jesus still calls them as “His disciples.”¹⁸¹ After the resurrection, the Lord fondly, excited, expressed His profound desire to meet His disciples. Upon seeing them, He did not discipline, punish, or threatened to abandon them. Instead, he gently counseled and comforted them, for he completely understood what they felt and experienced in the darkest hours of their lives. The loving Savior, who cleanses all transgressions, gave the great commission to them for the propagation of the gospel in and through the empowerment of the Holy Spirit.¹⁸² The twelve experienced a greater ministry after they abandoned Jesus and restored than they had previously.¹⁸³

The Apostle Peter

When Peter’s name mentioned in this context, his unthinkable denial of all association with Christ vividly flashes up on our mind screens. What a shame! What a devastating error! Underserving to be counted as a disciple of Jesus. Spurgeon's explained that the very fact Peter’s denial is recoded in all the four Gospels only

¹⁷⁹ John 18:12.

¹⁸⁰ Matthew 26:56.

¹⁸¹ Hendriksen, 681.

¹⁸² Acts 1:5.

¹⁸³ Luke 9:1-2.

amplifies the nature of this sin. Readers required to give four-fold attention to this sin. At the same time, such a loud sin can be overcome by the grace of God.¹⁸⁴

Yet, in Mark 16:7, on Easter, in the angel's message Peter enjoyed a special mention. William MacDonald comments,

“The risen Redeemer had not disowned him but still loved him and long to see again. A special work of restoration needed to be done. The wondering sheep must be brought back into fellowship with the Shepherd. The backslider must return to the Father's house.”¹⁸⁵

Gills expands on MacDonald's observation,

“Peter is particularly mentioned, not as distinct from the apostles, or as if he was not one of them, having sinned in the manner he had done; much less because he was the chief of them; but to comfort him in his great sorrow, on account of his fall; and to encourage him to meet Christ with the rest of his disciples, who might be both afraid and ashamed, because he had so basely denied him.”¹⁸⁶

At the shore of Galilee, while the rest of the disciples were taking their breakfast quietly, equally laden with guilt and pain, Jesus was gently working on Peter who is the leader of the band.¹⁸⁷ The Lord is a great restorer of anyone who fails in their commitment as his disciples. The Lord told him to leave the failure behind him and to follow for there is much Kingdom work to be done. Who paid for them all on the cross. Jesus specializes in transforming failures into rocks of strength for His church

¹⁸⁴ Charles Haddon Spurgeon, “Peter's Fall and Restoration,” (sermon, Metropolitan Tabernacle, London, October 22, 1882), accessed October 17, 2017, <https://www.spurgeongems.org/vols46-48/chs2771.pdf>.

¹⁸⁵ William MacDonald, *Believer's Bible Commentary* (Nashville, TN: Nelson Publishers, 1995), 1363.

¹⁸⁶ John Gill, “Mark 16:7” in John Gill's Exposition of the Bible, accessed October 16, 2017, <http://www.biblestudytools.com/commentaries/gills-exposition-of-the-bible/mark-16-7.html>.

¹⁸⁷ John 21:15-19.

John Mark

John Mark was the son of Mary, in whose house believers gathered for prayer meetings. On one occasion, believers were praying for the release of Peter from prison.¹⁸⁸ Later, Mark assisted in the ministry along with Paul and Barnabas in Pamphylia and, for an unknown reason, he deserted the work.¹⁸⁹ Sometime later, Paul expressed his desire to visit their mission stations to see how the brethren were doing.¹⁹⁰ The pleasant and spiritual discourse fell into turmoil when Barnabas suggested bringing along John Mark. Paul recounted how Mark left the ministry abruptly and was not keen at all to consider him again for this next mission trip.

Barnabas saw the situation much differently. He saw a change in Mark, who obviously wanted another chance.¹⁹¹ In disagreement and with frustration, Barnabas parted ways with Paul and left for the ministry at Cyprus with Mark while Paul headed for Syria and Cilicia with Silas to encourage the brethren there.¹⁹² Here is a classic case, where one person is not willing to take the chance with someone who failed earlier. At the same time, another belief in the growth of that same individual because the person failed and is now ready to try again. Paul looked at Mark as an unreliable person, whose presence only added liability and risk to the mission.

¹⁸⁸ Acts 12:12.

¹⁸⁹ Acts 15:38.

¹⁹⁰ Acts 15:36.

¹⁹¹ R. Kent Hughes, *Acts: The Church Afire*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1996), 202.

¹⁹² Acts 15:39-41.

Despite, this unpleasant experience, years later, Paul called Mark a “fellow worker.”¹⁹³ While in prison, Paul dispatched the following message to Timothy, “Luke is alone with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is very useful to me for ministry.”¹⁹⁴ One, whom Paul once deemed unfit and useless, is honored for his usefulness.

MacArthur highlights, “...John Mark is the story of the restored deserter...who’s not an Apostle, not a prophet, not a pastor, not a teacher, not an evangelist, not a leader, just a helper, the Lord would use people like that...the only kind of people there are, recovering sinners, restored deserters, recovered defectors.”¹⁹⁵

Failure is not final! Even serious failure in the Christian life does not have to be the point of no return. Failure can never be justified or condoned, but it can provide an opportunity for the love and grace of God to be magnified. The Lord knows that we are weak and prone to failure, and He graciously provides restoration for the repentant believer. (Psalm 103:8-14) God has a wonderful way of picking up the pieces and making something beautiful of a broken believer's life.”¹⁹⁶

Mark’s life illustrates the outstanding truth that failure at one time does not disqualify one for ministry later. Furthermore, God has given, through Mark, another account of the Gospel that compliments the brilliants of the other gospel accounts.

¹⁹³ Philemon 1:24.

¹⁹⁴ 2 Timothy 4:11.

¹⁹⁵ John MacArthur, “Mark, the Restored Deserter,” (sermon) Grace to You, March 15, 2009, <https://www.gty.org/library/sermons-library/41-1/mark-the-restored-deserter>.

¹⁹⁶ “Failure is Not Final,” eDevotions for Growing Christians, Growing Christians Ministries, accessed October 17, 2017, <https://www.growingchristians.org/devotions/failure-is-not-final/>.

The Prodigal Son

The prodigal son felt it was time to let go his father's calling, to discard his boring job and shake-off his responsibilities. Excited to take charge of his life, flirt with fun and play with the toys of the world.¹⁹⁷ He departed from his father's house and squandered his father's fellowship, privileges, time, resources, and status. The son shortchanged his father for something far lesser than he realizes. Eventually, his journey for a better life concluded in the pig's pen. The prodigal son returned to his senses, re-ordered his values, realized his foolishness, and determinedly headed back to his father to be reconciled.

The God of second chances and more, through this parable, heralds the truth that no one who seeks to make a U-turn to returns to God's calling, will have the heavenly door shut on them.

Erdman explains three reasons why we stray away from God's calling. From the parable of the lost sheep the sin of ignorance and folly leads the way. Secondly, the parable of the lost coin points to misfortune or accident. Thirdly, the parable of the prodigal son, highlights our willful choice and to a desire for indulgence. In any case, these parables not only portray our weakness and limitations but also celebrates the matchless love shown by God to every repentant soul. The Father had never ceased to love the prodigal or hope and yearn for his return."¹⁹⁸

¹⁹⁷ Luke 15:1-24.

¹⁹⁸ Charles R. Erdman, *The Gospel of Luke: An Exposition* (1936; repr., Teddington, UK: The Echo Library, 2009), 106-107.

Chapter 3

Methodology

This study investigates how pastors who left the ministry can successfully face challenges that impede them from re-entering the ministry. Three literature areas are explored to provide a foundation for the qualitative research: challenges pastors face in ministry sustainability, shame-based cultural obstacles to re-entering the pastorate, and biblical bases for pastors to return to ministry. The literature review found that the Bible address these challenges, lucidly underlining and exhorting a grace-based approach to those challenges. These crucial areas formulate the four research questions that will guide in this research.

The purpose of this study is to explore, from a cultural and biblical standpoint, how Asian pastors in Singapore describe best practices for restoring those who have left the pastorate back into employment as pastors.

Research Questions

The following research questions guide this study:

1. In what ways and to what extent do honor-shame-based cultural perceptions factor into the experience of those who have left the pastorate returning to employment as pastors?
2. How are those who have left the pastorate received by the church when returning to employment as pastors?
 - a. How are they treated by the existing Church pastors?
 - b. How are they perceived by the existing Church pastors?
 - c. How are they treated by the existing congregants?
 - d. How are they perceived by the congregants?
3. What scriptural principles do pastors reference when describing best practices for restoring those who have left the pastorate back into employment as pastors?
4. What cultural practices do pastors reference when describing best practices for restoring those who have left the pastorate back into employment as pastors?

Design of the Study

The approach for this research will follow the qualitative approach prescribed by Sharan B. Merriam, author of *Qualitative Research: A Guide to Design and Implementation*. Merriam says, “Qualitative researchers are interested in understanding the meaning people have constructed, that is, how people make sense of their world and experiences they have in the world.”¹⁹⁹ Through this qualitative research, the researcher seeks to uncover, understand, and establish the reality of the problem.

Merriam highlights at least four key areas that are essential for understanding the nature of qualitative research: First, the focus is on the process. Second, the researcher seeks understanding and meaning. Third, the researcher has the primary instrument of data collection and analysis. Fourth, the product is richly descriptive.²⁰⁰ Analysis from these areas will yield sufficient information from several face to face interviews that help to determine how pastors who left the ministry could overcome challenges thrown at them from the cultural front. These findings of best practices will then enable other pastors and ministry leaders to develop steps to reclaim and reinstate pastors who have left the ministry and to create a healthy and viable atmosphere for them to resume the ministry at some point in time.

¹⁹⁹ Sharan B. Merriam and Elizabeth J. Tisdell, *Qualitative Research: A Guide to Design and Implementation* (San Francisco: John Wiley & Sons, 2009), 13.

²⁰⁰ Merriam and Tisdell, 14.

Participant Sampling Selection

This study will utilize “purposive sampling”²⁰¹ for selecting participants to provide the richest and relevant data. Approximately, six to eight pastors will be interviewed, following the interview protocol listed below. The interviewees will come from various Asian cultures to draw up an Asian composite and give the researcher broad shame-based cultural perception and reaction towards pastors who left the ministry. Second, these pastors will have at least eight to twelve years of experience serving as key influential pastors in Asian reformed churches. Pastors with these years of experience will be able to provide the researcher data that is richer, clearer and greater in accuracy to access the problem concern. Third, for pragmatic reasons, the researcher seeks to interview these pastors of various Asian ethnicities presently living and ministering in Singapore. Findings from this variety of Asian ethnicities will provide a wider representative sample of shame-based cultural influence, scriptural perceptions, and social elements, all which impact the re-entry of pastors to ministry.

Data Collection

The researcher, prior to any of the interviews, will write to each participant to explain the purpose of the interview, attach the research questions, and have the consent form signed. This is to void making the respondents uncomfortable, no coercion or pressure was put on the respondents when they were willing to answer any of the questions. Further, the researcher assures the interviewees’ absolute confidentiality, given that none of their names would be disclosed in this report, and the information attained

²⁰¹ Merriam and Tisdell, 77.

from them would not be shared on public site. This assurance will provide them a safe and comfortable setting for the respondents to answer in all honesty.

The researcher will travel to the pastors' respective churches to hold the interviews or will make necessary arrangements to meet the interviewees at some favorable, public, but quiet, place where they can conduct a meaningful and uninterrupted interview. The interviews will go for one to one-half hours, based on the pastor's extent of service and experience. The interviews will be done in-person, with digital recording devices. The recordings of the interviews will be transcribed. The relevant data to do the research is discussed to allow for detailed analysis.

This study will use a semi-structured interview protocol. Merriam explains semi-structured interviews as the middle ground between highly structured or standardized interviews and open-structured, where the wording and order of questions are open-ended when the researcher "does not know enough about the phenomenon to ask a relevant question."²⁰²

Employing a semi-structured protocol will allow the researcher to explore the experiences of the interviewee from pre-designed questions and spontaneously follow-up on topics the interviewer raises without having to develop new questions.²⁰³ This method gives the fullest and most informed approach to fulfill the purpose of the research.

The following questions will serve as the interview protocol:

1. Describe a story of how you think the church should restore those who have left the pastorate back into employment as pastors. What would happen?
 - 1a. What role would the existing pastor have?
 - 1b. What about preparing the congregation?
 - 1c. What preparation other ministry Church leaders have?

²⁰² Merriam and Tisdell, 89.

²⁰³ Merriam and Tisdell, 90.

- 1d. What would that be like?
2. In your culture, how do the congregants tend to regard pastors who left the ministry and now restored to employment as pastors?
 - 2a. How do other pastors tend to regard them?
 - 2b. What elements of the cultural influence best practices for restoring those who have left the pastorate back into employment as pastors?
3. What concerns do you have for those who have left the pastorate when they are restored to employment as pastors?
 - 3a. What hopes do you have for those who have left the pastorate when they are restored to employment as pastors?
4. What challenges do those who have left the pastorate face in coming back into employment as pastors?
5. What are some of the best ways to solve those challenges?
 - 5a. In what ways can the church congregants help to solve those challenges?
 - 5b. In what ways can other pastors in the church help to solve those challenges?
6. What scriptural principles speak into best practices for restoring those who have left the pastorate back into employment as pastors?

Since this is a semi-structured protocol; the researcher may exercise flexibility. The order of the questions may differ from interview to interview. There is the possibility some questions may be ignored depending on how the interview goes and depending on the depth and experience of the interviewee.

Data Analysis

The researcher, at the earliest possible time, will carefully go through the transcriptions of the interviews using the constant comparative method, which, according to Merriam, “involves comparing one segment of data with another to determine similarities and differences.”²⁰⁴ She adds, “Data are grouped together..., tentatively given a name; it then becomes a category. The overall object of this analysis is to identify

²⁰⁴ Merriam and Tisdell, 30.

patterns in the data. These patterns are arranged in relationship to each other in the building of a grounded theory.”²⁰⁵ That is, “a theory that emerges from, or is ‘grounded’ in, the data.”²⁰⁶ Using the constant comparative method, the researcher is able to gain new and deep understandings about how cultural perceptions and denominational persuasion impede the possibility of pastors re-entering the ministry.

Researcher Position

With the qualitative method, the researcher is the primary analyzer of collected data. All deductions and assumptions are sieved through the researcher’s perspective and values. Especially, in this case, where the researcher himself has left the ministry and returned by the grace of God. His emotions and experiences may color the findings. Therefore, the researcher must pay attention so that his own bias or subjectivity does not interfere with the objectivity of the research, “by his experience, worldviews, and theoretical orientation” as stated by Merriam.²⁰⁷

The researcher conducting this study has specific advantages: he has served in a pastoral capacity for over ten years in a Bible-Presbyterian Church in Singapore. The researcher, like other ministers, has gone through the predictable challenges in the ministry; however, one situation had an overwhelming impact and effect on him. Unable to recover and with no heart to continue, he left the vocational ministry and sought a livelihood in the marketplace world for six years.

²⁰⁵ Merriam and Tisdell, 30-31.

²⁰⁶ Merriam and Tisdell, 29.

²⁰⁷ Merriam and Tisdell, 219.

In the early quarter of the sixth year, the researcher encountered an unusual storm and choppy waters that threw all promising business plans and ventures into turmoil. The researcher, in order, to stay afloat, jettisoned his plans and pursuits and resigned into the hands of God. Having heard the call, the second time to return to ministry, he yielded to the Lord who spelled the specifics for his ministry and the church reinstated him into the pastorate.

Study Limitations

For this study, six to eight pastors of the Protestant Reformed churches in Singapore are considered and selected from different Asian cultural and national backgrounds. To simplify data variables that are not the study focus, all the participants are male pastors. Therefore, the findings are limited by gender. Given the researcher's limited funds and time to invest in the collection of data, the findings at the end of this research work may not necessarily serve adequately for universal application. Readers who desire to transfer some of the findings or conclusion from this research should test those aspects in their context. As with all qualitative studies of this type, the readers bear the responsibility to determine what can be appropriately transferred to their context. The data collected will prove useful in providing perspective, guidelines, and assistance to key pastors and church leaders to review their perception of pastors who left the ministry, especially in Asian shame-based cultural contexts. The researcher further hopes that the findings will further the work of church leaders everywhere in developing healthier and grace-based cultures for leadership in the church.

Chapter 4

Findings

The purpose of this study is to explore, from a cultural and biblical standpoint, how Asian pastors in Singapore describe best practices for restoring those who have left the pastorate back into employment as pastors. Quitting the ministry has serious and long-term implications for pastors in Singapore. Largely, most pastors who left the ministry rarely returned to vocational ministry leadership. However, some, after a season of rest and reflection and despite challenging obstacle, make attempts to return to the ministry. It is not easy to re-enter vocational ministry.

In the context of a shame-honor-based society, past failures inexorably cast a deep and long shadow on the path of these pastors. Singapore, though a multi-racial society, is primarily composed of Asians and is profoundly fashioned after honor-shame-based culture. Therefore, through these interviews, the researcher seeks to gather data to establish the reality of the enormous challenges harshly confronting failed pastors who seek to return to the Lord's work and what possibilities are there for them to overcome them. All names and identifiable information of participants were changed to protect identities.

Research Questions

The following research questions guide this study:

1. In what ways and to what extent do honor-shame-based cultural perceptions factor into those who have left the pastorate back into employment as pastors?
2. How are those who have left the pastorate received by the church when returning to employment as pastors?
 - a. How are they treated by the existing Church pastors?
 - b. How are they perceived by the existing Church pastors?

- c. How are they treated by the existing congregants?
- d. How are they perceived by the congregants?
3. What scriptural principles do pastors reference when describing best practices for restoring those who have left the pastorate back into employment as pastors?
4. What cultural practices do pastors reference when describing best practices for restoring those who have left the pastorate back into employment as pastors?

In this chapter, nine pastors interviewed. Either they had the experience of employing a failed pastor or as failed pastors who have successfully rejoined the ministry. Their candid sharing in the interview will provide relevant and insightful information for this dissertation.

Introduction of Participants

In this study, nine Singapore vocational ministers were selected to participate. There are two categories of pastors in this group. Group one consists of interviewees who are currently serving faithfully as vocational ministers for at least fifteen to twenty years. The second group consists of pastors who left the ministry and have successfully returned to serve again as vocational ministers. Each pastor come from various denominations in Singapore with different cultural backgrounds, and experience.

Given the sensitivity of this research, several faithfully serving pastors and failed pastors who had returned to the ministry firmly turned down interviews. Particularly, the failed pastors who are too embarrassed to revisit the past. One of the pastors registered his unwillingness firmly said, “I am not comfortable recalling my past, please drop me off from your list” and concluded the texted message with the verse, “Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead,” (Philippians 3:13).

On the other hand, the serving pastors who never left the ministry stargely are not keen to talk about their experience hiring failed pastors for fear that they may embarrass the returned pastor carelessly in the course of the interview. Any careless mistakes can hurt the restored pastor from settle in well. This reaction indicates the mindsets of Christians living in a shame-honor-based society. Despite these acute odds, some pastors of both categories have very graciously consented to an interview hoping that this work will be a blessing to someone in the future. At each interview, the researcher reassured the interviewees' that absolute confidentiality of all information and identity would be observed strictly.

Pastor A (Chinese) has been serving as a vocational minister in the very church he founded some forty years ago. During his time in office as a pastor, he had the opportunity to hire a pastor who left the ministry at his church. He explained with passion the posture of his heart and mind when he considered the possibility of hiring a failed pastor.

Pastor B (Korean) has been a vocational minister for twenty-two years. He came over from South Korea to Singapore and is serving in a local Korean Church as a pastor for fourteen years. At the interview, he confessed that the ministry has been going rough for some years. On many occasions, he confessed contemplating leaving the ministry due to heavy church politics, and family financial constraints. The Korean population working in Singapore has been gradually reducing for a variety of reasons. Uncertain of his very own future, he reluctantly accepted to be interviewed.

Pastor C (Indian) has been a vocational minister for more than 20 years. Originally was serving in India and the last fifteen years pastoring a local church in

Singapore. Right from the beginning, he admitted the vocational challenges and obstacles that drains him of his energy and undermines his aspirations. He confessed that Christ had been his primary source of strength and sustenance. He perfectly understands and empathizes with pastors who crumble under the workload and pressures of the ministry.

Pastor D (Japanese) has been shepherding a Japanese congregation for several years now. He has been in the Lord's work for twenty-five years. He started his ministry in Northern Japan and now fervently ministering to a Japanese Christian community living in Singapore. The ministry is going on well but not without its typical challenges that pastors face everywhere. He appreciatively said that with his wife working alongside with him has been a great help.

Pastor E (Nepalese) has been in the ministry for forty years. He began his ministry in India amongst the Nepalese and now faithfully pastoring a congregation primarily composed of Nepalese working in Singapore. A small pocket in the congregation is either permanent residents or citizens of Singapore. His ministry is a tent-makers ministry. He works for a foreign institution based in Singapore where he serves as an interpreter.

Pastor F (Indonesian) has been in the ministry for 18 years. He shepherds a small congregation faithfully. There isn't much trouble in his ministry, for the people culturally holds the pastor in high regard. He underlines that the Indonesians generally insist all pastors to be totally blameless. Even in the sermon, the pastor must not come across to the people as one who suffers weaknesses and blamished with failures. Delightedly he agreed for an interview.

Pastor G (Chinese) is serving in a local conservative church for close to thirty years. In his journey, he served under two denominations as pastor. He too mentioned that in his experience the ministry is the toughest vocation to be in. Despite fluctuating health, he has been faithfully engaged in the Gospel work.

Pastor H (Chinese) began his ministry in the mid-twenties. He served effectively in evangelism and counseling and was well received in his church. Later in the ministry, he ran into difficulties. Negative comments from the congregation and leaders began to erode his confidence and he started to sink into depression. Eventually, left the ministry.

Pastor I (Indian) came into the ministry in his early thirties. He served in two denominations. He is a seasoned minister who has the experience working with Christians in South India and Singapore. He had a high aspiration for his pastoral journey. He shared some very interesting behaviors of Tamil speaking Christians from these two countries. He was very keen to share his observations and experiences in the interview.

Summary of Interview Findings

Honor-shame-based cultural perceptions on those who left the pastorate back into employment

When asked about this aspect, Pastor A slowly moved deeper into his seat and took some moments to construct his thoughts to words. Evidently, there was a conflict within him. He was weighing between the reality versus giving an idealistic answer for the interview.

Smilingly, he said that it is an undeniable truth, the Asian Churches have allowed their ethnic culture to override the biblical teachings. This is unacceptable and primarily

the cause of several issues in the church. He being a Chinese, confidently highlighted that in the Chinese churches honor is very highly esteemed. With such a mind-set, it's no surprise to see the difficulty this Christian community face in accepting a pastor who had forsaken his high calling and walked out of the ministry.

However, he went on to admit that in the Bible, there are several examples of Paul accepting John Mark back into the fold as fellow ministers and Jesus restoring Simon Peter. With the positive expression on his face, he said, God has repeatedly been gracious to the faltered, fallen and failed men and women in the history of the church. Therefore, pastors, leaders, and the congregation must follow God's example and not submit to the cultural dictations. He also emphatically stressed that when God calls someone, He will not write him off.

Pastor B echoed nearly the same view as the previous pastor on cultural barriers. He lamented that culture is the fundamental barrier for failed pastors' restoration to the ministry. Nothing else! The Korean culture is the Culprit! Both leaders and congregation regard a defector from pastoral calling as unworthy of any consideration. The Korean population is culturally inclined to look at failed pastors as contemptible examples in God's Kingdom. Such ministers have prostituted themselves by falling into the snare of the material world.

Hence, the leaders and the people will not take the effort to find out the circumstances under which the pastor left the ministry. They don't look at a failed pastor kindly. Regretably, in this culture, the fate of a failed pastor is to live-out the rest of his life in shame and guilt. He dejectedly admitted that the Korean culture predominantly shapes and governs the perspectives of the believers in the church. The culture has been

around with the population much longer than the exposure of the Gospel. Inevitably, the culture profoundly defines the community. Restoration of failed pastor is nearly impossible.

In a softer tone, he underscored an interesting point that if failed pastors can be restored, they will prove an invaluable asset to the church than a liability. Their preaching, teaching and counseling ministry will be much more effective than those pastors who never left the ministry. The combination of Word + Life and Life + Word will prove powerful. The restored Pastor can preach insightfully with a deeper understanding the struggles congregation faces out there in the real world. All the pastor's experiences are part of life. The experience of leaving and returning forms part of life and God allows that and uses all these to enrich the believers in their journey with God.

The researcher was very surprised that he had left the ministry three years earlier and still had no clue how he could ever return to the ministry. Pastor C comes across as a bold man who is tired with cultural influence and interference in the Christian faith and practices. He is up in arms to battle it faces to face.

He said that the Indian community has a great expectation of the pastors. The servants of God are highly respected and honored. The pastor is supposed to be the best living being in the Christian community. It is indigestible for the community to accept one who is highly esteemed to fail God and His people. Let alone to consider restoring him to the ministry in his demerited status.

He protested that the cultural norm must be confronted. It is crucial to teach the people to look at things differently. He acknowledged such resolve would demand a lot

of effort, patience, and time to help change the mindset of deacons, elders and the congregation.

He explained calmly that restoration is a biblical and practical idea. He quoted the words of the Lord, “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few;”²⁰⁸ Practically speaking, he said, since the ministry suffers an acute shortage of Indian pastors and preachers. It only makes complete sense to take every opportunity to responsibly recover and restore pastors who want to come back to the Lord’s work. He illustrated that many things in life are discarded when only it is no longer redeemable. How sad it is when cultural interference will not allow the church to do something at a basic level that amplifies common sense.

The pastor continued to blame that the cultural influence clouds the believer's mind to look at failed pastors as the second class ministers and develop a blind spot that deprives them of benefitting from their fresh and profound understanding of the scriptures which is born out of their experience. Failed pastors if restored can more closely identify with the congregation’s struggles and provide invaluable comfort and relevant counsel. He echoed the same truth as the previous interviewer that restored pastors are an added value and blessing for the church ministry.

Pastor I, gave an interesting observation about the Indian Christians. At least on the surface, the congregation will not stand in the way of a failed pastor returning to the ministry. However, they will be intensely curious to know the sin and faults of the pastor. Though on the surface they will be polite, gossips about the failed pastor will verberate in

²⁰⁸ Matthew 9:37.

the church. Such an inconducive atmosphere will impede the failed pastor from reestablishing his ministry and survive in the unkind and harsh environment.

Next, the failed pastor's reason for leaving the ministry will undermine his authority and influence on the congregation. Furthermore, he will become the yardstick for their faults and failures.

In short, it is better for the failed pastor not to return to serve in the pastorate again. If he insists on returning, it is better to go to a church far away from his former church and start anew or start a new congregation under his pastorship. There is always a group that will empathise with him, recognises his genuine repentance, accepts and support his ministry.

The Japanese pastor sharing on the cultural response to failed pastor was rather interesting. He added an interesting angle that was not shared by the previous interviewees. He said that the Japanese culture poses no challenges to failed pastors who are seeking to come back to the ministry. Provided he has not fallen into any of the "3G sins"—gold, gals, and glory. Fallen into any of these sins will nail the failed pastor's fate. Though the Japanese people may look on the surface very gracious, without any doubt, they regard the pastor's office as a holy office. Thus, moral failures are unacceptable. In any case, pastor abandoning their office will seriously affect the people's trust. He underlined that the Japanese culture is kind but not blind.

Pastor F explained that culturally the Indonesian people like all the other Asian cultures don't take the departure of a pastor from ministry very well. The big issue is trust. When broken, it is very hard to put it back again. Therefore, going away from the

ministry will incur irreversible damage to the pastor, the congregation and for the cause of Christ.

The Indonesian pastor endeavoured further to explain that their intolerance with the failed pastor is not a measure of no grace in their cultural system. When the failed pastor returns, in the light of genuine repentance, he will be forgiven. The congregation will readily absorb him into the Body of Christ but not restored to the office of a pastor.

The Indonesian church believes that the God of the Bible is a God of the second chance and more yet the church leadership will exercise grace only to a certain extent. He has broken the trust of the church leaders as well as the congregation. Indonesian people generally forgive but in a church setting the expectation is much higher.

Summary Analysis on Cultural Hinderance

From the various interviewees, it becomes evident that the cultural overtone and influence in the church is very strong and alive. The leaders and people are aware of the element of grace and how God demonstrated His grace, again and again, in the Bible. The Word of God encourages believers to be gracious and forgiving. However, that biblical grace impeded from reaching the failed pastors by cultural undercurrents. Some Asian pastors are keen to challenge the cultural settings and apply biblical principles faithfully. Despite their stand, there remain many challenges from other quarters for the failed pastor even after he is re-drafted back to the ministry. He will toil on to rebuild trust in the leaders and people and will take years. Next, he has to be prepared to deal with unkind remarks and gossips coming from leaders or people that can prove discouraging to carry on. He has to persevere on tenaciously trusting on God's calling.

To enhance better survival rate for failed pastors, it was recommended in the interview that they should not go back to the same church and if possible to the same denomination. Another food-for-thought is, failed pastors should seriously consider starting a new church. Though failed, these pastors always have a pocket of supporters and sympathizers who will consider them kindly. This gracious crowd could form the first congregation for the church.

Reception and treatment of failed pastors by the pastors and congregation.

Pastor A exhorted that churches should try to restore pastors who left the ministry.

He explained,

I believe in God's Calling. If the Lord has called the person, despite something unfortunate happens to him in the ministry, God is faithful to bring the person back. In His time and ways, the Lord will convict the person and bring the person back to the ministry. I will prepare the congregation for the possibility of hiring a pastor who had left the vocational ministry. I will not mince my words before the leaders or congregation when it comes to explaining why the pastor's left the ministry. It is important, to be honest right from the start with everyone concern.

He believed maintaining transparency is crucial for the church and for the restored pastor's future ministry. If a leader or a member in the congregation comes to know something more or different from what shared to them, then the consequences can be serious and may even call for a reconsideration of the failed pastor's standing. Therefore, in this restoration process honesty from the part of the failed pastor is indispensable. He pointed out that a reminder to be issued to the congregation to exercise grace and give the repentant person a chance to pick himself up.

Pastor B with a hopeless expression on his face commented that in the Korean Church, no one entertains the idea of welcoming back a pastor who left the ministry to ever serve in the vocational ministerial capacity again. Leaving the ministry is a one-way

ticket for the departing pastor. It is important to think carefully before going into the ministry. It is not only shame for the man, but it is also no less for the church and not to mention his immediate family, parents, and siblings.

Pastor C spelled out good steps as to how to receive and treat a failed pastor who has been retored to the pastorate. He sensitively described how the the failed pastor is going through internal struggles and experiencing pain from his failures. He said he would spend a good amount of time to walk with him in his pain and exhort him through the Word of God. Others in the pastorate will do likewise. The elders are not exempted. Such concentrated effort from various brethren will expitite healing and retoration with in him. He expounded,

The church as a whole has to exercise grace here. As the receiving pastor, I have the responsibility to remind the congregation that none in the assembly is perfect and are beneficiaries of God's grace. Falter and failures are nothing unusual for God's servants.

Unlike the previous recommendation, this pastor suggested that he will not go into the details why the pastor left the ministry. The congregation takes the cue from the leadership and receive the failed pastor with confidence in their midst.

Pastor E suggested in the light of genuine repentance any failed pastor could resume in the ministry. However, he cautioned that

No doubt grace is imporatant; I will caution that the restoration process must handle carefully. Grace cannot minister carelessly. I will give the restored pastor every opportunity to readjust back to the ministry. However, I will put him on probation to ascertain his genuineness. After some time of observation, with the Church leaders' favorable report and consensus, after proving himself he will be restored to his previous office.

Pastor G leaned forward and spoke with intent,

I am sure the congregants are forgiving and to let bygones be bygones. It is important to keep in mind how culturally some these unhappy things can go. Therefore, I will withhold intimate or fine details from the congregation. Their

inquisitive nature will not serve the returning pastor much good. Only the Leadership will be privelged to all details. I will encorage close monitoring and mentor to build up his confidence in the minsitry. If there are sexual sins involved, I will be more sensitive to the nature of ministry assigned to him. Maybe in pastoral care to senior citizens.

Summary Analysis on Reception of Failed Pastors

Except for two pastors whose churches have a huge problem accepting and restoring failed pastors, whereas all others were keen to the extent a gracious hand to lift a fallen pastor. However, they are careful that grace does not go into extreme grace and sin poorly treated. They cautioned to apply grace with care and love.

A support group and program put in place to care for the restored pastor to help cope and address issues that may crop up during his resumed ministry. This support group will pay attention to his physical, mental, social and spiritual state and wellbeing. His family will also receive counsel where and when necessary.

The restored pastor will grow gradually into his work. Over time, the load will gradually increase. This gradual assumption of the office facilitates nicely for the restored pastor to pick up his skills of ministry again, and at the same time, the other leaders and congregation could grow into the restored pastor's ministry.

Secondly, the congregation will be the next challenging factor. There are two approaches when introducing the failed pastors to the people. One is to tell everything there is about the pastor and address the objections and concern of the people. This approach will avoid progressive revelation of the failed pastor's "dark" details. In most cases, this may proof too much for the pastor as well as the family to undergo. The second approach is to reveal just only the essentials that will provide an idea to the congregation how the pastor failed previously. Juicy and graphic details kept at the Board

level. This approach will give the restored pastor sufficient breathing space to grow out of the past and into the future.

Scriptural principles best practices for restoring failed pastors to the ministry

Pastor A enthusiastically wracked his mind to pour out examples of grace beneficiaries. He pointed out that the three anointed offices in the Old Testament: Priest, Prophet, and King. The high priest Aron made the golden calf at the demand of the masses. He allowed the people to manipulate him resulting in the apostasy of the nation Israel. God of Israel severely judged the wicket people yet exercised grace towards Aron and allowed him to continue as the nation's spiritual leader.

Next the prophets. Jonah went against God's calling, yet the Lord patiently intervened circumstances and redirected him. Grace was applied to priest as well as prophets.

Now for the kings, besides David, King Manasseh was a horrible and wicked king. The Bible describes him as one who committed more evil than the Amorites. He desecrated the temple and led Israel into idolatry. God sent him into exile. Any one goes into exile; there is no hope of coming back. However, the wicket king humbled himself before God, he received grace and was allowed return from exile.

Pastor B chuckled, at the question. He said,

Every character either in the Old or New Testaments they are all flawed one time or another. But God exercised grace on every man—Abraham, David, Solomon, Peter or Paul.

Pastor C pointed out that the great servant like Elijah had his moments, under which he chose to quit from the ministry. God restored him! Like Elijah, there are many in the Bible whom God revived and restored them back to the ministry. Secondly, Peter

betrayed Christ to the public, yet Jesus restored him in a private session. That is grace and not tick for tack.

We must take note of an interesting point on how Jesus restored Peter. Jesus did not ask him why he denied Christ. Isn't that amplifying the element of grace? The Lord revived Peter's first love for the Lord. In the whole process, the Lord was gracious and merciful.

Similarly, the church should check if the failed pastor still loves the Lord with all his heart, mind and soul. Peter's tear of repentance is an important criterion for acceptance. If anyone in the congregation has an issue with the restoration of the failed pastor, he or she may approach the leadership for clarification.

The pastor together with his elders and deacons must be a great source of encouragement.

All believers are weak in various ways. None perfect. Ministry of encouragement is teamwork. We must keep in mind that the church is in the salvaging and restoration business.

Pastor D drew attention to John Mark. Paul rejected Mark for reasons, not told.

Barnabas stood with Mark his cousin and gave him the opportunity to redeem himself.

Twelve years later, 2 Tim 4, Paul wrote to Timothy to bring Mark and commented that he would be useful to him. Previously, Paul rejected Mark, but later he turned out to be good. Paul admitted that Mark had become a trustworthy servant of the Lord. Because of Barnabas kindness and grace, this Mark became a Gospel writer—the book of Mark.

No single person in the Bible is perfect. From Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses—all have sinned. They are righteous because of their faith in God. Abraham in Genesis twelve was called by God to come to the Land of Canaan. He showed wonderful obedience. But later, when the famine came, Abraham left Canaan and went down to Egypt. He lied through his teeth, and yet God restored him.

Pastor D paused and got a little emotional and explained further

Look how after Jesus had restored Peter the Lord encouraged him to strengthen the brethren. Jesus is looking to the future. Jesus never asked Peter why you denied me, but he only asked him if he genuinely loves the Lord.

Thomas refused to believe yet the Lord graciously convinced him through hard evidence and restored him. There are three things hard for us to control--money, ladies or with pride. Powerful pastors had come down with these sins. God is gracious; we must not become lifted in our heart.

Pastor E highlighted that Jesus is our example. How the Lord handled Peter's failure. Peter was the boastful, overconfident disciple amongst the twelve. He promised to be with Jesus in any situation. When the soldiers came to arrest Jesus, he was bold enough to cut off the soldier's ear. Commendably, he was protective of his Master. When a lady confronted him, he disassociated from the Lord.

The death of his Master took away his vision and future. Hence, he and his brethren went back to fishing. These twelve of them had spent three and half years with Jesus, witnessed all his miracles, were privileged students of the Word yet they fell. With this example, I will educate the church leaders and people to exercise grace and welcome the brother back to the ministry.

Pastor F has a very different perspective about pastors returning to the ministry. He claimed that Luke 9:62 does not only apply to disciples but leaders as well. His understanding is when a pastor defaults his calling; he defaults the office of a pastor permanently. No attempt should be made to reinstate failed pastors to the pastorate.

He explained pastors are held in high esteem. Therefore may not be wise to reinstall a failed pastor back to ministry. What if he fails again, imagine the state of the congregation. Passages like in James where our faith is not supposed to vacillate. Plus the qualification of a pastor in the pastoral epistles tells us to be careful installing failed pastor to his previous office again. When Jesus restored Peter, he did it carefully and responsibly. Grace cannot be carelessly and carefreely applied. Particularly so for the office of a pastor. It is an office of trust and honor.

Pastor G referred to the Bible passage in Galatian 6:1-9 and made the following points. First, he reminded that God commands the body of believers to restore a fallen brother or sister. If there is a provision for restoration; than there is an anticipation for falling into sin. The church is like a hospital. Here, the well takes care of the unwell and nurses the injured to health. Further, this healing and forgiving process are to done graciously. Not

in the prodigal son's elder-brother-spirit, but in the spirit of gentleness which the prodigal's father demonstrated for us.

Secondly, a fearsome warning was given to the spiritually strong. God cautions the strong believer involved in the restoration process, exercise careful over his vulnerability. Pastor G said, he has seen people in the church who were self-righteous, yet some years later, overtaken by unimaginable wrong doings. The restoration work may demand resources, attention to address the ripples created by unhappy believers, and tempted to coax the fallen brother to leave the flock. God instructs us to bear each other's burdens. Must be prepared to weep as much as we are excited to rejoice with our brethren.²⁰⁹

Thirdly, the God's Word is our ultimate standard of discipline and restoration. The cultural persuasion, church's traditions, inaccurate biblical persuasions, poor examples of other churches, and personal experience does not serve well as template for the restoration process. God's Word transcends and reigns supreme!

Fourthly, the good fruits of restoration are the prove of restoration. The restoration process is not a single moment thing. A well planned follow-up program must be in place to ensure the fallen brother is back on his feet and is about the Lord's work confidently. The leadership must help create confidence in the hearts of the congregation. Teach Grace! Gradually, increase restored pastor's duties corresponding to his confidence level, fellow leaders, and the congregation. Most importantly, pay attention to the failed pastor's family. Such careful and caring follow-up will translate into a promising future for both the church and the restored pastor and his family.

²⁰⁹ Romans 12:15.

Pastor H highlighted that all Bible characters are in some ways flawed. He explained that David, as a man after God's own heart yet who committed adultery and murder. Further he added to his list of examples, Jeremiah, who refused to talk to God for he was upset, and God had to fix him. Elijah quit the ministry, and yet God restored him. Peter was restored three times over, not once but three times. Lastly, brought in John Mark who was restored, and God used him to bring about the Gospel of Mark. He said,

Pastors who left the ministry have a very rich spiritual understanding. Their ministry will be very real and meaningful. When they couple their exposition with real-life experience the Word becomes very relevant and pertinent.

Analysis of Biblical Basis for Restoration

The data gathered under this heading heralds one single truth that is capsulated in one word—Grace. Every fallen man can enjoy a revival, and restoration, for God's grace, is sufficient and available to all. No one is too far gone from the reach of God's grace. Meaning, there is no sin too big to experience God's forgiveness. The various pastors drew the researcher's attention to the patriarchs, priests, prophets, kings, apostles, and others who have enjoyed God's grace and mercies.

Pastor G spelled out and demonstrated from the epistles of Galatians that it is a command for the stronger brother to restore the weak and fallen. Furthermore, a restoration process is crucial to avoid another fall by the same person.

Best practices for restoring those who left the pastorate back into employment as pastors.

When asked Pastor E for his views on the restoration of pastors who left the ministry he carefully explained that the first premise to check on is the pastor's calling. Many want to be a pastor coveting prominence, honor, power, or financial security. If the

individual's calling is weak than restoration is hard. If a person is genuinely called he will be able to go through tough times in the ministry. However, those genuinely called, may fall out of the ministry.

He felt necessary to cite two examples. The first case was a gifted-charismatic young pastor who was very successful in growing the congregation. Under his leadership, the congregation became the largest Nepalese church in one of the Singapore's neighboring countries. While serving well, he developed an affair with a woman in his visitation team. Gradually, the people in the church started to rumor about the pastor and the lady. Upon investigation, the rumour confirmed. No sign of repentance, he left the ministry. The second incident was a pastor who had a big ego and bad attitude issue. He constantly ran into difficulty working with the church leadership. With the people, he tends to be very authoritative. Soon the leadership was flooded with lots of feedback from the congregation. The leaders gradually grew impatient with him. In no time, the ill-attitude pastor quit the ministry.

Therefore it is very important to check on their calling. Otherwise, restoration will only lead to another horrible failure.

Pastor I, confidently laid out the steps how he would go about incorporating the failed pastor into his church. Firstly, he claims that it is crucial to establish the failed pastor's reason for leaving the ministry. If he had committed sexual sin, then no possibility to restore to the pastorate. When the populace comes to know the nature of the failed pastor's sexual sin, it becomes impossible for him to do ministry amongst the Indians. The Singapore Indians are slightly different from the India Indians. The Christians in India are candid and open in revealing their failures and sins. However, the local Indian will only reveal 20% of the information and will suppress 80% of it.

The interviewing pastor must be intuitive when filling out questions. If his “crime” isn’t as grievous than only will the serving pastor will interview returnee to take him in possibly for the pastoral ministry.

Next, he will encourage the failed pastor to worship regularly in the church for a year. During this period, the pastor, church leaders, and the people could get to know him better. In the same duration, the failed pastors could also evaluate his persuasion to return to the Lord’s work.

Next, after a year of observation, after the failed pastor has proved well of himself, then an interview will be arranged. First, the pastor and then followed by the church leaders to ascertain his genuineness to serve again in the pastorate. Only then he will be presented to the congregation as a possible pastor in the church. He will begin as a full-time worker in the church for a year. During this time, a senior Elder of the church will follow him up. A year later, if all goes well, he will be incorporated into the leadership and pastorate. The Church must exercise grace responsibly.

Pastor G suggested how to process the introduction of the returnee pastor to the leaders as well as the congregation. Firstly, the pastor will call in the ket church leaders and do all examination and discussion behind closed doors and in prayer, share the details of his past failure as a pastor. For the congregation, he suggested introducing the restored pastor as one who is keen and committed to serving in whatever capacity assigned and undertaken to do his best for the Lord. He explained the atmosphere in the sanctuary,

I will request the congregation to rise and register their welcome with a round of applause. I will tell the congregation that the Leadership is united to accept this pastor. I will explain the failed pastor’s mistakes or sins to the church discreetly. I will inform that the leadership had dealt with the past and had committed him to the Lord. Now, it is a stage of restoration and rejoicing in the grace of God.

Analysis of Best Practices for Restoring Failed Pastors Back into Pastorate.

The data gathered from the interviews on how to restore failed pastors back into the pastorate provides a good suggestion as to how to do it well. Firstly, the receiving pastor must have the grace centered approach to consider a returning pastor. Next, an open and honest discussion is indispensable to know the gravity of his wrong to determine the possibility for rehire into the ministry. Thirdly, this will be a close door discussion. Fourth, to observe the genuineness of the failed pastor's sincerity to return to the pastorate, he will serve along with the people for a year. With the feedback from leaders and people will strengthen or weaken his chances to return to the ministry. During this period, anything not revealed previously may come to light for further investigation. Fifthly, after a year, the pastor will interview the failed pastor and if he is keen to return to the pastorate than an interview will be called for the elders/church leaders. After which, the intention will be made known to the congregation. Sixthly, he will be hired on probation for at least six months before he is presented to the congregation to elect him to the pastorate.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, the researcher was privileged to gather nine pastors for a face to face interview. They come from various denominations and various ethnicity doing church ministry in Singapore. The first group is composed of vocational pastors who are serving faithfully since the day they stepped into the ministry. The second group of pastors at some point of their service as vocational pastors chose to leave the ministry for a variety of reasons and after some years of absence, through the Lord's intervention,

they returned to the Lord's work. Both groups spoke candidly for the sake of the beneficiaries of this research work.

From the interviews, the majority camp inclined to consider giving the failed pastors another opportunity to pick themselves up and serve again in the Lord's work. They rest on the fact that if a person genuinely called to the ministry, the Lord will not let him go on his failure. Rather, he will rework on him and return him to the ministry. Throughout the ages, there convincing number of examples in the Bible where people and servants of God who deplorably failed and yet God restored them to himself and to the work.

However, is not easily done, though not impossible. Firstly, the Asian Churches standing on honor-shame-based soil must be prepared to face cultural forces impeding the process of restoring failed pastors. Pastor B lamented,

Culture is the fundamental barrier for failed pastors' restoration to the ministry. Nothing else! The Korean culture is the Culprit! Both leaders and congregation regard a defector from pastoral calling as unworthy of any consideration.

On the one hand, the church esteems the office of a pastor, yet the lofty perception of a pastor when he fails, without hesitance, the church aggressively and brutally treats and throws him out quickly. The energy is not propelling from the conviction for the purity of the church, but for the shame suffered, and honor lost in her community.

Regrettably, the failed pastor lives on with the stigma of his failure which shadows him where ever he goes. From the interviews, the majority are prepared to stamp out the cultural dominance and dictum in the church.

Next, the participants in the interview shared on the reception and restoration process for failed pastors. It is paramount to establish the calling of the failed pastor who seeks to return to the ministry. Next to ascertain the reason why he left the ministry. If genuine repentance is evidence, then the leading pastor will provide counsel and guidance until such time the leadership will introduce him to the congregation. The key pastor will encourage the people to consider the restored pastor kindly, graciously and show love to him and his family. The key pastor in the pastorate will mentor the restored pastor closely. Pastor C said,

As the receiving pastor, I have the responsibility to remind the congregation that none in the assembly is perfect and are beneficiaries of God's grace. Faltering and failures are nothing unusual for God's servants.

Third, the Scriptural principles and examples were hugely cited by all the interviewees to back up their persuasions. Knowledgeably they demonstrated how in the Old and New Testaments fallen saints restored. Pastor D pointed out,

No single person in the Bible is perfect. From Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses—all have sinned. They are righteous because of their faith in God.

Conclusively, pastors who believed that not only fallen pastors with legitimate repentance can receive forgiveness, and restoration to their flock but also confidently argued that such pastor can again enter in the pastorate and fulfill their calling to the ministry well.

Chapter 5

Discussion and Recommendation

The purpose of this study is to explore, from a cultural and biblical standpoint, how Asian pastors in Singapore describe best practices for restoring those who have left the pastorate back into employment as pastors.

The following research questions guide this study:

1. In what ways and to what extent do honor-shame-based cultural perceptions factor into those who have left the pastorate back into employment as pastors?
2. How are those who have left the pastorate received by the church when returning to employment as pastors?
 - a. How do the existing Church pastors treat them?
 - b. How do the existing Church pastors perceive them?
 - c. How do the existing congregants treat them?
 - d. How do the congregants perceive them?
3. What scriptural principles do pastors reference when describing best practices for restoring those who have left the pastorate back into employment as pastors?
4. What cultural practices do pastors reference when describing best practices for restoring those who have left the pastorate back into employment as pastors?

Summary of the Literature Findings

Under the literature review, concentrated on two areas. Firstly, the literature that gives a good understanding and establishes the reality of Asian Honor-shame-based culture. How real it is and how dynamically is its influence in the lives of the Asian people. Hence, the data collected in this area will help to explain how the cultural influence permeates in the church and shapes her thinking and behavior. The Second aspect of the literature research was an intense investigation on the various examples in Bible where God's servants failed in their calling for a variety of reasons and how God deals with them. The third area was to look for statistics, data, books, and periodicals on this concern. Unlike the west, unfortunately, in the Asian context, there aren't any write-

ups or data available on failed pastors. The lack of information highlights one major factor that is honor-shame-based culture prevents one from documenting failures and shameful events in a person's life. Nobody wants to talk about it, let alone write about it. Therefore, is not surprising to find a pastor who left the ministry burn his bridges and move on with his life.

This study provides interesting and yet crucial information and insights to the dilemma faced by Asian pastors who had left the ministry. While the failed pastor is away from ministry, walking in his own will, the Holy Spirit continues to work in him. Aat some point in time, the failed pastor “comes to himself and rises up”²¹⁰ and seeks to come back to the pastoral ministry. At least two factors challenge such attempts by failed pastors. One, fearing embarrassment and shame, especially for the family, some pastors had put-off the idea of ever returning to the ministry. Two, the failed pastor is reluctant to return to ministry simply because the faithfully serving pastors who are the gate-keepers of the church deemed failed pastors as unfit for the ministry. They seriously doubt the failed pastor's calling to the ministry. Lastly, the failed pastor has broken the trust of the congregation. However, some pastors keep in mind that the Christian God is a God of many chances and He is ready to give his failed servants and people the opportunity to make the necessary U-turn to return to Him. Such pastors have gladly received failed pastors and successfully incorporated them into the church's vibrant ministry.

²¹⁰ Luke 15:17-18.

Summary of Interview Findings

Besides literature reviews, the researcher progressed on to do the face to face interview with nine pastors. Some of them had left the ministry and had “successfully” returned and reinstated in the Lord’s work. While the others were pastors who have been faithfully serving as vocational pastors and while in service, they have considered and employed failed pastors in their church ministry.

Both groups of pastors initially were not keen to put themselves up for an interview on this subject that the researcher had chosen. Especially the failed pastors. The failed pastors were very reluctant to visit the period where their ministry was disrupted either by their own doing or by others. Visiting the past reopen old wounds, relive the embarrassment and revive the experience of guilt and shame. The idea of recording their interview was another deterrent factor securing interviewees. However, after much persuasion, only a few pastors from both categories availed themselves for an interview. The interviewee reminded the researcher to guard their identity as much as possible fiercely. From their candid sharing, the researcher was able to gather valuable data for this research.

Discussions of Findings

The researcher, from processing the data gathered from study and interview on the topic: “Restoration of Pastors Who Left the Ministry in An Honor-Shame-Based Society Like Singapore,” specifically guides his findings to realize that there are three camps when it comes to reinstating failed pastors back to ministry. The first group of pastors is very kind, gracious, and willing to accept and re-employ a genuinely repentant failed pastor to ministry unconditionally. The second group of pastors is willing to accept

a failed pastor but on a condition. He must not have had committed any form of sexual sins. When varified and established, that he hasn't breached any moral standards they will consider him for redrafting. The third group of pastors outrightly rejects the possibility of failed pastors ever returning to the ministry.

The researcher will now expend, examine and interact with his findings from all areas of research. And at the close, to provide his recommendations and conclusions.

The Unconditional Camp

The first camp is the Unconditional Return. The faithfully serving pastors who belong to this camp are ready to welcome pastors who left the ministry. These pastors are only keen to know the reason for his departure from ministry not to fault him but to put in place the necessary resources to help and guide the failed pastor to avoid the same pitfall and enable him to encourage him on. Humbly, these pastors admitted that born again believer is imperfect and faulty in his ways. Only by the grace of God, many pastors had stayed faithful in their vocational calling. They claimed that they had several times under harsh circumstances intensely contemplated quitting the ministry. In their opinion, those who left the ministry are no greater sinners than those who did not. Just that some pastors have not come to the breaking point yet or a way of escape came about at a crucial time.

They underlined that the “elder brother’s” judgmental spirit is contrary to Christ’s grace-based ministry. The primary example they all went by is the attitude of the prodigal son’s father. The father’s grace, love, and compassion should take permanent residence in the hearts of pastors and believers. They recounted that when the Apostles failed the Lord, He gently and graciously restored them. The disciples learned their mistakes and followed the Lord in humility and did the ministry with greater care.

Next, they highlighted that God reaches out to his failed servants giving them sufficient time to reflect on their actions. Moses killed a task master to protect the Hebrew women of his blood. He acted as the protector and deliverer at that moment. When things went against him, out of fear, he fled Egypt to the land of Midian.²¹¹ God gave him forty years of reflection before the infamous burning bush episode. Recalled by God with a fresh mandate to Moses to deliver His people.²¹²

God allowed time for John Mark to consider his ways. We have no clue of his duration of absence from the ministry. But he rejoined in the Lord's. He went on mission trips. Proved himself and earned a good reputation even from Paul. He became instrumental in writing one of the four gospels. The serving pastors must rise to the occasion to reach out to a wounded and hurting failed pastor like Barnabas was to Mark.²¹³ Willing to give Mark the crucial support at a crucial time. Imagine, if Barnabas was not gracious, where will Mark be today.

They went on further to described how the key pastor in the church will highlight the element of grace and the importance of practicing it to his fellow leaders as well as the congregation. Some pastors of this camp are not even keen to highlight the complete details of the failed pastor's sin or wrongs. The fine details kept at the leadership level. Any church member who seeks to know specific details of the failed pastor should approach the leadership. After establishing the seeking individual's motive, details disclosed. The whole idea is to help the failed pastor to get on the ministry well.

²¹¹ Exodus 2:11-15.

²¹² Exodus 3:10.

²¹³ Acts 15:39.

Interestingly, these pastors recognized that failed pastors are not a liability but an asset to the church. They will bring out of God's word profound truth to address greater life challenges and understand God intimately from their struggles and through their experiences. This same condition was evident in work and words of the Lord's disciples. A completely transformed ministry. We can safely assume that the prodigal son remained in his father's house as a far better son than ever before. The Apostles and others who have enjoyed God's marvelous grace served so well that they had gained a reputation as people "who turn the world upside down" for the cause of Christ.²¹⁴

The Conditional Camp

The second camp is the Conditional Return. In this camp, the pastors are equally willing just as the former camp to consider failed pastor kindly and graciously. They are no less mindful of the element of grace in the Bible. They perfectly understand that under certain difficult situation a pastor makes the wrong and perhaps hasty decision to leave the ministry. They compassionately sited Jonah, the failed prophet. He could not accept the commission God gave to him. And at the same time, he could not live with himself if he reaches out with the Gospel to that barbaric population.²¹⁵ He knew he could not persuade God to change his order for him neither is there any force that could prevent Him from showing grace to the Assyrians.²¹⁶ Quietly, he decided to leave the ministry. At one point, he was even willing to die for his persuasion which was evident when he

²¹⁴ Acts 17:6.

²¹⁵ Nahum 3:1-4.

²¹⁶ Jonah 4:2-3.

instructed to be thrown overboard into the raging stormy sea. He is so opposed to Nineveh that he is prepared to commit suicide. Bearing in mind, he had no clue of a gigantic fish that will come to his rescue. Thus, the Conditional Camp expressed empathy for failed pastors. The camp also cited the infamous grace passage in Luke 15, the prodigal son.

Suddenly, this camp slammed the brakes. They explained, the church's practice of grace must not in any way make the ministry "light-hearted." The church through various measures makes the failed pastor realize that it was an irresponsible act on his part to leave the ministry and forsake his calling. The key pastor of the church must exercise care not to make the ministry light and become complacent in looking after the gravity of the office of a Pastor. Grace is not cheap! The leadership needs to know the reason and nature on which the failed pastor decided to leave the ministry. In the examination, if the failed pastor had committed sexual sin (adultery), he will not be considered for a position in the pastorate. Sexual sins disqualify an individual from returning to the pastorate. They explained further that in the bible, there isn't an example of a failed prophet, disciple or pastor ever restored back to office despite his sexual sin. In this analysis, David not considered because he was a king.

Other than sexual sins, the failed pastor who had gone from the ministry for certain reasons and genuinely had reflected and experienced a change of heart and seeks to come back to the ministry then he will be considered for hire. The leadership will inform the congregation the pastor's previous failure and explain his departure from the Lord's work. These pastors felt the need to be transparent from the beginning rather than

going through a “progressive-revelation” of the failed pastors faults in the past. If any strong objection from the leaders or congregation, then the failed pastors has to go.

The rehired failed pastor will go on probation for a period of at least six months to a year to assess the genuineness of his repentance and the dedication he shows in the Lord’s work. While on the probation period, the rehired pastor will not hold the office of a pastor yet. At the end of the probation, (duration determined by each local church leadership) he will come before the Board of Elders to hear their assessment of the returned pastor. Only upon the satisfactory report, he will assume the office of a vocational pastor.

These pastors are very firm not to allow cultural dictations into the church governance. They pointed out that scriptures are above culture. One or two of the pastors interviewed pointed out that cultural norms and forms are drawn up by fallen man immersed in their paganism. The Asian culture inevitably intertwined with religion. The key pastor must educate the leaders and congregation to go by the scriptures and not by any other concepts and precepts.

The Absolute No Return Camp

The third Camp is the Absolute No Return. Their key verse is Luke 9:62, “Jesus said to him, “No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God.” This group of pastors completely shuts the door on pastors who left the ministry. They exercise grace in a limited sense. When a failed pastor returns to the church, the leadership and the congregation will recognize his repentance, forgive him and receive him back into their fellowship. But he will not resume the office of a shepherd. Their persuasion is when a pastor leaves the ministry he has broken the trust of

the people. That is very unacceptable behavior. When the trust is broken, it can never fix, and any attempt will never return to its original condition. The office of a pastor is a very important office in the church.

Secondly, when a pastor leaves the ministry his calling to the ministry becomes questionable. The general assumption is if the Lord has called a person to the ministry the Chief Shepherd will sustain the under-shepherd through the “valleys and mountains” of life. The pastor’s departure from ministry evidenced against his calling to the ministry. He possibly called himself to the ministry for trivial earthly reasons and benefits. Or simply it was his imagination. Or an emotional decision after a fiery sermon.

They also believe the strong Asian cultural sentiments will not accommodate failed pastors resuming a position in the pastorate. The argument is when man’s culture and customs which is inferior to scripture could indicate what is appropriate and what isn’t. How much more the scriptures, which is the church’s heavenly authority accommodate “unholy vessels” for God’s holy work.

In summarizing the three positions the example of a race, horses come to the researcher’s mind. All vocational pastors set before a track and all are expected to run fast and win the race. During the race, unfortunately, accidents occur, and the horse suffers injuries. The Unconditional Camp represents the caregivers who at the earliest opportunity readily goes out to attend the injured horse and do a thorough examination and recommend all the care needed to ensure that the horse recovers well, with the objective to restore it to its former glory. The second camp, will approach the injured horse, examine for specific injuries, if found, disqualifies the horse from the race

altogether and perhaps dispatch it to farms to provide miserable horse ride for farm-stay-tourists. The third camp goes out, and simply and quickly puts down the horse. That's it.

The Fate of the Failed Pastor

The fate of the failed pastor is very dependent on three factors. The first deterrent is his fear of embarrassment and shame that extinguishes the hope of re-entering the ministry. The fear is reasonable and natural for one who lives in an Honor-shame-based culture. The thought of subjecting the failed pastor's wife and children to shame causes his very being to quake. In most cases, the failed pastor and family move on with their lives serving at a secondary level, directly or indirectly in the ministry.

Next, very much depends on the church door he chose to knock on. From the findings, the researcher deduces that there is a good chance to find a church that may be receptive towards failed pastors. Only one in three churches may not have the allowance to take in pastors who left the ministry. Some churches are very kind and gracious, while others are operating on a limited-grace platform, sadly, some no provision for failed pastors. Because of these variants, pastors are hesitant to return.

Third, the challenges faced by failed pastors restored in the ministry. Coming into the pastorate is only the beginning of a long and difficult road ahead. Sometimes the leaders are not encouraging, but the people are. In another case, the people are kind and encouraging, but the leaders will time to time through their untactful words and treatment subtly register that he is the second class compared of the rest in the pastorate. The failed pastor must prepare for some degree of embarrassment, and a mild level of shame while serving the Lord. The cross will become much heavier than before. A close walk with the

Lord is indispensable! Next, keep your focus on what is before you and not on what is behind you. The researcher takes the liberty to quote the findings from the interview:

Pastor A pointed out:

The broken pastor should focus on the future and not the past. Paul in his letter to the Philippians said, “Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead,”²¹⁷ The best example is Jesus our Lord. The Lord after His resurrection told the ladies that He would meet his disciples in Galilee and he made special mention of Peter.²¹⁸ Surely, Jesus was going to encourage and fix Peter for greater ministry.²¹⁹ Paul did the same for Onesimus, the runaway slave. He wrote to Philemon to receive the slave as a brother in the faith. To overlook his past and to begin a new chapter with him.²²⁰

Pastor B highlighted,

Pastors seldom will consider coming back to the ministry. If the failed pastor ever had the chance to be restored in pastorate the biggest challenge is to face up to the way people and leaders look at the restored pastor. In their mind, he is not equal to the other pastors. He is second class. When treated in this way, suffer unkind words or unwelcome body language, or intentionally ignoring the pastor can be discouraging. Some can't take this and they sadly quit again. Therefore, I hope the church will treat and accept a failed pastor as he is. Not in a Pharisee-judgemental spirit.

Pastor C neatly spelled out,

Restored pastors may go through a certain level of insecurity, inferior complexity, guilt, and other emotional baggage. He will have to try very hard to gain the trust of the people. Outwardly, he restored to office, but inside, the inner man is still working on it. The receiving pastor will assist in this healing process.

Pastor D underlined,

The greatest challenge for the returning pastor is to gain the trust of the people. He has to work hard to rebuild the trust. Even in the business world, the element of trust is so important, how much more in the Kingdom of God. Fortunately, if

²¹⁷ Philippians 3:13.

²¹⁸ Mark 16:7.

²¹⁹ John 21:15-16.

²²⁰ Philemon 1:16.

he has not lost the trust of the people, then he can naturally reintegrate into the ministry.

Pastor E believes,

Despite the effort to persuade the leaders and people to exercise grace towards the restored brother, there will always be some who will walk around with a judgmental spirit making unkind remarks and comments about the failed pastor. All these experiences are part of the restored pastor's maturing process in this phase. The Nepalese society might not accept him well since he failed in his ministry, but still, Jesus is the church's example.

Pastor H commented,

A restored pastor must be prepared to develop "thick skin" to forebear time to time unkind remarks, doubts and lack of trust expressed by some leaders and members. It is a challenge on his shoulder to demonstrate his worth in Christ by staying focus on the work and pray for those who are uncertain of him. They are only human.

It a humble journey with a heavy cross on the shoulder. Nevertheless, God's grace is sufficient.

Pastor, I confidently said that the first hurdle for the failed pastor to overcome is self. Usually, failed pastors suffer from acute shame and guilt that simply makes it difficult to overcome. In him, the inferiority complex will infiltrate every area of his life.

Pastor I remarked,

The Indian people without much objection will accept the failed pastor. They are kind on the surface. But the underlying current is treacherous. The motive of their generous acceptance will come to light in the future. Firstly, the restored pastor will have to lead the congregation with a "limp." He may not be able to command the congregation. Secondly, in their mind, they would imagine since the pastor is a failure, he will understand how difficult it is to live out the Christian life. As a result, people will lead a careless and ill-disciplined life. This congregational mindset will be very challenging for the restored pastor.

Recommendation for Practice

Bloom Where Planted

Firstly, the researcher sets his focus on pastors who are serving the Lord faithfully. The Lord did not promise anyone of us a good and comfortable ministry. Jesus

said, “Then Jesus told his disciples, “If anyone would come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me.”²²¹ The cross is the symbol of hard, painful and shameful death. Right from the beginning, the Lord did not promise his disciples a great life ahead on this earth. There will be internal and external conflicts. The weaknesses that each pastor comes with will time to time constantly hamper or hinder him from realizing a much faster and better ministry for God’s Kingdom. The inner weaknesses also affect others to become less favorable, or desirable of his leadership in the church. These conflicts could come from others or oneself. For instance, in the church of Philippi, a well celebrated church, yet she has misplaced her joy in the Lord. Possibly because of the conflict between Euodia and Syntheize hurting the church and her testimony in many ways.²²² There was an acute lack of harmony in amongst the believers.

The Pastor who comes to the ministry must first and foremost realize what he had signed up. At the slightest provocation or entangled in a long drawn difficult situation one who called to the ministry must function under such a climate carefully, walk circumspect fully and constantly leaning on the “bosom of the Lord” for counsel and comfort.²²³ Any rash and the emotional reaction may result in departing from the ministry going for the secular world.

In that same angle, the Lord warned his disciples are saying, “No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God.”²²⁴ While plowing

²²¹ Matthew 16:24.

²²² Philippians 4:1-5.

²²³ John 13:23.

²²⁴ Luke 9:62.

there, the worker may come across all sorts of distractions, but he must keep reminding himself that he has to pay attention to calling and remain faithful to his task or else his labor will be in vain, and the land will be in a sad state of affairs.

Where God has placed the pastor, he is to remain faithful as Christ was so determined to be faithful with his calling, “My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me and to accomplish his work.”²²⁵ The Apostle Paul said, “Each one should remain in the condition in which he was called.”²²⁶ Zig Ziglar explains the verse, “Paul’s encouragement to the people to remain in their calling. He told them (slaves) not to worry about their freedom. If they could become free, they should go for it., but if not, they didn’t have to worry about it. Either way, they are told to follow God with passion and whole heart. If slaves could bloom where they are planted, maybe we can too.”²²⁷ Many times Paul introduces himself in his epistles as a slave of Jesus Christ.²²⁸ He is a testament to an excellent servant of the Lord. He wrote down a long list of his sufferings to the Corinthians:

“Are they servants of Christ? (I am out of my mind to talk like this.) I am more. I have worked much harder, been in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely, and been exposed to death again and again. Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was pelted with stones, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, I have constantly been on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my fellow Jews, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false believers. I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have

²²⁵ John 4:34.

²²⁶ 1 Cor 7:20.

²²⁷ Zig Ziglar and Dwight “Ike” Reighard, “December 5,” *The One Year Daily Insights*, (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2009).

²²⁸ Romans 1:1.

been cold and naked. Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches. Who is weak, and I do not feel weak? Who is led into sin, and I do not inwardly burn?”

Despite all these rough and tough experiences, he never once contemplated quitting the ministry. Paul exhorts, “Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.”²²⁹ Hence, Paul is an example for all pastors, missionaries, evangelists and every other vocation in the Lord’s work.

Obtain Your Freedom

Paul also said to the slaves in Corinth if they could secure their freedom that should be alright. I would suggest from this angle, that the pastor who is serving under a very difficult circumstance may consider the following:

1. Go to another church and continue in the ministry. Choose the next church prayerfully and ensure that you are not moving from the frying pan to the fire. Learn the past and present of the potential church you have in mind to go to. Every church has a culture and tradition. Do your homework and seek the counsel of matured brethren. Make sure you can fit into that church. Hasty and careless moves will result only in more stress and distress. If you frequently, move from one church to another soon you will run out of churches to go. Next, in no time you will gain a reputation as a “rolling stone” pastor. Churches will not show keenness to consider your application. You would come across as someone who is unstable and unsure about many things.

²²⁹ 1 Corinthians 15:58.

2. Next possibility is to approach the present church leadership and request for a six to twelve months Sabbatical leave to be away from the church. Such a move will provide a quite space of time to do an honest reflection of oneself, reconnect with the Lord, reassess the church you are serving in and recuperate from physical duress. Preferably the pastor goes for theological studies which will not only further equip him for the next phase of ministry but also to focus on something different which can be refreshing.

The Lord's vineyard for redemptive work and personal salvation is the whole world. So, do not confine your scope of ministry narrowly. Everything done in faith and obedience to the Lord can be considered ministry and redemptive work, apart from vocational calling. Our vocations and work may change, but God's call to salvation and equipping for redemptive work in this world are sure.

The Church Is the Embodiment of Grace

I wonder if Jesus' twelve disciples were standing outside your church door will they experience warm reception, caring conversation, comforting counsel, and enjoy an atmosphere of Christ-like grace and love. The church of Jesus Christ must always remain robed in grace. Any broken and "limping" failed pastor comes knocking the church's door, the pastor in charge must receive the worn-out and wounded soldier into his care and commit him to the care of the church as well. No soldier in his right mind defect from the campaign. He must be lost in the battle or overcome by his weaknesses and fear

or grievously injured and could not go on with the rest. This scenario fits just as well with the soldiers of Christ.²³⁰

No one has transgressed to the point of no return. The efficacy of Christ's atonement on the cross is not particularly short-handed when it comes to a failed pastor. Everyone deserves a chance to make the critical U-turn in his life. It is a God given gracious opportunity to get back in the race and finish well.²³¹ No man or church should stand in the way hampering the heavenly torrential flow and administration of the Divine's grace upon the wounded.²³²

An article by the Dales perfectly captures the researcher's heartbeat, "It doesn't seem that complicated. He is drowning, arms flailing. Throw him a rope. If he grabs the rope. Pull him out. Simple. Rescue complete. But in real life, it seldom works that simply. When shame and fear impact a pastor or congregation the result will always be a distortion of God's intentions. The dysfunctional system which results in what we call The Pedestal Paradigm-a silent, systemic malignancy which impairs a church's mission and poisons its ministry."²³³ A position where the pastor and the congregation had conjured in their minds inaccurate notions of the church as well as the pastor which adversely influences their perception and treatment of a failed pastor. The article captures the Pastor's and people's Pedestal mindset dramatically, "This is especially true if the person flailing about in the waters of crisis and failure is your pastor? What then? What is

²³⁰ 2 Timothy 2:3-4.

²³¹ 2 Timothy 4:7.

²³² Luke 10:34.

²³³ Dale O. Wolery and Dale S. Ryan, "Hope in Times of Crisis: When Pastors and Churches Need Recovery," Clergy Recovery Network, accessed December 15, 2017, <http://www.clergyrecovery.com/?p=18>.

he doing there? How did this happen? This is not supposed to happen. Isn't he supposed to be a model to follow? Doesn't the office of pastor have some higher standards? Shouldn't he be above this kind of problem? These and a thousand other painful questions emerge in rapid succession when a pastor's failures become public."²³⁴ Where exactly the No-Return-Camp belongs? Limited Grace! The Dales went on to say, "The fact that we want our pastors to be above or beyond such things suggests that we have allowed the pastor's "success" to become our basis for hope. Of course, pastors struggle just like all of us do. The Good News is that the basis for our hope lies in the love and grace of God—a much more stable foundation for hope than any pastor's ability to perform."²³⁵

"Pastors and churches that are rooted in fear and shame often tenaciously cling to the Pedestal Paradigm. Fortunately, however, this is not the only paradigm available. Things do not have to be like this. There is a saner, more grace-full, more truth-full and more biblical path. We need not exist generation after generation stuck on that self-blinding and self-defeating pedestal. We can learn to live with grace and love. We can choose a better paradigm—a recovery paradigm. The Christian recovery model assumes that we are works in process—not finished products. We are flawed—not faultless. It assumes our Father delights in our journey toward his love and grace."²³⁶

²³⁴ Wolery and Ryan.

²³⁵ Wolery and Ryan.

²³⁶ Wolery and Ryan.

Most Difficult Sin in Restoration

There is not a sin that cannot take care off by the attoning work of Christ. Only a small number of pastors are willing to consider failed pastors who have committed sexual sin. Whether addiction to pornography, adultery, prostitution, pedophile and other sexual sins. Aall pastors agree that the atonement of Christ has the depth to take care of such carnal sins. But there is something about this sin that the process of restoration is especially difficult. Pastors who fell into sexual sins may receive forgiveness but not accepted both by the leaders and the congregation. Perhaps Paul explanation to the Corinthians sheds some light, “Flee from sexual immorality. Every other sin a person commits is outside the body, but the sexually immoral person sins against his own body.”²³⁷

John Piper explained the struggles involved in this particular sin and suggested a solution, “A pastor who has sinned sexually can be a pastor again. And I say that just because of the grace of God and the fact that "above reproach" can be restored, probably. But here's the catch. Forgiveness comes quickly, expensively, and immediately, on repentance. But trust doesn't, cannot. If a pastor has betrayed his people, and it has wounded a church grievously and wounded his wife grievously, he can be forgiven just like that. Wiped away. The blood of Jesus covers it. But as far as reestablishing trust, which is essential to a shepherd/sheep and wife/husband relationship, how long does that take? A decade? It takes a long time until memories healed.

And very practically I think this is what I would say: A man who commits adultery, say, in the ministry, should immediately resign and look for other work. And he

²³⁷ 1 Cor 6:18.

should not claim the church at all. He should get another kind of job and go about his life humbly receive the discipline and sit and receive ministry, whether in that church or another church. And then the church should turn that around if it believes it should, not him.”²³⁸

Another suggestion that born out of the interview with Pastor I was that the fallen pastor should go and start his ministry but not close by to his previous church. There will always be some sympathizers and followers who had appreciated his ministry in the past. Gradually, over time, others will come to identify with the church. Like David was a fugitive and slowly some dropout of society joined him,²³⁹ and the band grew to 600 men.²⁴⁰ This church may develop a new and meaningful ministry for people who are hurting because of their past failures. If he pays attention to his life and walks circumspect fully than this opportunity will prove profitable and serve as an invaluable second chance for his ministry.”

Returned out of Out-No-Choice

Another element that encumbers the flow of grace is the condition the failed pastor returns. He came back like Naomi of old, having lost everything and had no better alternative but to return “home.”²⁴¹ The people and the pastor doubt the sincerity of the failed pastor’s intention to return to the ministry. The perceived idea is he seeks returns to

²³⁸ John Piper, “Is It Possible to Restore a Pastor Who Has Sinned Sexually?”, *Desiring God*, April 20, 2009, <https://www.desiringgod.org/interviews/is-it-possible-to-restore-a-pastor-who-has-sinned-sexually>.

²³⁹ 1 Samuel 22:2.

²⁴⁰ 1 Samuel 23:13.

²⁴¹ Ruth 1:19-21.

the ministry for he failed in his worldly pursuits. Therefore, he is back purely for economic reason and has run out of better options out there.

When a pastor leaves the ministry, he still has responsibilities to provide for his family and himself. Either he works for someone, or he starts his own business. If the Lord chose not to prosper him soon hardship times will be at his doorsteps. The relentless pursuit of God will eventually cause him to contemplate returning to the ministry. Two factors can cause the failed pastor to return to the ministerial track. One, the deep-seated dissatisfaction in what he is doing, plus shame and guilt that resurrects within him on various occasions. The other factor is a failure in his pursuits that eventually brings him to the door steps of the church. Adversity is the best agency of God in leading his people and servants to Himself. Not to mention, the constant nudging of the Holy Spirit during his absence from the ministry. The hymn writer, Robert Robinson pens,

O to grace how great a Debtor, Daily I am constrained to be!
Let Thy goodness, like a fetter, Bind my wandering heart to thee:
Prone to wonder, Lord I feel it, Prone to leave the God I love;
Here's my heart, O take and seal it; seal it for thy courts above

Looking at some the failed characters in the Bible:

1. The people of Israel only and always return to God when it hurts them deeply. They chose to worship the pagan gods of their time, forsaking God's laws, and pattern their lives after the wicked and immoral pattern of life.²⁴² God caused their fields to fail to push them into economic downturns. God permits foreign powers to torment them and eventually send them into exile.

²⁴² Daniel 9:4-19.

2. Samson was walking in his carnal weakness and priding in his physical strength while ignoring God's calling for his life. In the final days of his life, he was in his most deplorable state. He was mocked, shamed and ruined by the Philistines. His eyes were put out, and his physical strength far reduced. He called upon God for the last opportunity to finish his calling well. The Holy Scriptures records his last petition for our learning, "Then Samson called to the Lord and said, O Lord God, please remember me and please strengthen me only this once, O God, that I may be avenged on the Philistines for my two eyes." And Samson grasped the two middle pillars on which the house rested, and he leaned his weight against them, his right hand on the one and his left hand on the other. And Samson said, "Let me die with the Philistines." Then he bowed with all his strength, and the house fell upon the lords and upon all the people who were in it. So, the dead whom he killed at his death were more than those whom he had killed during his life."²⁴³
3. The infamous story of the prodigal son amplifies how failures and shame can bring his servant back to the ministry. Ask yourself if the prodigal son had made it big like Bill Gates, Warren Buffet, or Mark Zuckerberg in the far country that he went to would he ever think of returning to his father's house? Very unlikely! His heart flooded with pride and egoism. Intuitively, he would expect his father to come and see him. The shame and pain that came from the pig's pen were very instructive to his soul.²⁴⁴

²⁴³ Judges 16:28-30.

²⁴⁴ Luke 15:16-20a.

The church and her leadership should shrug off this sort of perception of a failed pastor. I am suggesting the church should run out to receive the failed pastor but don't drive without compassion or grace the broken pastor back to the streets.

Steps to Restore Failed Pastor

Qualities for Restoration

Firstly, this person is responding to the conviction of the Holy Spirit, prompting a desire to confess, repent and change—regardless of the cost. This variable of honesty and reckless desire to change is respectable and often paves a softer way to restoration.

Second, this person comes for restoration in profound humility. Such a person will not pay attention to his past glories and along the way trumpeting their great gifts and influence or how important they were. Their transgressions demolish them and devastated by the pain that they have caused to others who have trusted them.

Third, the person seeking restoration is willing to take full responsibility for his deeds. He is not going to start blaming the spouse or church leadership or the congregation. This person stands up to the plate and says, "I did it, I'm 100 percent responsible." The person who fully owns the sin is most likely going to heal from this past and will have a future in ministry. This attitude is crucial for the returnee for there will be consequences for his behavior and the attitude must be, "That's my mistake, my responsibility, and my consequences." Only then can he move through the process, there cannot be a mindset of escaping these consequences.

Fourth, the restored failed pastor is prepared to take instructions and follow guidelines and directions from the church leadership or Board of Elders and prepared to give full cooperation, follow instructions and submit to their authorities.²⁴⁵

Convers and Confess

Firstly, when a failed pastor indicates his desire to return to the ministry, the pastor of the church should prepare for a session where the two could hear each other out. The Omniscient God had the patience to hold a conversation and ask important questions to establish the failings of His first servant and in the last book of the Bible with his stubborn chosen people.²⁴⁶ In Genesis account, after the tragic fall of Adam, God asked self-searching questions, followed by confession, correction, consequence, and touching compassionate care “clothing” the two in his grace and mercy.

After the session, if the failed pastor’s account is genuine and he is taking responsibility for his erroneous past actions without shifting blame to others then encourage him to worship in the church for an at least three months. This period is crucial to evaluate him at closer range by the leaders and people as they get to know him. After that stipulated period, he may write-in formally to the Board seeking a position in the pastorate.

²⁴⁵ Douglas Weiss, “Restoring the Fallen,” Charisma Leader, October 26, 2011, <https://ministrytodaymag.com/281-features/19293-restoring-the-fallen>.

²⁴⁶ Genesis 3:8-21; Malachi.

Board & Congregation

The pastor will call the Board of Elders to gather their evaluation of the candidate for the last three months. If nothing adverse expressed by them, he would call the applicant for a proper interview. With the favorable outcome of the interview, the leadership will announce to the congregation of a new intake. They will give only the necessary details that will enhance the restored pastor's adjustment and gradual assimilation into the congregation.

Probation and Promotion

The leadership will place him in the local church ministry for a probation period of six to twelve months. The restored pastor has the responsibility to prove himself to be worthy of hire and demonstrate his calling through his faithful service. The church will also assign an elder or a pastor to mentor him during this period. The leaders will also listen and the ground and monitor closely to see how he is faring in the church. This is not with the intention to pick bones in his work but to go in and provide necessary assistance to get over humps and bumps. This period can be very crucial for the restored pastor. He is trying hard to "find his feet" in the ministry again, and that can be very humbling. He is very sensitive during this period constantly wondering what people perceive of him. Careless words by anyone he could easily become overwhelmed by self-pity and low self-esteem that could prove detrimental to his progress.

Progress on to Finish Well

After completing the probation period, he will be appointed or elected to the office of a pastor. At this stage, both leadership and the restored pastor must move on in

the ministry following the motto of Paul, "...But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus."²⁴⁷

Auxiliary Support Group

Pastors are the loneliest people in the ministry. Karl Vaters commented in his article, "People come to us for answers and comfort, but we often have nobody we can go to when we need answers or comfort ourselves. The stress builds, and our health and effectiveness falter I'm not stating this as a complaint, but to set the stage for the need to deal with this challenge in a healthy way."²⁴⁸ Article by Mark highlights, "Does it seem strange and sad that pastors are often the loneliest people in our churches and communities? More than half (55%) of pastors say being in ministry makes them feel lonely at times, according to a LifeWay survey conducted in 2011. Isolation is a trap that leads to loneliness, which can lead to even darker places."²⁴⁹

It is highly recommended to form a Pastors' Care Group that meets at least once a month or more to fellowship, to learn from one another, share pastoral challenges and provide practical assistance, counsel and prayer support. The researcher, who is a failed pastor himself, had benefited from a small pastoral breakfast group that meets for breakfast weekly and has enjoyed much benefits and blessings.

²⁴⁷ Philippians 3:13-14.

²⁴⁸ Karl Vaters, "The Lonely Small Church Pastor: Breaking the Cycle," Pivot (blog), *Christianity Today*, October 7, 2015 <http://www.christianitytoday.com/karl-vaters/2015/october/lonely-small-church-pastor-breaking-cycle.html>.

²⁴⁹ Mark Dance, "The Isolation Trap," (blog), *LifeWay*, May 21, 2015, <http://www.lifeway.com/pastors/2015/05/21/the-isolation-trap/>.

This group preferably not composed of leaders and pastors from the same local church. Surely, this is not a malicious secret meeting. Rather a conducive setting where problems faced by pastors in the local church could share forthrightly and assured of the group's support and confidentiality. Such a provision may even deter pastors from leaving the ministry. Michael underlines, "A lot of pastors are introverts – comfortable in their study but not always the life of the party. But these pastors need friendships, too. They need to be able to hang out with other pastors and not talk about church growth strategies. They need to be able to be open and honest with a group of real friends without the fear of losing their jobs. Ironically, the larger your church gets, the more lonely leaders can become."²⁵⁰

Conclusion

The researcher's conclusion from the findings: Firstly, the serving pastor should not make it easy for themselves to quit the ministry at the slightest provocation, stress, or difficulties. Like good soldiers, they must be prepared to encounter and experience tough challenges. In an inevitable situation, should a pastor leave the ministry he should not imagine that he could never come back to the ministry? When God gives another call, despite the challenges ahead must be prepared to swallow humble pie and get behind the "plow" again. Not everyone gets the opportunity to do so. God will give the grace and strength to recover and return to work fully focused on things ahead and not constantly bothered by past failure. Unfortunately, if a pastor must leave because of sexual

²⁵⁰Michael Lukaszewski, "The Five Common Struggles of Pastors," Michael Lukaszewski (blog), accessed December 15, 2017, <http://michaellukaszewski.com/the-five-common-struggles-of-pastors/>.

misconduct, then it may prove far more challenging to return to the pastorate. But not impossible!

Next, the church must exercise grace when failed pastors attempt to return to the pastorate. Following biblical grace-based approach, the church will explore all possibilities to restore the failed pastor in the church's ministry. Render all necessary support and encouragement for the restored pastor to recover as soon as possible and encourage his family as well. Teach the congregation to show kindness and love on the basis that all believers are profoundly flawed in their ways.

Limitations and Further Research

This research was done only in Singapore's context. Singapore, though an Asian city, being a cosmopolitan city, her perceptions, practices, attitude, and tolerance influenced by the western culture and education. The findings and recommendations may not sit well in the cultures of the original countries. For instance, the Japanese pastor may be able to do somethings in Singapore more conveniently and quickly compared doing the same thing in his native country. Hence, a study may be necessary to accurately capture how failed pastors considered in the respective honor-shame-based cultures in their native country.

Next, there was no provision in this research to investigate how and what the failed pastors' wives went through when their men stepped out of the ministry. What level strength she marshals to bear the burden in such crisis of her pastor-husband. The crucial role she plays in keeping the family together, explain to the children what's going on and protecting the Christian faith of her off-springs. It, even more, tougher if her man left for sexual misconduct. How does she stand with her failed man, experiencing with

him the shame, embarrassment, challenges with her husband who restored to the
pastorate?

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