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Covenant Theological Seminary

**JUGGLERS FOR THE LORD:
HOW “SANDWICH GENERATION” PASTORS CARE FOR
MULTIPLE GENERATIONS OF FAMILY MEMBERS
WHILE LEADING CONGREGATIONS**

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

By

WILLIAM L. GLEASON

2019

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Graduation Date May 17, 2019

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to explore how “sandwich generation” pastors navigate the simultaneous demands of ministering in their churches and caring for their multigenerational families. No previous peer-reviewed studies have focused on the experience of vocational ministers who are “sandwiched.” The well-being of pastors is important to the health of congregations. However, the literature finds that “sandwiched” persons experience significant stresses and strains that can erode well-being.

This study utilized a qualitative design. Data was gathered through semi-structured interviews with seven “sandwich generation” pastors who reported “doing well” or “flourishing” as they occupied the simultaneous roles of ministering in congregations and caring for multiple generations of family members. All participants were seasoned male ministers who had at least one living parent age 65 or older and were either raising one or more underage children or providing at least some support to a grown child. The interviews focused on stresses and strains of caregiving, benefits of caregiving, and coping strategies. Data was analyzed using the constant comparative method.

This study concluded that the “sandwiched” pastors experienced challenges in their personal lives, their marriages, and their vocations. The personal challenges were most significant, manifesting in varying degrees of anxiety, anger, guilt, sadness, and depression. The challenges did not affect the overall quality of the pastors’ marriages or ministries. The study found that “sandwiched” pastors also experienced personal, marriage, and ministry benefits. Personal benefits included growth in self-awareness and spiritual maturity, and enriched relationships with care recipients. Marriage benefits included enriched relationships with spouses and an enhanced ability to support spouses.

Ministry benefits included increased effectiveness in the core job skills of preaching and pastoral work, and greater appreciation for the congregation. The study also found that the “sandwiched” pastors used a variety of coping strategies, including managing self, relying on social support, and accessing formal support.

Further research was recommended to explore the discrepancies between findings of this study of “sandwiched” pastors and the literature on studies of “sandwiched” persons in the general population. Also recommended were further studies using different participant selection criteria to examine “sandwiched” pastors of different sexes, races, nationalities, and theological views of scripture.

To the memory of my parents, Bob and Carolyn Gleason

The privilege of caring for and providing for our aging and ill parent was more rewarding than anything I've ever done. If we had to do it all over again, we would, and with just as much zeal and enthusiasm. For me, it was one of those crown jewels of life.

— Karen L. Warner

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Thanks are also due to the wonderful pastors who shared with me their experiences as members of the “sandwich generation.” I was inspired and moved by their stories, and greatly admire them for the important work they are doing in their families and churches. Don’t forget to count the blessings as you’re juggling, brothers.

Finally, all praise and honor to the Lord Jesus Christ, the great Shepherd of the sheep. All our efforts to care for others are at best dim reflections of his perfect care for us.

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Chapter One

Introduction

In 1981, Dorothy A. Miller, Professor and Director of Practicum at the University of Kentucky's College of Social Work, introduced the academic community to an emerging trend in American family life. Miller called it the "sandwich generation," calling attention to the fact that many adults assuming the role of caregiver to multiple generations of family members are in a position that "exposes them to a unique set of unshared stresses in which giving of resources and service far outweighs receiving or exchanging them."¹ Miller's thesis proved to be the overture to what in subsequent years has become an extensive scholarly quest to learn more about the phenomenon. The Pew Research Center defines the "sandwich generation" as "those adults with at least one living parent age 65 or older and who are either raising a child younger than 18 or providing financial support (either primary support or some support in the past year) to a grown child age 18 or older."²

Studies have demonstrated that the "sandwich generation" is of considerable size. LeaAnne DeRigne and Stephen Ferrante, who both have extensive academic training and experience in the field of social work, conducted a review of research indicating that 22

¹ Dorothy A. Miller, "The 'Sandwich' Generation: Adult Children of the Aging," *Social Work* 26, no. 5 (September 1981): 419.

² Kim Parker and Eileen Patten, *The Sandwich Generation: Rising Financial Burdens for Middle-Aged Americans* (Washington, D. C.: Pew Research Center, 2015), accessed January 28, 2018, <http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2013/01/30/the-sandwich-generation/>.

percent of Americans ages 45 to 55 are caring for aging parents or relatives.³ This represents, in real numbers, a caregiving community of between thirty and thirty-eight million adults.⁴ These informal caregivers devote an average of twenty-one hours to the task each week,⁵ saving the U.S. economy an estimated \$522 billion annually.⁶ Additionally, many adults are providing support to their grown children. A survey conducted by the Pew Research Center in 2012 – about the same time that DeRigne and Ferrante’s review was published – showed that 48 percent of all adults ages 40 to 59 with at least one child age 18 or older had given financial support to a grown child in the past year.⁷ The Pew Center suggests that the Great Recession of 2007-2009 may be largely responsible for this trend. In making the case that the recession had a disproportionate negative impact on younger adults, Pew reports that the employment rate for young adults in 2010 was the lowest it had been since these statistics began to be gathered in 1948.⁸ Additionally, young adults working full time saw the greatest drop in average weekly wages of any age group from 2007 to 2011.⁹

The Pew survey also found that some parents, 15 percent of those ages 40 to 59 and 8 percent of adults overall, were providing support to both an aging parent and a

³ LeaAnne DeRigne and Stephen Ferrante, “The Sandwich Generation: A Review of the Literature,” *Florida Public Health Review* 9 (2012): 99.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 100.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ Janice I. Wassel and Neal E. Cutler, “Yet Another Boomer Challenge for Financial Professionals: The ‘Senior’ Sandwich Generation,” *Journal of Financial Professionals* 60, no. 6 (March 2006): 63.

⁷ Parker and Patten, *The Sandwich Generation*.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ *Ibid.*

grown child.”¹⁰ Janice I. Wassel and Neal E. Cutler have also examined the prevalence of multigenerational support to aging parents and adult children. Wassel holds a PhD in demography and sociology, specializing in gerontology, while Cutler is Research Director of National Gerometrics in Radnor, PA. These authors reported in 2016 that 40 percent of Gen Xers, ages 33 to 47, were providing financial support both to parents and adult children, while 29 percent of younger Baby Boomers, ages 48 to 56, and 36 percent of older Baby Boomers, ages 57 to 66, were doing so.¹¹

Miller had implied that the “sandwich generation” consisted of adults ages 45 to 65. The Pew survey, however, found that adults of all ages were involved in multigenerational caregiving. In their report on the findings of the survey, Kim Parker and Eileen Patten of the Pew Research Center revealed that while 71 percent of the “sandwich generation” were middle-aged adults, defined as ages 40 to 59, 19 percent are younger than 40, and 10 percent are age 60 or older.¹²

Miller’s summary of the early research had already made it clear that “sandwich generation” families vary widely in the types of support they provide. The researcher pointed out that specific caregiving measures are determined by “an immense number of interacting variables,” including “parents’ ages, health, finances, and social class; number of children by generation; spacing of children; children’s sex, financial condition, health, and location; availability of support; and so on.”¹³ The Pew survey provides a threefold

¹⁰ Ibid., 14.

¹¹ Wassel and Cutler, “Yet Another Boomer Challenge,” 71.

¹² Parker and Patten, *The Sandwich Generation*.

¹³ Miller, “The ‘Sandwich’ Generation: Adult Children of the Aging,” 421.

taxonomy of support consisting of the broad categories of caregiving, financial support, and emotional support.¹⁴ Support categories are further delineated by DeRigne and Ferrante, who identify such discrete forms of caregiving as financial aid, assistance in managing bill-paying and taxes, transportation, housekeeping, meal preparation, personal hygiene, and shopping.¹⁵

Four converging societal trends lead researchers to predict that these diverse forms of multigenerational care will be in greater demand in the years ahead and will be more challenging for “sandwich generation” caregivers to provide:

First, the number of older citizens will grow significantly. As Baby Boomers reach retirement age, the U.S. will be undergoing one of the most significant demographic shifts in national history.¹⁶ Those aged 65 and older – the “silver tsunami” – are expected to increase from thirty-four million in 2006 to seventy-one million by 2030.¹⁷ Although they will be living longer than previous generations, a significant number of these seniors will have chronic physical and mental conditions that will need to be addressed by medical professionals, social services, and informal caregiving by family members and others.

Second, primary responsibility for senior care will continue to fall on family members. Medical and social service networks and staffs will be inadequate to cope with

¹⁴ Parker and Patten, *The Sandwich Generation*.

¹⁵ DeRigne and Ferrante, “The Sandwich Generation: A Review of the Literature,” 100.

¹⁶ Ty Cruce and Nicholas Hillman, “Preparing for the Silver Tsunami: The Demand for Higher Education among Older Adults,” *Research in Higher Education* 53, no. 6 (September 2012): 593.

¹⁷ Elizabeth K. Do, Steven A. Cohen, and Monique J. Brown, “Socioeconomic and Demographic Factors Modify the Association between Informal Caregiving and Health in the Sandwich Generation,” *BMC Public Health* 14, no. 1 (April 2014): 1.

the demand for services to the growing number of increasingly elderly Americans.¹⁸ This fact, combined with mounting pressure to reduce the public costs of care within an aging society, will likely continue to shift responsibility of support for the aged onto members of their immediate and extended families.¹⁹

Third, informal family caregivers will face mounting challenges. They will be fewer in number since their Baby Boomer parents produced fewer offspring than previous generations.²⁰ They will be older themselves – increasingly, middle-aged – since large numbers of their parents postponed marriage and childbearing until their 30s and 40s while they were launching their careers.²¹ Most adult children who will care for aging parents will simultaneously be parenting their own underage children. Both spouses in caregiving couples will likely be participating in the paid labor force since dual-income families are currently the norm in American society.²² Hence, members of the “sandwich generation” will find themselves juggling multiple roles as spouses, parents, employees, and caregivers to their aging parents and parents-in-law. As they do so, they will be at a stage of life when many of them will begin to face their own health problems related to the aging process.

¹⁸ Jo Ann Jankoski and Annette Frey, “Students Connecting with the Elderly: Validation as a Tool,” *Educational Gerontology* 38, no. 7 (July 2012): 486.

¹⁹ DeRigne and Ferrante, “The Sandwich Generation: A Review of the Literature,” 95.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² Lynn Friss Feinberg and Carol Levine, “Family Caregiving: Looking to the Future,” *Generations* 39, no. 4 (Winter 2015/2016): 13.

Finally, as they are caring for their underage children and aging parents, increasing numbers of future “sandwich generation” caregivers will likely be providing support to one or more of their young adult children as well. A recent prominent change in the structure and composition of American households is the growing number of young adults who continue to reside with their parents. There are multiple reasons for this trend. One is economic necessity, as the Great Recession has made it difficult for many young adults to support themselves due to lack of employment or the inability to find jobs that pay well enough to afford independent living.²³ Other young adults are returning to the parental home for a variety of reasons including job loss, illness, the break-up of a domestic partnership, or becoming the victim of criminal abuse.²⁴ As a result, the period between 2000 and 2011 saw an increase in the percentage of adults ages 25 to 34 who live with their parents. For men, the figure increased from 12.9 percent to 18.6 percent, and for women, from 8.3 percent to 9.7 percent.²⁵ The “sandwich generation’s” caregiving relationship with young adult children adds yet another layer of responsibility for those who are already balancing multiple life roles.

Wassel and Cutler extend the discussion by contributing the insight that the most significant recent increase in the co-residence of adult children with parents has occurred among adult children ages 25 to 34.²⁶ In relatively recent times, multigenerational

²³ Pew Social & Demographic Trends, *Young, Underemployed, and Optimistic: Coming of Age, Slowly, in a Tough Economy* (Washington, D. C.: Pew Research Center, 2012), 1, accessed June 16, 2018, <http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2012/02/09/young-underemployed-and-optimistic/>.

²⁴ Scott J South and Lei Lei, “Failures-to-Launch and Boomerang Kids: Contemporary Determinants of Leaving and Returning to the Parental Home,” *Social Forces* 94, no. 2 (December 2015): 865.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 863.

²⁶ Wassel and Cutler, “Yet Another Boomer Challenge,” 64.

households reached their peak in 1940, when 28 percent of young adults ages 25 to 34 were co-residing with their parents, along with large numbers of aging parents who were also members of multigenerational households.²⁷ The number had decreased to 11 percent by 1980, but since that time the trend has reversed; 2007 found 19 percent of all young adult children living with their parents.²⁸ The figure had increased to 24 percent by 2014, when more young adults were living with parents than at any time since the end of the Great Depression.²⁹

A majority of adults in the U.S. report that they are willing to embrace the increased caregiving responsibilities that are expected to devolve upon them in the future. While Americans are divided in their opinion of other emergent social trends such as more unmarried couples raising children, more gay and lesbian couples raising children, and more single women having children without a male partner to help raise them,³⁰ there is much stronger support for multigenerational caregiving. In the Pew survey, 75 percent of respondents indicated they believed that adult children are obligated to provide financial assistance to an aging parent if needed, while 52 percent said these adult children are under a similar obligation to provide financial assistance to their own grown child or children in need.³¹

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Rich Morin, *The Public Renders a Split Verdict on Changes in Family Structure* (Washington, D. C.: Pew Research Center, 2011), 1, accessed March 7, 2018, <http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2011/02/16/the-public-renders-a-split-verdict-on-changes-in-family-structure/?src=family-interactive>.

³¹ Parker and Patten, *The Sandwich Generation*.

While many express a willingness to embrace the challenge of being “sandwich generation” caregivers, the experience is invariably a stressful one. One reason for the stress, Miller explains, is the imbalance involved in occupying a relational role in which people are giving more resources than they are receiving in return.³² But the researcher also suggests that the peculiar stage of life at which many “sandwich generation” caregivers find themselves is another contributing stress factor. Middle-age is commonly associated with such significant personal development issues as confrontation of one’s loss of youth, recognition of the onset of the aging process, and adjustment to the empty nest.³³ Those in middle-age have typically achieved a measure of financial and relational equilibrium and are anticipating a more relaxed pace during this period of life, but often find this expectation frustrated by the needs both of aging parents and grown children who are depending on them for support.³⁴

Problem and Purpose Statement

It is difficult to overestimate the importance of marriage and the family to the Christian faith. The centrality of marriage arises because it is “a divine ordinance instituted for the promotion of man’s happiness and the glory of God.”³⁵ Moreover, says pastor and author Dr. James Montgomery Boice, when God presented the first woman to

³² Miller, “The ‘Sandwich’ Generation: Adult Children of the Aging,” 419.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ *The Book of Church Order of the Presbyterian Church in America*, 6th ed. (Lawrenceville, GA: Office of the Stated Clerk of the Presbyterian Church in America, 2017), Appendix A.

the first man as recorded in Genesis 2:22,³⁶ the occasion had lasting significance for all mankind. More than the first wedding, it represented the establishment of marriage as “the first and most basic of all human institutions.”³⁷ The divine intent from the beginning was that governments, churches, schools, and other social structures would flow from the basic family unit and rest upon it.³⁸ Procreation and marriage, as two of God’s creation ordinances,³⁹ were and are foundational to his mandate to humans to fill the earth and subdue it and to exercise dominion over it for his glory and their good.⁴⁰

The institution of the family is central to God’s redemptive purposes as well. Professor John Murray points out that marriage is “one of the main channels for the accomplishment of God’s saving purpose in the world. It is in the bosom of the Christian family that the nurture which the Lord himself provides is administered.”⁴¹ In view of the vital importance of the family both in scripture and in life, situations that impose additional stresses upon this institution are of great interest and concern to Christians. As Boice asserts, “If marriage falls then all these other institutions – churches, schools, businesses, hospitals, and governments – will inevitably fall with it.”⁴²

³⁶ Genesis 2:22.

³⁷ James M. Boice, *Genesis: An Expository Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2002), 1:136.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ This is the term theologians use in referring to the commands or mandates God gave to man in his state of innocence before the fall.

⁴⁰ Genesis 1:26-28.

⁴¹ John Murray, *Principles of Conduct: Aspects of Biblical Ethics* (1957; repr., Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1997), 79.

⁴² Boice, *Genesis*, 1:137.

The Christian faith is also cognizant of the strategic importance of church leaders. The Apostle Paul writes that pastors have been gifted to the church by Jesus Christ “to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for the building up of the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.”⁴³ As by God’s design pastors fulfill such a key role in fostering church unity and maturity, it is reasonable to assume that the well-being of pastors has significant implications for the overall well-being of the congregations they lead.

This assumption is supported by recent research. Bob Burns, Tasha D. Chapman, and Donald C. Guthrie all have extensive experience serving in church leadership and training leaders for ministry. Through a grant from the Lilly Endowment, Inc. initiative, *Sustaining Pastoral Excellence*, these authors facilitated extensive discussions with clergy couples and conclude that the health of pastors has significance for the health of their congregations. One study participant, commenting on his lack of emotional self-awareness, said that “I see my weaknesses in this are reflected in the church I pastor. Our church is emotionally and relationally underdeveloped.”⁴⁴ Another pastor participant expressed the conviction that “the most effective way to develop a healthy church is for me to be healthy and maintain the health of my marriage.”⁴⁵

⁴³ Ephesians 4:11-13. Unless otherwise noted, scripture citations are from the English Standard Version (ESV).

⁴⁴ Bob Burns, Tasha D. Chapman, and Donald C. Guthrie, *Resilient Ministry: What Pastors Told Us about Surviving and Thriving* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2013), 23.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 25.

The health and well-being of church leaders, however, may not be taken for granted. The difficulties of the pastoral vocation have been well documented. Authors Michael Todd Wilson and Brad Hoffman mention several: meeting the demands and expectations of board members, learning to lead experienced volunteer staff, coordinating one's calling with other professionals in the organization, and dealing with felt-pressures to please all members of the congregation. In sum, the authors allege, "Vocational ministry is more difficult than most laypeople realize,"⁴⁶ and "At times, being a minister can be overwhelming."⁴⁷ Clearly stress is a common problem among the clergy, and Wilson and Hoffman note that surveys have shown that 80 percent of pastors believe that pastoral ministry affects their families negatively.⁴⁸

The importance of the family, the key role ministers play in churches, and the stresses they encounter day to day combine to raise some important questions in view of the emergence of the "sandwich generation": How are those church leaders who are among the ranks of the "sandwich generation" faring? How – and how well – are they coping with the added responsibility of caring either for aging parents or grown children, and sometimes for both? Although much has been learned about the "sandwich generation" since the appearance of Miller's groundbreaking work nearly four decades ago, the answers to questions regarding the experience of clergy engaged in multi-generational caregiving have yet to be discovered.

⁴⁶ Michael Todd Wilson and Brad Hoffman, *Preventing Ministry Failure: A Shepherd Care Guide for Pastors, Ministers and Other Caregivers* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2007), 16.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 31.

In preparing their 2012 review, DeRigne and Ferrante’s literature search yielded 833 peer-reviewed articles on the topic of the “sandwich generation.”⁴⁹ Research conducted as part of the present study in early 2018 identified over 200 additional studies that have been published in the interval between 2012 and the present.⁵⁰ In this entire body of scholarly literature going back to Miller, no studies have yet probed the important topic of church leaders who are “sandwiched” between children and aging parents for whom they are simultaneously providing care.⁵¹ Therefore, the purpose of this study was to explore how “sandwich generation” pastors navigate the simultaneous demands of ministering in their churches and caring for their multigenerational families.

Research Questions

The following questions guided the research:

1. How do “sandwich generation” pastors describe the impact of navigating the simultaneous demands on their personal lives?
 - a. How do they describe the challenges?
 - b. How do they describe the benefits?
2. How do “sandwich generation” pastors describe the impact on their marriages?
 - a. How do they describe the challenges?
 - b. How do they describe the benefits?
3. How do “sandwich generation” pastors describe the impact on their ministries?
 - a. How do they describe the challenges?
 - b. How do they describe the benefits?

⁴⁹ DeRigne and Ferrante, “The Sandwich Generation: A Review of the Literature,” 95.

⁵⁰ The literature search that was conducted employed a methodology identical to that used by DeRigne and Ferrante, “The Sandwich Generation: A Review of the Literature.” Academic Search Premier was the search engine, only peer-reviewed articles based on U.S. studies were counted, and key word combinations included (1) sandwich + generation, (2) multigenerational + caregiving, (3) care + aging parent + children, and (4) caregiving + burden + generation.

⁵¹ This was determined by conducting a literature search via Academic Search Premier of all peer-reviewed articles from 1981 to 2018 using the key word combination sandwich generation + clergy or pastor or minister or priest.

4. How do “sandwich generation” pastors seek to navigate their challenges and function successfully in their various roles as caregivers, marriage partners, and ministers?

Significance of the Study

This study is intended to provide an opening line to what will hopefully become an extended conversation centered around pastors in the “sandwich generation.” The insights gathered will facilitate a deeper theoretical understanding of this social phenomenon as it pertains to this specific vocational group. The ultimate intent of the study, however, is practical. Multigenerational caregiving creates certain stresses, and “sandwiched” clergy need support as they seek to navigate the dual demands of ministry and providing care to their families. As they receive help, they will be strengthened for their calling and may in turn become channels of assistance to those around them in similar circumstances.

Pastors

Pastoral ministry is inherently demanding, and church leaders are candid about the stresses their work involves. The majority believe that ministry has a negative impact on their families. The added responsibility of caring for aging parents and grown children adds another layer of personal and professional challenge for those involved. If clergy in the “sandwich generation” can locate their own experience within the context of broad changes that are occurring in American family life, they may feel less isolated through an awareness that many others are facing similar challenges. If they can learn how fellow ministers are seeking to navigate ministry and family care, they may discover helpful

pathways through their own difficulties. If they are informed about the growing number and variety of services, informational resources, and other forms of support available to members of the “sandwich generation,” they will be able to access them where appropriate. This study seeks to advance all these ends.

Congregants

The size of the “sandwich generation” makes it highly likely that some of its members are present in any given American congregation. “Sandwiched” pastors thus have an opportunity to minister to such persons from a position of shared experience. Their own struggles and solutions can become a reservoir from which to draw, enabling them to speak with greater understanding and empathy to the needs and concerns of the “sandwiched” members in their pews. This study, then, is intended in part to inspire ministers in the “sandwich generation” to draw on their own firsthand experiences in caregiving as means of shaping and sharpening their ability to serve others.

Churches

Finally, it is hoped that local churches will benefit from this study. Scripture calls God’s people to “bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.”⁵² This mutual burden-sharing is sometimes accomplished most effectively at the congregational level as church leaders develop and deploy human and other resources to implement specialized ministries targeted to specific practical needs present within the church body.

⁵² Galatians 6:2.

Churches may find that organized ministries to “sandwiched” members become vehicles of informed and compassionate service both to the stressed among the flock and to the chief Shepherd himself.⁵³ Moreover, for some congregations, ministries directed to the needs of the “sandwich generation” might become an avenue of effective outreach to the surrounding community at large as churches seek to engage their neighbors with the gospel of Jesus Christ through deeds of mercy and words of truth.

Definition of Terms

For the purposes of this study, certain key terms are defined as follows:

Benefit. Something that produces good or helpful results or effects or that promotes well-being.⁵⁴

Caregiving. Informal and unreimbursed care administered by family members and others to older adults. Caregiving is distinct from paid treatment and care rendered by medical professionals and institutions such as hospitals, assisted living centers, and skilled nursing facilities.

Coping. The behaviors, cognitions, and perceptions in which people engage when contending with their life problems.⁵⁵ These responses serve as defensive mechanisms that prevent, avoid, or minimize emotional distress.

Role Strain. A sense of being overwhelmed by excessive demands and responsibilities associated with one’s various life roles. Role strain can negatively impact peoples’ self-concept by eroding their sense of mastery and diminishing their level of self-esteem. Role strain indirectly adds to the stress that people experience directly through difficult events and circumstances in their lives.⁵⁶

⁵³ Matthew 25:37-40.

⁵⁴ Merriam-Webster, “Benefit,” (N.p.: Merriam-Webster, 2018), accessed March 13, 2018, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/benefit>.

⁵⁵ Leonard I. Pearlin and Carmi Schooler, “The Structure of Coping,” *Journal of Health and Social Behavior* 19 (April 1978): 5.

⁵⁶ Reference.com, “What Is Role Strain in Sociology?” (N.p.: Reference.com, n.d.), accessed May 19, 2018, <https://www.reference.com/world-view/role-strain-sociology-1f92a3ceb753acec>.

Sandwich Generation. American adults who have at least one living parent age 65 or older and are either raising a child younger than 18 or providing financial, caregiving, or emotional support to a grown child age 18 or older.⁵⁷

Stress. A state of bodily or mental tension resulting from factors that tend to alter an existent equilibrium.⁵⁸ Stress is often experienced as a sense of being anxious, exhausted, or overwhelmed.

⁵⁷ Parker and Patten, *The Sandwich Generation*.

⁵⁸ Merriam-Webster, "Stress," (N.p.: Merriam-Webster, 2018), accessed March 13, 2018, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/stress>.

Chapter Two

Literature Review

The purpose of this study was to explore how “sandwich generation” pastors navigate the simultaneous demands of ministering in their churches and caring for their multigenerational families.

The following questions guided the research:

1. How do “sandwich generation” pastors describe the impact of navigating the simultaneous demands on their personal lives?
 - a. How do they describe the challenges?
 - b. How do they describe the benefits?
2. How do “sandwich generation” pastors describe the impact on their marriages?
 - a. How do they describe the challenges?
 - b. How do they describe the benefits?
3. How do “sandwich generation” pastors describe the impact on their ministries?
 - a. How do they describe the challenges?
 - b. How do they describe the benefits?
4. How do “sandwich generation” pastors seek to navigate their challenges and function successfully in their various roles as caregivers, marriage partners, and ministers?

This literature review establishes a theoretical framework for the study and situates its findings in the context of current scholarly discussion of the “sandwich generation.” The review begins with an analysis of three areas of literature relevant to the “sandwich generation”: stresses and strains of caregiving, coping strategies, and benefits of caregiving. The review concludes with a fourth section examining biblical and theological teaching on troubles in the Christian’s life.

Stresses and Strains of Caregiving

In 1981, Dorothy A. Miller introduced the “sandwich generation” to the academic community and asserted that those who provide care simultaneously to their children and aging parents are exposed to a “unique set of unshared stresses.”⁵⁹ Subsequent studies have confirmed Miller’s contention and have found that multigenerational caregiving is associated with varying levels of stress in two caregiver life domains.

Caregiving Stresses

Psychological Stress

A study conducted by the National Alliance for Caregiving and AARP, *Caregiving in the U. S. 2015*, provides an overview of family caregiving in the United States. In this study, 38 percent of participants reported that their caregiving role was highly emotionally stressful, with an additional 25 percent reporting it was moderately stressful.⁶⁰ The study found that caregiver stress levels vary significantly according to multiple variables comprising each caregiving relationship.⁶¹ The spectrum of stressful

⁵⁹ Dorothy A. Miller, “The ‘Sandwich’ Generation: Adult Children of the Aging,” *Social Work* 26, no. 5 (September 1981): 419.

⁶⁰ National Alliance for Caregiving and AARP Public Policy Institute, *Caregiving in the U. S.: 2015 Report* (n.p.: National Alliance for Caregiving and AARP Public Policy Institute, 2015), 56, accessed April 9, 2018, <https://www.aarp.org/content/dam/aarp/ppi/2015/caregiving-in-the-united-states-2015-report-revised.pdf>.

⁶¹ Ibid. Variables found to be positively associated with higher stress levels include increased caregiver age; lower levels of caregiver education and income; caregiver perception of having no choice in assuming caregiving responsibilities; higher number of weekly hours devoted to caregiving; increasing number of years that care is provided; caring for a close relative such as a spouse or parent; caregiver co-residence with the care recipient; caregiver living more than an hour away from the care recipient; being the primary caregiver to the care recipient; caring for someone with a mental health issue such as Alzheimer’s, dementia, or memory loss; caring for someone with a chronic or long-term condition; care involving a higher number of activities of daily living (ADLs) and incidental activities of daily living (IADLs); and care requiring the accomplishment of medical or nursing tasks. Stress reactions are also based on caregiver perceptions of the extent to which their caregiving responsibilities interfere with their personal needs.

emotions that the literature has documented among caregivers includes depression and anxiety;⁶² hostility and resentment;⁶³ feeling down, feeling upset, and having little interest in things;⁶⁴ anger, shame, fear, denial, and sadness;⁶⁵ feelings of inadequacy and guilt;⁶⁶ the feeling of being overburdened;⁶⁷ defensiveness, irritability, feelings of isolation, an inability to concentrate, difficulty making decisions, and feelings of hopelessness or worthlessness.⁶⁸

The research has found that caregivers report significant levels of life stress in greater numbers than do non-caregivers. Lynda A. Anderson, PhD, is a research scientist at the Vanderbilt University Medical Center. She and a team of colleagues conducted a comparative study of life satisfaction indicators among caregivers and non-caregivers. The study found that significantly more caregivers than non-caregivers reported frequent

⁶² Lesley D. Riley and Christopher “Pokey” Bowen, “The Sandwich Generation: Challenges and Coping Strategies of Multigenerational Families,” *Family Journal* 13, no.1 (January 2005): 53.

⁶³ Marina Bastawrous et al., “Factors that Contribute to Adult Children Caregivers’ Well-being: A Scoping Review,” *Health & Social Care in the Community* 23, no. 5 (September 2015): 450.

⁶⁴ Steven A. Cohen et al., “Psychosocial Factors of Caregiver Burden in Child Caregivers: Results from the New National Study of Caregiving,” *Health & Quality of Life Outcomes* 13, no. 1 (August 2015): 3.

⁶⁵ Barbara Silverstone and Helen Kandel Hyman, *You and Your Aging Parent*, 4th ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, Inc., 2008), 30.

⁶⁶ Anne Petrovich, “Lessons Learned in the Sandwich,” *Afflia: Journal of Women and Social Work* 23, no. 3 (August 2008): 226.

⁶⁷ Silverstone and Hyman, *You and Your Aging Parent*, 33.

⁶⁸ Ann O’Sullivan, “Pulled from All Sides: The Sandwich Generation at Work,” *Work* 50, no. 3 (March 2015): 493.

mental distress (14.3 percent versus 9.4 percent) and reported being dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with life (7.0 percent versus 5.5 percent).⁶⁹

Physiological Stress

Medical science has established that high levels of stress are associated with an array of negative physical health outcomes including muscle tension, digestive problems, high blood pressure, heart disease, headaches, insomnia, and lowered immunity to illness.⁷⁰ Although early caregiving studies did not examine the physical health of the “sandwich generation,” researchers did explore the health outcomes of persons giving care either to children or to aging parents. The results of these studies were inconsistent.

More recent studies have explored the physical health of the “sandwich generation” and have found a positive association between multigenerational caregiving and poorer health outcomes. A team of researchers under the leadership of Elizabeth K. Do, PhD, MPH, of the Virginia Commonwealth University’s Department of Health Behaviors and Policy, found that members of the “sandwich generation” were less likely than others to report having excellent or very good health, with the association between caregiving and diminished health increasing with the number of children present within a

⁶⁹ Lynda A. Anderson et al., “Adult Caregivers in the United States: Characteristics and Differences in Well-being, by Caregiver Age and Caregiving Status,” *Preventing Chronic Disease* 10 (August 2013), under “Results,” accessed April 16, 2018, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3748279/>.

⁷⁰ O’Sullivan, “Pulled from All Sides,” 492.

caregiving household.⁷¹ The researchers maintain that caregiver stress increases when simultaneous care is provided both to elderly family members and young children.⁷²

The association between caregiving and negative health outcomes is supported in the findings of other studies. The MetLife Mature Market Institute, Metropolitan Life Insurance Company's research, information, education, and consultation resource center for aging-related issues, sponsored a study produced by the National Alliance for Caregiving and the National Center on Women and Aging at Brandeis University. In this study, *The MetLife Juggling Act Study: Balancing Caregiving with Work and the Costs Involved*, almost three-quarters of surveyed caregivers reported that caregiving had a negative impact on their health, with more than two in ten reporting significant health problems resulting from caregiving.⁷³

Those who reported negative health impacts said that one manifestation was additional visits to a health care provider, with half of these respondents reporting more than eight additional annual visits.⁷⁴ The *Caregiving in the U. S. 2015* report also finds an association between caregiving and poorer health, with 22 percent of participants reporting that their health had declined because of caregiving, and 17 percent describing

⁷¹ Elizabeth K. Do, Steven A. Cohen, and Monique J. Brown, "Socioeconomic and Demographic Factors Modify the Association between Informal Caregiving and Health in the Sandwich Generation," *BMC Public Health* 14, no. 1 (April 2014): 8.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ National Alliance for Caregiving and the National Center on Women and Aging at Brandeis University, *The MetLife Juggling Act Study: Balancing Caregiving with Work and the Costs Involved* (n.p.: MetLife Mature Market Institute, 1999), 8, accessed April 5, 2018, <http://www.caregiving.org/data/jugglingstudy.pdf>.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

their health as fair or poor.⁷⁵ Additionally, 19 percent of participants reported a high level of physical strain associated with their caregiving efforts.⁷⁶

Caregiving Strains

Sociologist Leonard I. Pearlin, PhD, is best known in the academic community for the stress process paradigm he developed while serving as director of the Human Development and Aging Program at the University of California-San Francisco. Pearlin and a group of colleagues maintain that in addition to creating stress directly, stressors also function indirectly to create significant additional stress for people by exacerbating their chronic life strains and generating feelings of being overwhelmed by excessive demands on time, energy, and resources.⁷⁷ Anne Petrovich, PhD, associate professor in California State University's Department of Social Work Education, became a caregiver to her aging father as she was beginning stages a new career in academia. Providing a personal account of the feeling of overload that can be experienced by members of the "sandwich generation," Petrovich says that as she contemplated the multiple demands she was facing, "My heart sank."⁷⁸ She goes on to explain that "I was an aging sandwich-

⁷⁵ National Alliance for Caregiving and AARP Public Policy Institute, *Caregiving in the U. S. 2015*, 10. By comparison, only 10 percent of the general U. S. adult population describe their health as fair or poor.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Leonard I. Pearlin et al., "The Stress Process," *Journal of Health and Social Behavior* 22, no. 4 (December 1981): 339.

⁷⁸ Petrovich, "Lessons Learned in the Sandwich," 223.

generation parent with three grown children, a 9-year-old daughter with learning disabilities, a husband, and a grandson on the way.”⁷⁹

Role strain – the sense of being overwhelmed by excessive demands and responsibilities⁸⁰ – often erodes two important elements of people’s self-concept. Their sense of mastery decreases when they feel that important events and circumstances in their lives are beyond their ability to control. Also, their level of self-esteem decreases when they feel that the uncontrollability of their difficulties is due to their inadequacy as persons. These losses of self-concept indirectly increase the subjective level of stress that is directly due to the difficulties themselves.

The literature establishes that the stresses experienced by members of the “sandwich generation” are augmented through strain that occurs in their roles as marriage partners, workers, and managers of household economies.

Marital Strain

Although few studies have focused on the impact of caregiving on marriages in the “sandwich generation,” the literature does contain both anecdotal and research-based evidence associating caregiving with marital strain. Petrovich describes the struggles she encountered in her marriage when she added caring for her elderly parent to the other roles in her life. “My husband gave up his only private space in the house to accommodate Dad and tolerated an increasing stream of home health care workers,

⁷⁹ Ibid., 224.

⁸⁰ Reference.com, “What Is Role Strain in Sociology?” n.p.: Reference.com, n.d., accessed May 19, 2018, <https://www.reference.com/world-view/role-strain-sociology-1f92a3ceb753acec>.

sometimes graciously and occasionally impatiently and grumpily. My marriage was strained.”⁸¹

Two studies have found that increased marital strain, while commonly a concomitant of caregiving, does not negatively impact caregiver marital quality in most cases. Laura Spencer Loomis, a researcher at Westat, Inc., and Alan Booth, PhD, professor emeritus of sociology, human development, and demography at Pennsylvania State University, conducted a longitudinal study of “sandwich generation” couples probing four indicators of marital quality: marital happiness, marital interaction, marital conflict, and marital instability. Spencer and Loomis found that although participants were more likely than those in “non-sandwiched” marriages to say they believed the division of labor in their households had become unfair, multigenerational caregiving did not significantly affect the quality of their marriages in a negative way.⁸² Similarly, a study of “sandwich generation” couples ages 40 to 59 conducted by State University of New York at Albany researchers and professors of sociology Russell A. Ward, PhD, and Glenna Spitze, PhD, found indicators of strain in caregiver marriages, but concludes that being “sandwiched” between adult children and aging parents had only modest and scattered influences on the quality of marriages in midlife.⁸³ The strain detected in some of the participants’ marriages – reports of lower marital quality and greater frequency of

⁸¹ Petrovich, “Lessons Learned in the Sandwich,” 226.

⁸² Laura Spencer Loomis and Alan Booth, “Multigenerational Caregiving and Well-being: The Myth of the Beleaguered Sandwich Generation,” *Journal of Family Issues* 16, no. 2 (March 1995): 139.

⁸³ Russell A. Ward and Glenna Spitze, “Sandwiched Marriages: The Implications of Child and Parental Relations for Marital Quality in Midlife,” *Social Forces* 77, no. 2 (December 1998): 667.

disagreements – was traceable to problems caregivers experienced with care recipients rather than to problems directly related to the marriage relationship itself.⁸⁴

Loomis and Booth express surprise that the demands of multigenerational caregiving do not significantly erode the quality of marriages. They suggest that a partial explanation of this “null” effect may be that people more likely to assume caregiving responsibilities have greater relational skills and stronger marriages than those who do not, factors which in turn decrease the negative marital impact of caregiving demands.⁸⁵ Regarding the association of problems in caregiver/care-recipient relationships with lower marital quality, Ward and Spitze caution that it is uncertain whether this should be construed as a causal link or is “more generally indicative of the underlying nature and quality of family relations.”⁸⁶

Vocational Strain

Research indicates that multigenerational caregiving is associated with job strain. In *The MetLife Study of Sons at Work: Balancing Employment and Eldercare*, a MetLife Mature Market Institute-sponsored study conducted by the National Alliance for Caregiving and The Center for Productive Aging at Towson University, nearly two-thirds of caregiving participants said that caregiving negatively impacted their careers.⁸⁷ These vocational strains manifest in a variety of ways.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 663-664.

⁸⁵ Loomis and Booth, “Multigenerational Caregiving and Well-being,” 143.

⁸⁶ Ward and Spitze, “Sandwiched Marriages,” 664.

⁸⁷ National Alliance for Caregiving and The Center for Productive Aging at Towson University, *The MetLife Study of Sons at Work: Balancing Employment and Eldercare* (Westport, CT: MetLife Mature

Absenteeism

According to “Respect a Caregiver’s Time,” a Gallup organization research project sponsored by the pharmaceutical company Pfizer and ReACT, an organization dedicated to addressing the challenges faced by caregiver-employees, people who combine caregiving with participation in the paid workforce miss an annual average of 6.6 days of work due to their caregiving responsibilities.⁸⁸

Diminished Career Development and Advancement

Significant numbers of participants in *The MetLife Juggling Act Study* reported bearing a wide range of indirect career costs associated with caregiving. These included passing up job promotions or assignments; foregoing opportunities for job transfers or relocations; an inability to acquire new job skills; and an inability to keep up with changes in necessary job skills.⁸⁹ Overall, nearly 40 percent of respondents reported that caregiving limited their ability to advance on the job.⁹⁰

Decreased Productivity

Studies indicate that a portion of the annual estimated \$28 billion cost to employers attributable to the caregiving activities of employees results from the

Market Institute, 2003), 8, accessed April 5, 2018, <https://www.towson.edu/chp/departments/interprofessional/undergrad/gerontology/centeraging.html>.

⁸⁸ Dan Witters, “The Cost of Caregiving to the U. S. Economy,” *Gallup Business Journal*, December 1, 2011, <http://news.gallup.com/businessjournal/151049/cost-caregiving-economy.aspx>.

⁸⁹ National Alliance for Caregiving and the National Center on Women and Aging at Brandeis University, *The MetLife Juggling Act Study*, 5.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

decreased performance and productivity of workers struggling to balance their work responsibilities with caregiving responsibilities at home.⁹¹ Diminished performance can result from a form of distraction – known as “presenteeism” – that occurs when the employee is physically present in the workplace but is mentally preoccupied with family caregiving-related concerns.⁹² Decreased worker performance can also result from employee health problems attributable to the strains of caregiving. Almost three-quarters of those surveyed in *The MetLife Juggling Act Study* reported caregiving-induced health struggles.⁹³ Of these, 13 percent reported that their health affected their work “a little,” with 24 percent saying it was affected “somewhat,” and 16 percent reporting it was affected “a lot.”⁹⁴

Job Loss

Research reveals that caregivers are sometimes terminated by their employers due to conflicts between their work and caregiving responsibilities, though this is rare. In the *Caregiving in the U. S. 2015* study, 2 percent of participating caregivers reported having been fired from a job as a result of being a caregiver.⁹⁵

⁹¹ O’Sullivan, “Pulled from All Sides,” 492.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ National Alliance for Caregiving and the National Center on Women and Aging at Brandeis University, *The MetLife Juggling Act Study*, 8.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ National Alliance for Caregiving and AARP Public Policy Institute, *Caregiving in the U. S. 2015*, 56.

Financial Strain

The literature on the “sandwich generation” consistently documents the significant financial strain that caregiving often entails. According to Parker and Patten, 30 percent of survey participants said they were barely able to meet their basic expenses, with an additional 11 percent reporting they did not have enough to meet even basic expenses.⁹⁶ Similarly, in the *Family Caregivers – What They Spend, What They Sacrifice: The Personal Financial Toll of Caring for a Loved One* study co-sponsored by the National Alliance for Caregiving and Evercare, a large national healthcare coordination program, 43 percent of participants said caregiving had increased their financial worries.⁹⁷

The literature establishes that the financial strains of the “sandwich generation” mount as monetary losses grow both during caregiving and after caregiving has ended.

Present Costs

Out-of-Pocket Costs. Members of the “sandwich generation” incur out-of-pocket costs associated with their support of both aging parents and adult children. Participants in the *Family Caregivers – What They Spend, What They Sacrifice* study reported contributing money to parents for an array of expenses that included payments for household expenses, groceries, travel and transportation costs, medical care co-pays, and

⁹⁶ Kim Parker and Eileen Patten, *The Sandwich Generation: Rising Financial Burdens for Middle-Aged Americans* (Washington, D. C.: Pew Research Center, 2015), accessed January 28, 2018, <http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2013/01/30/the-sandwich-generation/>.

⁹⁷ Evercare and National Alliance for Caregiving, *Family Caregivers – What They Spend, What They Sacrifice: The Personal Financial Toll of Caring for a Loved One* (n.p.: Evercare and National Alliance for Caregiving, 2007), 21, accessed April 5, 2018, http://www.caregiving.org/data/Evercare_NAC_CaregiverCostStudyFINAL20111907.pdf.

pharmaceuticals.⁹⁸ A number of respondents in *The MetLife Juggling Act Study* also mentioned out-of-pocket costs for home care professionals who provided care to parents of “sandwich generation” members.⁹⁹ Wassel and Cutler assert that “sandwiched” parents providing financial support to their adult children are often helping to defray expenses that go beyond room and board. Payments for living expenses, transportation costs, insurance coverage, medical expenses, student loans, and spending money are frequently provided as well.¹⁰⁰

Although estimates vary somewhat among studies, research indicates that these combined out-of-pocket costs can be substantial. In the *Family Caregivers – What They Spend, What They Sacrifice* study, for example, participants who kept records of out-of-pocket caregiving expenses reported annualized expenses of \$12,348.¹⁰¹ *The MetLife Juggling Act Study*, on the other hand, found that caregiving participants spent an average total of \$19,525 over the six years during which, on average, they provided financial assistance to care recipients.¹⁰²

Lost Wage Income. Studies show that many caregivers make workplace accommodations to fulfill their caregiving responsibilities, including transitioning from

⁹⁸ Ibid., 14.

⁹⁹National Alliance for Caregiving and the National Center on Women and Aging at Brandeis University, *The MetLife Juggling Act Study*, 7.

¹⁰⁰ Janice I. Wassel and Neal E. Cutler, “Yet Another Boomer Challenge for Financial Professionals: The ‘Senior’ Sandwich Generation,” *Journal of Financial Professionals* 60, no. 6 (March 2006): 64.

¹⁰¹ Evercare and National Alliance for Caregiving, *Family Caregivers – What They Spend, What They Sacrifice*, 14.

¹⁰² National Alliance for Caregiving and the National Center on Women and Aging at Brandeis University, *The MetLife Juggling Act Study*, 7.

full-time to part-time work, taking unpaid leaves of absence, quitting a job, or taking early retirement.¹⁰³ These accommodations usually result in lower wages. Participants in *The MetLife Juggling Act Study* who provided sufficient information to permit calculations were projected to lose an average of \$566,433 in lifetime wages.¹⁰⁴

Future Costs

Lower Retirement Account Balances. To cope with caregiving-associated costs, some in the “sandwich generation” postpone or curtail certain categories of personal spending, including contributions to their savings and tax-deferred retirement accounts. While *The MetLife Juggling Act Study* did not project an average loss in caregivers’ retirement income, it did find that 11 percent of caregivers reported reducing their savings and investments “somewhat” and 16 percent reported reducing them by “a lot.”¹⁰⁵ Participants also reported reducing contributions to their IRAs. Eleven percent said they reduced contributions “somewhat” and 4 percent said they did so “a lot.”¹⁰⁶

Lower Pension and Social Security Benefits. The workplace accommodations mentioned above, besides resulting in lost wage income for “sandwiched” persons, also have a negative impact on other retirement benefits. Researchers for *The MetLife*

¹⁰³ Ibid., 4. In the *Family Caregivers – What They Spend, What They Sacrifice* study, 15 percent of participants reported taking an unpaid leave of absence, and 37 percent reported reducing work hours or quitting work entirely. See *Family Caregivers – What They Spend, What They Sacrifice*, under “Figure J: How Has Caregiving Affected Your Work Status?”

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 6. The present value of lost lifetime wages calculated as of the date of retirement is \$566,443.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 7.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

Juggling Act Study project that “sandwiched” persons who make such accommodations will experience average lifetime losses of \$25,494 in Social Security benefits and \$67,202 in pension wealth.¹⁰⁷

Catastrophic Costs

Some of the “sandwich generation’s” care recipients experience illnesses requiring surgeries and extensive medical treatments. Researchers have noted the potentially devastating financial impact of these major illnesses on caregivers and their families. Melissa A. Simon, MD, MPH, is professor of preventive medicine and medical social sciences at Northwestern University’s Feinberg School of Medicine. Simon points out that “serious illnesses often impose significant costs on individuals and their families, which can place families at an increased risk for multigenerational economic deprivation and even an illness-poverty trap.”¹⁰⁸ Long-term financial hardship can be the result of several cascading effects. The entire household feels the impact of reduced income when a breadwinner finds it necessary either to reduce work hours or exit the work force altogether to care for a sick family member. When caregiving breadwinners subsequently return to full-time work, they are then likely to experience reduced compensation in the form of lower wages and reduced employee benefits.¹⁰⁹ As a result of this spiral, it can

¹⁰⁷ National Alliance for Caregiving and the National Center on Women and Aging at Brandeis University, *The MetLife Juggling Act Study*, 7.

¹⁰⁸ Melissa A. Simon et al., “Path Toward Economic Resilience for Family Caregivers: Mitigating Household Deprivation and the Health Care Talent Shortage at the Same Time,” *The Gerontologist*, 53, no. 5 (October 2013): 861.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 862. The authors state that studies show caregivers aged 50 or older leaving the work force to care for a family member experience mean income and benefit losses of \$283,716 for men and \$324,044 for women.

take more than six years even for advantaged households – with employment, health insurance, and financial assets – to recover, and they must often do so through bankruptcy.¹¹⁰

Total Costs

Research indicates that the lifetime cost of providing support to aging parents and adult children can be significant for the “sandwich generation.” Average projected lifetime losses in total wealth were projected to be \$659,139 for participants in *The MetLife Juggling Act Study*.¹¹¹

Summary

This section of the literature review summarized salient findings of research on the stresses and strains experienced by the “sandwich generation” as they provide care to their children and aging parents. It surveyed the significant direct psychological and physiological impacts of stress on caregivers. It also presented important findings concerning the additional indirect stress created through strains which often have an

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ National Alliance for Caregiving and the National Center on Women and Aging at Brandeis University, *The MetLife Juggling Act Study*, 10. Average lifetime wealth losses were projected based on information provided by study participants who reported complete personal financial data. The researchers made these projections by summing the average projected \$566,443 in lifetime losses, \$25,494 in lifetime Social Security benefit losses, and \$67,202 in pension benefit losses. The MetLife projections do not include caregiver out-of-pocket expenses. Utilizing data from the *Family Caregivers – What They Spend, What They Sacrifice* study, Wassel and Cutler project average lifetime wage losses of \$126,934 for male caregivers and \$120,616 for female caregivers; and average lifetime Social Security benefits losses of \$37,923 for male caregivers and \$64,433 for female caregivers. They do not estimate projected lifetime pension benefit losses. See Wassel and Cutler, “Yet Another Boomer Challenge,” 63.

erosive effect on caregivers' self-concept and create difficulties in their major life roles as marriage partners, workers, and managers of household economies.

Although members of the "sandwich generation" experience significant stress, the literature also demonstrates that their subjective stress levels are not directly correlated to the intensity of the objective stressors they encounter. Stress may be buffered by a variety of factors, including a set of responses collectively known as coping strategies. Significant insights in the literature concerning the ways people cope with their difficulties will be summarized in the next section of the literature review.

Coping Strategies

Multiple studies demonstrate that the intensity of the objective pressures and problems to which people are subjected does not directly correlate to the subjective level of stress they experience. This is because they respond to stressful situations in ways that serve to buffer the negative impact. The literature speaks of these responses to difficulties as forms of coping.

Coping Defined

Pearlin defines coping responses as "the behaviors, cognitions, and perceptions in which people engage when actually contending with their life problems."¹¹² These responses serve as defensive mechanisms that prevent, avoid, or minimize emotional distress. Although unanswered questions remain, research has established that various

¹¹² Pearlin and Schooler, "The Structure of Coping," 5.

responses to life-strains can have a significant cushioning effect on the impact of stressful events and situations. Studies suggest that individuals cope with varying degrees of effectiveness, such that the levels of stress induced by similar difficulties may vary, sometimes widely, from person to person. The reasons for this are not fully understood and may result from a complex set of variables that include the social and psychological resources at the disposal of the individual as well as other contextual factors.

Overview of Coping Strategy Models

Pearlin and his associate Carmi Schooler speak of the “bewildering richness” of the different coping behaviors that emerged in their study of the ways people respond to the strains associated with the major social roles they occupy.¹¹³ Other researchers have also noted the vast multiplicity of people’s coping responses and have proposed various models for classifying them.

Pearlin and Schooler maintain that the coping responses identified in their study are most intelligibly classified according to three overarching types, based on their differing functions: responses aimed at changing the situation out of which strainful experience arises; responses aimed at controlling the meaning of the strainful experience itself; and responses aimed at controlling the stress emerging from a strainful experience.¹¹⁴

Susan Folkman, PhD, and Richard S. Lazarus, PhD, two scholars noted for their contributions to studies related to stress and coping, propose an alternate model

¹¹³ Ibid., 4.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 7.

consisting of two main categories. The first, problem-focused coping, is designed to manage the problem that is causing distress through responses such as seeking information, trying to get help, inhibiting action, or taking direct action.¹¹⁵ The second, emotion-focused coping, is designed to regulate the emotions or distress associated with the problem through responses such as trying to see humor in the situation, avoidance, detachment, assignment of blame to self or others, fatalism, projection, and fantasy.¹¹⁶ According to Folkman and Lazarus, problem-focused coping relates to external behavior and actions, while emotion-focused coping relates to interior activities involving thoughts and emotions.¹¹⁷ These researchers assert that people's choices of coping strategies typically depend on how they appraise a strainful situation. If they appraise that it has a reasonable potential for beneficial change, they will typically select and use problem-focused strategies. Alternately, if they appraise that a difficult situation has little possibility for beneficial change, they usually adopt emotion-focused strategies.¹¹⁸

Rachel A. Pruchno, PhD, is director of research at the New Jersey Institute for Successful Aging and endowed professor of medicine at Rowan University's School of Osteopathic Medicine. Pruchno and a group of colleagues propose a coping strategy model that represents a variation on the Folkman-Lazarus model. While adopting the two categories of problem-focused and emotion-focused coping, the Pruchno team proposes a

¹¹⁵ Susan Folkman and Richard S. Lazarus, "An Analysis of Coping in a Middle-Aged Community Sample," *Journal of Health and Social Behavior* 21, no. 3 (September 1980): 227.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 229.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 231.

third category, acceptance coping, which includes ways to navigate a difficult situation by accepting it, determining to make the best of it, or refusing to let it get to them.¹¹⁹

Of particular relevance to the current study is a fourth model of coping strategies developed through a study of the “sandwich generation” by Margaret B. Neal, PhD, and Leslie B. Hammer, PhD. Neal is professor of community health at Portland State University’s Institute on Aging, and Hammer is professor of psychology at Portland State University and director of the Center for Work-Family Stress, Safety, and Health. In a comprehensive national study of working “sandwich generation” couples, Neal and Hammer synthesized multiple existing coping strategy models and supplemented them with data from their own research to construct a new model to describe more accurately how “sandwich generation” couples deal with their life challenges.¹²⁰ Neal and Hammer sorted study participants’ coping strategies into two basic categories, one representing responses aimed at increasing resources available to deal with problems and the other representing responses aimed at reducing demands associated with problems. Additionally, Neal and Hammer found that people typically increased resources and reduced demands in three distinct ways: behaviorally, cognitively, and emotionally.

Their full model of coping strategies thus includes the six distinct categories of increasing resources behaviorally, increasing resources cognitively, increasing resources emotionally, decreasing demands behaviorally, decreasing demands cognitively, and decreasing demands emotionally.¹²¹

¹¹⁹ Rachel A. Pruchno, Christopher J. Burant, and Norah D. Peters, “Coping Strategies of People Living in Multigenerational Households: Effects on Well-Being,” *Psychology and Aging* 12, no. 1 (1997): 117.

¹²⁰ Margaret B. Neal and Leslie B. Hammer, *Working Couples Caring for Children and Aging Parents: Effects on Work and Well-Being* (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers, 2007), 128.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 129-130.

Coping through Control of the Meaning of Stressful Situations

Pearlin and Schooler maintain that the most common type of coping strategy individuals adopt in the face of difficulties involves meaning control.¹²² These seasoned researchers assert that the level of threat represented by any problem is largely determined by the meaning people attach to the problem. Thus, by finding ways to control the meaning of a problem cognitively, people effectively reduce its perceived threat level. This type of coping reduces the level of subjective stress they experience from the objective problem.¹²³

Other researchers extend the work of Pearlin and Schooler by providing insight into how meaning control functions to buffer stress. Folkman and her colleague, Judith Tedlie Moskowitz, PhD, professor of medical social sciences at Northwestern University, contend that meaning control strategies can generate and sustain positive affect or emotion in people.¹²⁴ These positive feelings, in turn, prevent or mitigate a broad range of physiological and psychological manifestations of stress, enhancing their well-being.¹²⁵

Eight types of meaning control appear in the literature.

¹²² Leonard I. Pearlin and Carmi Schooler, "The Structure of Coping," *Journal of Health and Social Behavior* 19 (April 1978): 6.

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Susan Folkman and Judith Tedlie Moskowitz, "Positive Affect and the Other Side of Coping," *American Psychologist* 55, no. 6 (June 2000): 651.

¹²⁵ Ibid., 649.

Positive Reappraisal

One strategy of meaning control mentioned by Folkman and Moskowitz is positive reappraisal, or reframing a situation to appraise it in a more constructive way. As examples, positive reappraisal can take the form of perceiving opportunities for personal growth in the context of a problem or perceiving personal growth that has already resulted from a problematic situation.¹²⁶ In a caregiving context, positive reappraisal often takes the form of defining the situation as a worthwhile opportunity to be helpful to care recipients by demonstrating love for them and maintaining their dignity.¹²⁷

Problem-Focused Coping

A second meaning control strategy posited by Folkman and Moskowitz, problem-focused coping, features ways to manage or solve a problem. Elements of problem-focused coping include planning, decision-making, information and resource-gathering, and task-oriented actions.¹²⁸ While problem-focused coping at first may not seem to be a variation of cognitive meaning control, Folkman and Moskowitz maintain that it does represent such a variation since it involves careful thought to identify specific goals leading to meaningful action steps that furnish caregivers with feelings of effectiveness and mastery, thereby buffering their sense of helplessness and lack of control.¹²⁹

¹²⁶ Ibid., 650.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

Infusion of Ordinary Events with Positive Meaning

Folkman and Moskowitz mention infusing positive meaning into ordinary events as a third variety of coping through cognitive meaning control. In their study of the coping strategies of caregivers to AIDS patients, more than 99 percent of study participants reported regularly using two variations of this strategy.¹³⁰ One variation involved actively planning small positive experiences such as a special meal or a gathering of friends. The other involved taking note of unplanned positive experiences such as receiving an unexpected compliment or seeing a beautiful sunset on an especially difficult day. Although in ordinary times these planned and unplanned positive experiences would likely be perceived as neutral, caregivers consciously infused these experiences with positive meaning, and this reduced their stress by providing them with a brief and needed respite in the midst of their stressful situation.

Positive Comparisons

Pearlin and Schooler identify positive comparisons as a fourth variety of coping through meaning control. This involves the drawing of comparisons with a significant individual or group. By appraising their problem as less severe or no more severe than the problems of significant others, people control its meaning in a way that decreases the magnitude of its threat, thus buffering its negative psychological and physiological impacts.¹³¹ Alternatively, the reference point of comparison can be a significant time-

¹³⁰ Susan Folkman and Judith Tedlie Moskowitz, "Stress, Positive Emotion, and Coping," *Current Directions in Psychological Science* 9, no. 4 (August 2000): 116.

¹³¹ Pearlin and Schooler, "The Structure of Coping," 6.

frame. When people appraise their problem as an improvement over past circumstances or as the prelude to an improvement in the future, it seems less threatening and easier to endure.¹³²

Selective Ignoring

Selective ignoring is a fifth variety of coping through meaning control. It reduces stress by mentally disregarding a circumstance's negative or threatening impact, focusing instead on the positive or worthwhile aspects of the situation.¹³³

Hierarchical Ordering of Life Priorities

Pearlin and Schooler mention hierarchical ordering of life priorities as a sixth variation of coping through meaning control. People engage in this style of coping when they assign different levels of importance to different aspects of their lives and life-roles in order to minimize stress.¹³⁴ Thus a member of the "sandwich generation" who takes early retirement to have time to care for an aging parent may cope by devaluing the ensuing losses of income and workplace relationships and magnifying the value of investing time and energy to help a frail loved one in the final stages of life. Pearlin and Schooler assert that when people define the areas of their lives in which they are experiencing problems as less important, negative impacts on their self-concept are minimized, which in turn reduces the subjective level of stress they experience.¹³⁵

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

Normalization of Caregiving

A seventh variation of coping through meaning control is mentioned by Lesley D. Riley, PhD, and Christopher “Pokey” Bowen, PhD. These counselors suggest that members of the “sandwich generation” can buffer their stress levels by conceptualizing caregiving as being a normal – as opposed to anomalous – life experience.¹³⁶ Their suggestion rests on observations similar to that of gerontologist Paula C. Fletcher, PhD, and her colleague, Allison M. Steiner, who maintain that people are more likely to perceive unexpected roles as more challenging and stressful than roles they anticipate and accept as normal.¹³⁷ Current demographic realities have made caring for aging parents and supporting adult children more commonplace, and Riley and Bowen suggest that people can minimize the negative subjective impacts of multigenerational caregiving by adjusting their expectations and viewing the role of family caregiver as a normal and expected aspect of life in contemporary society.¹³⁸

¹³⁶ Riley and Bowen, “The Sandwich Generation: Challenges and Coping Strategies,” 51.

¹³⁷ Allison M. Steiner and Paula C. Fletcher, “Sandwich Generation Caregiving: A Complex and Dynamic Role,” *Journal of Adult Development* 24, no. 2 (June 2017): 142.

¹³⁸ Youjung Lee and Laura Smith of Binghamton University’s Department of Social Work provide an instance of how role expectations have significant implications for the levels of stress people experience in difficult circumstances. In a study of the attitudes of Korean American caregivers to older family members with dementia, the researchers point out that dementia-related diseases are considered a normal part of the aging process in Korean culture. This may explain why these caregivers are far less likely to seek special assistance in caring for their loved ones with dementia. This contrasts with the perspective of Western culture, which views dementia as an abnormal and pathological condition and typically finds caring for dementia patient more stressful. See Youjung Lee and Laura Smith, “Qualitative Research on Korean American Dementia Caregivers’ Perception of Caregiving: Heterogeneity between Spouse Caregivers and Child Caregivers,” *Journal of Human Behavior in the Social Environment* 22, no. 2 (February 2012): 117.

Appraisal of Problems through the Lens of Religion

As an eighth variation of coping with difficulties through meaning control, Jon S. Newman, PhD, and Kenneth I. Pargament, PhD, point to the significant role that religion can play. Newman is an experienced clinical psychologist, and Pargament is professor of psychology and director of clinical training in the clinical psychology PhD program at Bowling Green State University. These researchers assert that people respond to the presence of hardship through a problem-solving process that begins with their definition or assessment of the problem. According to Newman and Pargament, religion can serve a significant stress-reduction function by providing useful categories for conceptualizing difficulties and challenges in intelligible ways.

As examples of how religion can help people make sense of their problems, Newman and Pargament maintain that belief in a God who visits judgment on wrongdoing may lead people to interpret and accept a difficult situation as an instance of divine discipline or punishment; that belief in a loving God may lead them to frame problems as a divine invitation to growth; and that belief in a God who is sovereign and all-powerful will encourage them to think that although their problems may be beyond their control, they are not beyond the control of their God.¹³⁹ These ways of thinking will decrease the appraised threat level of problems, which in turn will serve to decrease the stress levels associated with the problems.

According to Newman and Pargament, the problem definition process also involves a secondary appraisal. This secondary appraisal involves people's evaluation of

¹³⁹ Jon S. Newman and Kenneth I. Pargament, "The Role of Religion in the Problem-Solving Process," *Review of Religious Research* 31, no. 4 (June 1990): 391.

their ability to solve or cope with the challenges confronting them. The researchers maintain that religion further reduces stress at the point of secondary appraisal by enabling people to think that their problems are solvable or manageable with God's help. Further, say these researchers, religion may also suggest options for ways of solving or managing problems that are consistent with their convictions about God's will and character.¹⁴⁰

Newman and Pargament point out that while problem definition from a religious perspective is primarily a cognitive function, it also has definite emotional and behavioral implications. When people frame their problem as intelligible and beneficent, they are more likely to experience positive emotions during the difficult experience. Moreover, when their religion assists them in identifying ways of managing or solving their problem consistent with their understanding of God, they are more likely to respond to the problem with activity rather than passivity. Thus, according to Newman and Pargament, religion holistically informs and engages people's minds, emotions, and actions in a way that buffers the negative impact of problems on their psychology and physiology.

Newman and Pargament's research finds that people whose religious orientation is more intrinsic are more likely to report higher levels of religious coping with problems than are those whose religious orientation is primarily extrinsic. They explain the difference by suggesting that people with an intrinsic religious orientation live their religion, while those with and extrinsic religious orientation use their religion.¹⁴¹ Their

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 400.

studies indicate that those whose religion is an end in itself – rather than a means to some other end – draw on it more often to cope with their problems.

The Effectiveness of Various Coping Strategies

Consistent with the present incomplete nature of research on coping, the literature offers some provisional observations concerning the effectiveness of various coping strategies. Pruchno and her colleagues suggest that greater use of problem-focused and acceptance strategies is associated with recognized correlates of psychological well-being such as less depression, more mastery, and more positive affect, while greater use of emotion-focused strategies is negatively associated with these correlates.¹⁴² Neal and Hammer found that two of the three coping strategies most commonly adopted by working “sandwich generation” couples had a positive impact. These included increasing resources by seeking emotional support from others and reducing demands by setting and adhering to priorities. The third commonly used strategy, reducing demands by decreasing social involvement, tended to have a negative impact on well-being.¹⁴³ Newman and Pargament contend that coping through religion has been shown to buffer stress effectively by exerting a positive influence on the thoughts, emotions, and behaviors of those who adopt this approach.¹⁴⁴ Of interest to the current study, a team of researchers under the direction of David P. Nalbone, PhD, associate professor of

¹⁴² Pruchno, Burant, and Peters, “Coping Strategies of People Living in Multigenerational Households,” 115.

¹⁴³ Neal and Hammer, *Working Couples Caring for Children and Aging Parents*, 154.

¹⁴⁴ Newman and Pargament, “The Role of Religion,” 391-392.

psychology at Purdue University Northwest, suggests that the positive cognitive appraisals of the caregiving role typically made by religious caregivers, coupled with the sense of transcendence above difficult situations that religion affords them, serve to reduce the stressful burden of caregiving and promote marital satisfaction in caregiving contexts.¹⁴⁵

Although some coping strategies afford greater protection against stress than others, Pearlin and Schooler nonetheless maintain that “there is no single coping mechanism so outstandingly effective that its possession alone would insure our ability to fend off the stressful consequences of strains.” Rather, they assert, the employment of a variety of coping responses is most likely to provide the greatest buffering effect against stress during difficult life events and circumstances.¹⁴⁶

Summary

This section of the literature review highlighted relevant research on the topic of how “sandwich generation” members and others cope with difficult events and situations. It defined coping as “the behaviors, cognitions, and perceptions in which people engage when actually contending with their life problems” and posited that such coping responses can explain varying levels of stress in different individuals. Four models of coping strategies were reviewed, including a more detailed discussion of cognitive control of the meaning of challenging situations. A brief review of literature-based

¹⁴⁵ Jennie S. Murphy et al., “Caring for Aging Parents: The Influences of Family Coping, Spirituality/Religiosity, and Hope on the Marital Satisfaction of Family Caregivers,” *The American Journal of Family Therapy* 43, no. 3 (May/June 2015): 245.

¹⁴⁶ Pearlin and Schooler, “The Structure of Coping,” 13.

evaluations of the relative effectiveness of different coping strategies was provided, and the review of the literature on coping concluded with the contention that a variety of coping strategies is likely to provide people with the most effective buffer against stress in problematic events and circumstances.

While coping strategies have been shown to be helpful to the “sandwich generation,” research establishes the presence of other dynamics besides stresses and strains in multigenerational caregiving households. Caregivers experience positive benefits as well. The benefits of caregiving will be the topic of the following section of the literature review.

Benefits of Caregiving

While most studies have focused on the stresses of caregiving, a growing body of research finds that benefits are also associated with caregiving. Betty J. Kramer, PhD, associate professor in the University of Wisconsin-Madison’s School of Social Work, mentions a study in which 90 percent of the caregivers reported that they valued positive aspects of caregiving.¹⁴⁷ Similarly, a study led by Javier Lopez, PhD, professor of psychology at the Complutense University of Madrid, found that caring for elderly and dependent relatives had a positive impact on caregivers in most cases.¹⁴⁸ The literature suggests that the presence and magnitude of the benefits associated with caregiving

¹⁴⁷ Betty J. Kramer, “Gain in the Caregiving Experience: Where Are We? What Next?” *The Gerontologist* 37, no. 2 (May 1997): 219.

¹⁴⁸ Javier Lopez, Jesus Lopez-Arrieta, and Maria Crespo, “Factors Associated with the Positive Impact of Caring for Elderly and Dependent Relatives,” *Archives of Gerontology and Geriatrics* 41, no. 1 (July 2005): 89.

depend on a range of situation-specific variables related to the caregiver, the care-receiver, the caregiving relationship, and other factors.

A survey of these variables lies beyond the scope of this literature review. This review will instead present an overview of three main categories of caregiving benefits, which include intrapersonal, interpersonal, and practical benefits.

Intrapersonal Benefits

Affective Well-Being

According to behavioral psychologist M. Powell Lawton, PhD, uplifts, defined as “small events that evoke some response of pleasure, affirmation, or joy,” are intrinsic features in most caregiving relationships.¹⁴⁹ Uplifts contribute to a general appraisal of caregiving satisfaction, a judgment by caregivers that the feelings associated with their caregiving role are fulfilling in spite of the stresses it entails.¹⁵⁰ A study conducted under the leadership of social psychologist and researcher Thomas Hansen, PhD, found that even in the presence of high stress levels, most caregivers report “feelings of appreciation . . . and satisfaction in their role as caregiver.”¹⁵¹

The positive emotions reported by caregiver participants in multiple studies include feelings of gratification associated with being helpful, feelings of satisfaction

¹⁴⁹ M. Powell Lawton et al., “Measuring Caregiver Appraisal,” *Journal of Gerontology* 44, no. 3 (June 1989): 62.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

¹⁵¹ Thomas Hansen, Britt Slagvold, and Reidun Ingebretsen, “The Strains and Gains of Caregiving: An Examination of the Effects of Providing Personal Care to a Parent on a Range of Indicators of Psychological Well-Being,” *Social Indicators Research* 114, no. 2 (November 2013): 325.

derived from repaying care recipients for their previous care, and feelings of appreciation by care recipients for help provided;¹⁵² enjoyment stemming from spending time with care recipients, feelings of gratification when care recipients show appreciation, feelings of pleasure over the care receivers' pleasure in small things, feelings of happiness in knowing that care recipients are being cared for by family;¹⁵³ feelings of being loved by care recipients, good feelings about the quality of care the caregiver was providing;¹⁵⁴ and feelings of usefulness and pride at being able to handle crises.¹⁵⁵

The literature suggests that these positive emotions significantly improve the overall caregiving experience. In a meta-analysis integrating the findings of 228 studies, researchers Martin Pinquart, PhD, and Silvia Sörensen, PhD, found that perceived caregiving uplifts correlate with lower levels of caregiver burden and depression.¹⁵⁶ The researchers also found that perceived uplifts do not decrease when objective levels of caregiving stress increase.¹⁵⁷ Since mental health experts consider affective well-being to be an important component of overall psychological or subjective well-being,¹⁵⁸ it is

¹⁵² Berit Ingersoll-Dayton, Margaret B. Neal, and Leslie B. Hammer, "Aging Parents Helping Adult Children: The Experience of the Sandwiched Generation," *Family Relations* 50, no. 3 (July 2001): 262.

¹⁵³ Lawton et al., "Measuring Caregiver Appraisal," 65.

¹⁵⁴ Kramer, "Gain in the Caregiving Experience," 226.

¹⁵⁵ Martin Pinquart and Silvia Sörensen, "Associations of Stressors and Uplifts of Caregiving with Caregiver Burden and Depressive Mood: A Meta-Analysis," *The Journal of Gerontology* 58B, no. 2 (March 2003): 114.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 120. The researchers caution, however, that while this may indicate that uplifts reduce the negative psychological effects of caregiving, it is also possible that distressed caregivers may be less likely than non-distressed caregivers to perceive caregiving uplifts. The directionality of the association remains unclear at the present stage of research.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 122.

¹⁵⁸ Hansen, Slagsvold, and Ingebretsen, "The Strains and Gains of Caregiving," 325.

possible that the positive emotions associated with caregiving may spill over from the caregiving role into other life roles and domains.

Cognitive Well-Being

The literature demonstrates that another caregiver gain is cognitive well-being. Hansen and his colleagues maintain that cognitive well-being and affective well-being are the key components of psychological well-being. Cognitive well-being is comprised of three elements: life satisfaction, people's appraisal of their quality of life; partnership satisfaction, their appraisal of the quality of their relationships; and self-satisfaction, also known as self-esteem, their appraisal of their self-worth, self-acceptance, and self-respect.¹⁵⁹ These appraisals result from people's tendency to evaluate their lives according to personal norms, such as their earlier lives, their personal goals and expectations, or the expectations of significant others.¹⁶⁰

Although the strains associated with caring for aging parents might be expected to have a negative impact on people's cognitive well-being, the Hansen research team found these strains to have "inconsequential" effect on it.¹⁶¹ The researchers point to the highly cognitive – versus affective – nature of satisfaction and self-esteem appraisals and suggest that these appraisals "may be detached from, or even enhanced by, emotionally taxing and burdensome experiences."¹⁶²

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

¹⁶¹ Ibid., 342.

¹⁶² Ibid.

Multiple studies exploring the impact of caregiving on well-being have consistently found that caregivers report gains in cognitive well-being and that they associate these gains with their caregiving role. Kramer's critical review of literature summarizing twenty studies conducted over two decades mentions reports that caregiving leads to personal growth experienced as increased self-esteem, and an enhanced sense of meaning and purpose.¹⁶³ In a subsequent review of research focused on male caregivers, Kramer cites a broad spectrum of participant-reported gains, including satisfaction, intense gratification, personal growth, an enhanced sense of purpose, pride in accomplishment, and self-appraisals of competence in difficult circumstances.¹⁶⁴

Additional evidence for the cognitive gains associated with caregiving is provided by firsthand accounts in the literature by persons whose formal academic training and experience in the caring professions intersect with their personal stories as informal caregivers to members of their families. These narratives juxtapose reports of cognitive-related satisfaction with candid acknowledgements of the extreme practical and emotional difficulties that caregiving entails. Petrovich, reflecting on the satisfaction she derived through the difficult role of caring for her elderly father, says that "it felt vitally

¹⁶³ Kramer, "Gain in the Caregiving Experience," 226-227. These caregiver appraisals touch on three of the six dimensions of well-being posited by psychologist Carol D. Ryff, PhD, Director of the University of Wisconsin-Madison's Institute on Aging, namely, personal growth, purpose in life, and self-acceptance. The other dimensions, according to Ryff, are autonomy, environmental mastery, and positive relations with others. See Carol D. Ryff, "Happiness Is Everything – Or Is It? Explorations on the Meaning of Psychological Well-Being," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 57, no. 6 (December 1989): 1069-1081. See also Carol D. Ryff, "In the Eye of the Beholder: Views of Psychological Well-Being Among Middle-Aged and Older Adults," *Psychology and Aging* 4, no. 2 (June 1989): 195-210.

¹⁶⁴ Betty J. Kramer and Edward H. Thompson, Jr., eds., *Men as Caregivers: Theory, Research and Service Implications* (New York: Springer Publishing Company, 2002), 113. Competence in difficult circumstances relates to a fourth of Ryff's six dimensions of well-being, namely, that of environmental mastery. Sociologists define mastery as "the extent to which one regards one's life-chances as being under one's own control in contrast to being fatalistically ruled." See Pearlin and Schooler, 5.

important to me to honor my father's wishes and to remain in loving, daily connection with him in the bosom of our family."¹⁶⁵ Her report also supports Hansen's contention that previous life experience is one of the standards caregivers use in measuring their self-esteem. As Petrovich puts it, "I realize how strongly influenced I was by the gender-role modeling of my maternal grandmother, who lovingly cared for one elder after another in our extended family"¹⁶⁶

In another account, Karen L. Warner, RN, MBA, associates significant personal gains in cognitive well-being with her experience as part of a team of extended family members caring for her terminally ill father-in-law. Warner, who is chairperson of the practical nursing program at Valparaiso, Indiana's Ivy Technical State College, describes the inconveniences, exhaustion, and difficult emotions that accompanied her caregiving role. Nevertheless, she testifies to the simultaneous sense of reward and satisfaction that she and all other family members realized as a result, claiming that "the privilege of caring for and providing for our aging and ill parent was more rewarding than anything I've ever done."¹⁶⁷

The literature establishes that gains in cognitive well-being similar to those associated with caring for aging parents are also realized when providing support to young adult children. Heidi Igarashi holds a PhD in human development and family studies and serves in the human development program at Oregon State University's School of Social and Behavioral Health Sciences. Igarashi and a team of researchers

¹⁶⁵ Petrovich, "Lessons Learned in the Sandwich," 225.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

¹⁶⁷ Karen L. Warner, "The Rewards of the Sandwich Generation," *The Journal of Practical Nursing* 45, no. 4 (December 1995): 20.

conducted a study of middle-aged “sandwich generation” couples in which participants reported higher levels of well-being when their support efforts helped their children be successful.¹⁶⁸ The researchers maintain that “sandwich generation” parents value parenthood as a central life role and are strongly committed to supporting their children in the transition to adulthood and full independence. This commitment remains unwavering even when parents must sacrifice other life goals to provide the types and levels of support they perceive their children need.¹⁶⁹ Igarashi and her team suggest these values and commitments may be influenced by the “sandwich generation’s” previous life experiences. One shaping influence may be their memory of parental support received during their own transition to adulthood; another may be their experience-based understanding of the challenges associated with accomplishing certain milestones widely considered to constitute “normative adulthood” in American culture, including a college degree, a job, marriage, the purchase of a home, and starting a family.¹⁷⁰ These shaping influences, combined with the social expectations both of their circle of friends and of their own children, may become an important standard by which members of the “sandwich generation” assess their self-esteem. This standard motivates their support to

¹⁶⁸ Heidi Igarashi et al., “My Nest Is Full: Intergenerational Relationships at Midlife,” *Journal of Aging Studies* 27, no. 2 (April 2013): 103.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

¹⁷⁰ The researchers point out that “sandwich generation” parents are confident in their knowledge of how to be helpful in supporting their young adult children, a characteristic that seems to be rooted in their own experience of transition to adulthood. This, together with the fact that supporting children in a growth-oriented transition to independence represents a continuation of longstanding parent-child roles in the relationship, may contribute to the relatively low level of ambivalence parents experience and express as they support their transitioning children. By contrast, Igarashi’s team found that the “sandwich generation” experiences higher levels of ambivalence in caring for their aging parents. The researchers hypothesize that this ambivalence may be because caring for older family members in decline represents “uncharted territory” for these caregivers, which undermines their confidence in this new caregiving role.

their children, which in turn facilitates the positive appraisal of self-esteem which is essential to cognitive well-being.

Wisdom

The literature suggests that the caregiving role facilitates the development of wisdom in the “sandwich generation.” Robert J. Sternberg, PhD, professor of psychology and education and director of the Center of the Psychology of Abilities, Competencies, and Expertise at Yale University, defines wisdom as “the application of intelligence and experience as mediated by values toward the achievement of the common good.”¹⁷¹ He maintains that such wisdom is beneficial because “the judgments it yields can improve our quality of life and conduct.”¹⁷² Studies suggest that caregiving serves as a matrix for the development of two types of wisdom, as follows:

An Enhanced Capacity to Judge and Pursue What Is Most Important in Life

The literature documents that the experience of multigenerational caregiving can lead to a refined sense of life values and priorities. Psychologist Ayala M. Pines, PhD, is business department chairperson and faculty dean of the Guilford Glazer College of Business and Management at Ben-Gurion University of the Negev. In a qualitative study of working “sandwich generation” couples conducted by Pines and a group of colleagues, some participants reported that the experience of simultaneously raising children and caring for aging parents led them to prioritize family over career, a development they

¹⁷¹ Robert J. Sternberg, “What Is Wisdom and How Can We Develop It?” *The Annals of the American Academy* 591, no. 1 (January 2004): 165.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, 167.

deemed beneficial.¹⁷³ More specifically, participants said caregiving had led them to subordinate their former preoccupation with personal achievement and possessions to a concern for the future of their children.¹⁷⁴ Petrovich's personal account also reveals that her family's caregiving experience helped them develop a sense of what is most important. Recalling the quiet influence of her sick and elderly father's gentle presence on the attitudes and behavior of her entire family, Petrovich says that their "kindness quotient" increased, since "Dad's vulnerability, innate goodness, and awareness of what was important stimulated us to become better human beings."¹⁷⁵

An Enhanced Capacity to Understand the Nature and Implications of the Aging Process

The literature finds evidence that caregiving also facilitates wisdom in the form of an enhanced understanding of aging and its practical implications. "Sandwich generation" participants in the study led by Igarashi reported that their experience of caring for aging parents had afforded them a preview of the physical and mental decline that would likely be a part of their own experience as they navigated old age. Participants reported translating this insight into behaviors calculated to preserve their own health and maximize their independence in later years. These behaviors included cultivating habits of healthy diet and exercise, engaging in activities to preserve brain health, maintaining

¹⁷³ Ayala Malach Pines et al., "Job Burnout and Couple Burnout in Dual Earner Couples in the Sandwiched Generation" *Social Psychology Quarterly* 74, no. 4 (December 2011): 378.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 375.

¹⁷⁵ Petrovich, "Lessons Learned in the Sandwich," 227.

an active involvement in community affairs, and arranging current living spaces to make them more habitable in their old age.¹⁷⁶

The wisdom that the “sandwich generation” gains through caregiving also leads to greater value being given to reducing the future caregiving role of the next generation. Having gained firsthand knowledge of the strains involved in caregiving and desiring to insulate their children from them, participants in the Igarashi study reported purchasing long-term care insurance, exploring assisted living options, and having conversations with their children about their preference for non-family care as they approach the end of their lives.¹⁷⁷

Interpersonal Benefits

Enriched Relationships with Care Recipients

Studies of the “sandwich generation” indicate that enhanced relationships between caregivers and aging care receivers are a frequent benefit of caregiving.¹⁷⁸ A study conducted by a research team under the leadership of Berit Ingersoll-Dayton, PhD, of the University of Michigan’s School of Social Work, revealed that care relationships are reciprocal and that care receivers often provide emotional support to their adult

¹⁷⁶ Igarashi et al., “My Nest Is Full,” 108.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., 110. Since these actions and desires “reflected a type of agency or individual initiative to establish some control over a situation that they anticipated to be inevitable,” Igarashi’s team interprets them as evidence of enhanced mastery, a key component of cognitive well-being.

¹⁷⁸ Ingersoll-Dayton, Neal, and Hammer, “Aging Parents Helping Adult Children,” 262. The researchers cite three additional studies that also found enhanced caregiver-care receiver relationships to be a benefit of caregiving. These were conducted Alexis J. Walker and Katherine R. Allen; Gregory A. Hinrichsen, Nancy A. Hernandez, and Simcha Pollack; and Andrew E. Scharlach.

children caregivers.¹⁷⁹ This support comes in the forms of companionship and advice which caregivers appraise as enjoyable and beneficial.¹⁸⁰

The literature finds that “sandwich generation” support for young adult children can enhance this relationship as well. According to Parker and Patten, 53 percent of middle-aged parents in the Pew Study who had provided financial support to their grown children during the past twelve months reported having more emotional closeness with their children than their own parents did with them at a similar age.¹⁸¹

Enriched Relationships with Spouses

There is evidence in the literature that caregiving can have an enriching impact on “sandwich generation” marriages. This finding emerged in the study of working “sandwich generation” couples undertaken by Pines and her colleagues. Focus group participants reported that caring for aging parents presented an opportunity for spouses to provide help and support to each other as they partnered in providing care. Participants said that strong marriages helped them deal with the many stresses of caregiving, which in turn further strengthened their marriages and imparted more meaning to their relationships.¹⁸²

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., 266.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid.

¹⁸¹ Parker and Patten, *The Sandwich Generation*. By contrast, a smaller percentage of parents who had not provided financial support to their grown children, 41 percent, reported experiencing more emotional closeness with their children than their own parents did with them at a similar age.

¹⁸² Pines et al., “Job Burnout and Couple Burnout,” 377.

Enriched Relationships with Other Family Members

There is some evidence in the literature suggesting that caregiving may strengthen ties among members of extended families when undertaken as a joint project involving siblings and others. Recalling how a team of siblings, spouses, and children worked together to care for an aging parent, Warner explains, “We had never been a family, but when faced with all these decisions and problems, we all banded together.”¹⁸³ Stronger family bonds grew out of regular discussions of caregiving problems and possible solutions, and relationships were strengthened around the shared goal of doing their utmost to provide care while making their loved one as comfortable as possible.

Enriched relationships with extended family members, however, are not guaranteed. The literature also finds that relationships can sometimes deteriorate in joint caregiving contexts. Petrovich, for example, reports that her caregiving experience was accompanied by the re-emergence of longstanding sibling rivalry with her brother and that strong differences of opinion regarding care for their father led to estrangement.¹⁸⁴

Practical Benefits

Tangible Assistance from Care Recipients

Ingersoll-Dayton and her colleagues found that aging parents who receive care from their children often reciprocate by providing practical help to their caregivers. Reciprocated help comes in several forms including help with finances, child care, and

¹⁸³ Warner, “The Rewards of the Sandwich Generation,” 17.

¹⁸⁴ Petrovich, “Lessons Learned in the Sandwich,” 225-226, 229.

household tasks such as cleaning, laundry, and cooking.¹⁸⁵ The literature contends that help was most often provided by elders who had relatively fewer physical and cognitive impairments. However, such tangible help was not uncommonly perceived by caregivers as a “mixed blessing” that precipitated increased concerns about their aging parents. Some “sandwich generation” members felt that help with housework provided by their parents was substandard, and that care for children at times was inept.¹⁸⁶ Some also reported feelings of guilt when financial help was given. These feelings were further complicated by sadness stemming from the realization that their aging parents were losing the ability to be helpful.¹⁸⁷

Acquisition of New Skills

Authorities who have explored the relationship between caregiving and vocational roles observe that caregivers acquire a broad range of skills transferable to the workplace. Career consultant Virginia Byrd, MEd, who has served as president of the Work-Life Coalition of San Diego, maintains that caregiving facilitates the development of a wide array of useful skills including communicating, surveying needs, being intuitive, thinking logically, being creative, nurturing, managing, adaptive and self-management skills, and knowledge skills in such specialized areas as legal and financial benefits, contracts, wills,

¹⁸⁵ Ingersoll-Dayton, Neal, and Hammer, “Aging Parents Helping Adult Children,” 266.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 269.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 270.

trusts, real estate transactions, and employee compensation.¹⁸⁸ These skills find relevant practical applications in vocational and other settings.

Melissa A. Simon, MD, MPH, is the George H. Gardner Professor of Clinical Gynecology and vice-chair of clinical research in the Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology at Northwestern University's Feinberg School of Medicine. Simon and a team of experts drawn from the fields of business and medicine point out that informal caregivers typically acquire a wide variety of marketable health care skills.¹⁸⁹ They suggest that with minimal augmentation, these new skills may qualify caregivers for new careers as home health aides. Simon and her colleagues contend that by putting their practical knowledge to work in a professional setting, those who have incurred significant monetary losses while caring for family members may recover financially while also helping to relieve a growing workplace talent shortage in the health care industry.¹⁹⁰

Summary

This section of the literature review provided an overview of salient findings on the benefits associated with the caregiving activities of the “sandwich generation.” Studies suggest that caregiving gains may be categorized under the three broad headings

¹⁸⁸ Virginia Byrd, “Career Counseling for the Sandwich Generation,” in *Thriving in Challenging and Uncertain Times* (Washington: U. S. Department of Education Educational Resources Information Center Publications, November 2011), 31.

¹⁸⁹ Simon et al., “Path Toward Economic Resilience,” 861.

¹⁹⁰ According to the researchers, this shortage of home health aides is attributable to the growing population of the elderly requiring in-home care combined with the incapacity of existing institutions to produce an adequate pool of competent and motivated formal caregivers.

of intrapersonal gains, embracing the sub-categories of affective gains, cognitive gains, and wisdom; interpersonal gains, embracing the sub-categories of enriched relationships with spouses, care recipients, and other family members; and practical gains, embracing the sub-categories of tangible help from care recipients and the acquisition of new skills. As with caregiver stresses and strains, the presence and degree of any these caregiver gains is variable and depends on the specific combination of characteristics and factors present in each caregiving context.

Biblical and Theological Insights on Troubles in the Christian's Life

The Bible has much to say about the troubles that come into the lives of God's people. The richness of the biblical vocabulary related to this subject signals its importance in the minds of the inspired writers of scripture. The Old Testament speaks of trouble,¹⁹¹ affliction,¹⁹² and distress.¹⁹³ The New Testament mentions tribulation,

¹⁹¹ E.g., Psalm 34:17 and Isaiah 8:22; 30:6. The Hebrew noun is צר, which embraces a range of meaning that includes narrowness, distress, dread, and want. See William L. Holladay, *A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (1971; repr., Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1980), s.v. "צר." The adjectival form of the Hebrew word means narrow or tight, and the verbal form means to be restricted, narrow, scant, or cramped.

¹⁹² E.g., Psalm 34:19. The Hebrew noun is רעה, which means misery, trouble, or disaster. See Holladay, *Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon*, s.v. "רעה."

¹⁹³ E.g., Isaiah 30:6 and Proverbs 1:27. The Hebrew noun is ציקה, which means oppression, distress, or pressure. See Holladay, *Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon*, s.v. "ציקה."

affliction, or calamity,¹⁹⁴ sufferings,¹⁹⁵ trials,¹⁹⁶ distress,¹⁹⁷ and hardship.¹⁹⁸ Scripture indicates that these troubles at times can be severe. For example, the Apostle Paul, writing to the church in Corinth of “the affliction we experienced in Asia,” says “We were so utterly burdened beyond our strength that we despaired of life itself.”¹⁹⁹

There are two strands of biblical teaching about troubles in the Christian life that are of special interest to the present study.

¹⁹⁴ E.g., Romans 5:3; 8:35; 2 Corinthians 1:4, 8; 4:14. The Greek word is θλίψις, which in extra-biblical Greek literally means pressure. In the New Testament, the word has a range of figurative meanings including oppression, affliction, tribulation, and distress that is brought about by difficult outward circumstances. See BDAG, s.v. “θλίψις, εως, ἢ.” The commentator John R. W. Stott maintains that in the New Testament, the word is almost a technical term for the sufferings that Christians must expect in the last days. See John R. W. Stott, *The Message of Romans: God’s Good News for the World*, The Bible Speaks Today, ed. John R. W. Stott (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 141. In classical literature and in the LXX (the Greek Old Testament), the term has a broader range of meaning, referring to oppression and various forms of need, distress, and affliction. See R. Schippers, “θλίψις,” in *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, English language edition, ed. Colin Brown (Grand Rapids, MI: The Zondervan Publishing House, 1976), 2:807-809.

¹⁹⁵ E.g., Romans 8:18; 2 Corinthians 4:7. The Greek noun is πάθημα, which means sufferings or misfortunes in both extra-biblical Greek and the New Testament, where it is almost always plural and often refers to the sufferings of Christ and of persecuted Christians in union with him. See BDAG, s.v. “πάθημα, ατος, τό.”

¹⁹⁶ E.g., James 1:2; 1 Peter 1:6. The Greek noun is πειρασμός, which has both a negative and positive meaning. Negatively, it refers to temptations or enticements to sin. Positively, it refers to divinely ordained painful trials by which his people may prove themselves true. See BDAG, s.v. “πειρασμός οὔ, ὄ.”

¹⁹⁷ E.g., Romans 8:35. The Greek noun is στενοχωρία, which means, literally, narrowness in extra-biblical Greek. In the New Testament it has a figurative range of meaning that includes distress, difficulty, anguish, or trouble. See BDAG, s.v. “στενοχωρία, ας, ἢ.”

¹⁹⁸ E.g., 2 Corinthians 12:10. The Greek noun is ἀνάγκη, which means distress or calamity. See BDAG, s.v. “ἀνάγκη, ης, ἢ.”

¹⁹⁹ 2 Corinthians 1:8.

Troubles Are Normal for God's People in This Present Time

God's people are instructed in scripture to expect difficulties in their lives. King David's observation that "many are the afflictions of the righteous"²⁰⁰ is representative of a theme that frequently appears in the Old Testament. In the New Testament, Paul, associating the sufferings of believers with "this present time," implies that these sufferings are to be anticipated as regular occurrences in the current era of salvation history.²⁰¹ Paul elsewhere makes the certainty of present hardship more explicit, declaring to the churches in Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch that "through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God."²⁰² Similarly, the Apostle Peter, writing to believers facing persecution, says, "Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you."²⁰³ And Jesus Christ himself – spoken of in prophecy as "a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief"²⁰⁴ – teaches his disciples that, like him, "in the world you will have tribulation."²⁰⁵

In preparing God's people to face their troubles, the Bible is careful to assure them that troubles, though challenging and unpleasant, are consistent with God's love for

²⁰⁰ Psalm 34:19.

²⁰¹ Romans 8:18. The expression τοῦ νῦν καιροῦ refers to the present age of world history before the second coming of Jesus Christ. This era is characterized by the inbreaking of God's gracious kingdom through the person and work of Christ, but also by the sin and brokenness that entered into the created order through the fall of mankind in the garden recorded in Genesis 3. Trouble and misery, inescapable at present as consequences of sin, will be completely eradicated at the glorious coming of Christ. At that time perfect peace will be restored in the new heaven and new earth.

²⁰² Acts 14:22.

²⁰³ 1 Peter 4:12.

²⁰⁴ Isaiah 53:3.

²⁰⁵ John 16:33.

them. He has become their loving Father, and they are his adopted children in Jesus Christ.²⁰⁶ Hence their troubles are manifestations of his fatherly discipline intended for their welfare and growth in maturity.²⁰⁷ In light of their new status as his children and heirs, they are assured that “God is for us.”²⁰⁸ Indeed, the Bible’s promise is that nothing in all creation “will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.”²⁰⁹ He will be with them through every experience.²¹⁰ Even when life is at its most difficult, they are ultimately secure, for Jesus Christ is the Ruler over every storm.²¹¹ Each difficulty through which a disciple passes is characterized as a “light momentary affliction,” serving as the prelude to a much greater glory to come.²¹²

The Bible does not require God’s people to be stoical in the face of their troubles. It recognizes that there will be times when they will know faintness of heart,²¹³ will experience grief,²¹⁴ and will “be burdened beyond our strength.”²¹⁵ Yet, in these experiences it exhorts believers to trust in the Lord and to “pour out your heart before him,” for “God is a refuge for us.”²¹⁶ Through allusions to patient farmers, the prophets

²⁰⁶ John 1:13; 1 John 3:1.

²⁰⁷ Hebrews 12:7, 10.

²⁰⁸ Romans 8:31.

²⁰⁹ Romans 8:39.

²¹⁰ Psalm 46:1; Psalm 91:15; Matthew 28:20.

²¹¹ Matthew 8:23-27.

²¹² 2 Corinthians 4:17.

²¹³ Psalm 61:2.

²¹⁴ 1 Peter 1:6.

²¹⁵ 2 Corinthians 1:8.

²¹⁶ Psalm 62:8.

who spoke in the name of the Lord, and the long-suffering Job, the Bible calls God's people to patience and firmness in the midst of troubles.²¹⁷ It directs the gaze of their faith "to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith," so that they will be strengthened to "run with endurance the race that is set before us."²¹⁸ It also commands them, in times of trouble, to "bear one another's burdens" in fulfillment of Christ's law of love.²¹⁹

Troubles Are Beneficial for God's People in Multiple Ways

A second strand of biblical teaching is that troubles are sent and ordered by God for the blessing of his people. Writing to the church at Rome, Paul bolsters believers who are undergoing trials with the assurance in Romans 8:28 that "we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose."²²⁰ Well-known author and theologian R. C. Sproul, PhD, maintains that the apostle, in using the terminology of "all things," is referring the infirmities and sufferings of God's people that form the context of Romans 8. Sproul asserts that the association of these troubles with "good" does not mean that everything that happens to Christians is

²¹⁷ James 5:7-11.

²¹⁸ Hebrews 12:1-2.

²¹⁹ Galatians 6:2.

²²⁰ Romans 8:28. The Greek word translated good is the neuter adjective ἀγαθός, used here substantively to denote something that is advantageous. See BDAG, s.v. "ἀγαθός, ἡ, ὄν." F. F. Bruce, Rylands Professor of Biblical Criticism and Exegesis at the University of Manchester, maintains that the grammar of Romans 8:28 contains ambiguities. According to Bruce, although "all things" (πάντα) may be either nominative, thus serving as the subject of the verb translated "work together," or accusative, thus serving as the object of the verb translated "work together," it more likely serves an adverbial function and means "in all things." If this is correct, the meaning would be that God, in all things, works for the good of those who love him." See F. F. Bruce, *Romans: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, ed. Leon Morris (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1985), 166.

“good” in a narrow sense, but that “God uses these things, triumphs over them, brings victory out of them and adds them together for our greater glory.”²²¹ Hence the troubles believers experience are actually “blessings in disguise.”²²²

Scripture’s general promise that good accrues to believers through all their troubles becomes more specific in biblical texts that mention four distinct benefits that are imparted to Christians through difficulties.

Troubles Nurture Believers’ Faith

First, the Bible teaches that troubles serve to nurture the faith of God’s people. Scripture indicates that this nurturing takes place in a fourfold way.

Troubles Test Faith

According to Peter, believers’ troubles are beneficial as a means by which their faith in God may display its “tested genuineness.”²²³ This expression, according to Wayne Grudem, DD, PhD, research professor of theology and Bible at Phoenix Seminary, is often used of the process by which precious metal such as gold or silver is tested by fire.²²⁴ As believers patiently endure their troubles – as they continue trusting

²²¹ R. C. Sproul, *The Gospel of God: Expositions of Paul’s Letter to the Romans* (Ross-shire, Great Britain: Christian Focus Publications, 1999), 147.

²²² *Ibid.*, 146.

²²³ 1 Peter 1:7. The Greek neuter adjective with the article is τό δοκίμιον. The commentator Charles Hodge maintains that the parallel expression in Romans 5:4, “endurance produces character” (δοκιμήν), expresses the thought that as sufferings call forth patient endurance in believers, this endurance constitutes evidence of the authenticity of their faith. Such faith, being well-tested, receives God’s approbation. See Charles Hodge, *A Commentary on Romans* (1835; repr., Edinburgh, Scotland: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1975), 135.

²²⁴ Wayne Grudem, *1 Peter: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, ed. Leon Morris (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 63.

and following the Lord in the midst of them – their faith is “proved” in the sense that it has stood the test of difficulty and has been found to be genuine.²²⁵

Troubles Purify Faith

Troubles also serve to nurture believers’ faith by purifying it. As Grudem explains, the intense pressure of difficulties is used by God as a means of burning away faith’s impurities so that “what is left when the trials have ended is purified, genuine faith, analogous to the pure gold or silver that emerges from the refiner’s fire.”²²⁶

Troubles Exercise Faith

The Bible indicates that troubles nurture faith by stimulating its exercise. In speaking of the experience of severe affliction that had come to him in Asia, Paul asserts that its divinely-intended purpose “was to make us rely not on ourselves but on God who raises the dead.”²²⁷ Colin G. Kruse, PhD, senior lecturer in New Testament at the Melbourne School of Theology, maintains that the exercise of faith is both necessary and beneficial for God’s people. This scholar points out that although reliance on God – not on self – is of fundamental importance in the Christian life, “such an attitude does not

²²⁵ The book of Job expresses a similar understanding of the proving function of trials in the lives of believers in the Old Testament. In the depth of suffering, Job 23:10 affirms of the Lord, “He knows the way that I take; when he has tried me, I shall come out as gold.”

²²⁶ Grudem, *1 Peter*, 64.

²²⁷ 2 Corinthians 1:9. The expression translated “rely . . . on” renders a compound verbal expression in the Greek that includes the perfect participial form *πεποιθότες*, which means to depend on, trust in, or put one’s confidence in. See BDAG, s.v. “*πείθω*.”

come naturally.”²²⁸ Kruse maintains that an inspired apostle’s need to have the stubborn tendency to self-reliance rooted out of his heart suggests that believers in general have the same necessity, “*to make us rely not on ourselves but on God*” (emphasis his).²²⁹

Douglas F. Kelly, PhD, professor of theology emeritus at Reformed Theological Seminary, agrees, asserting that suffering “has a way of killing our self-centered thinking and leaving room for us to trust in God who raises the dead.”²³⁰

Troubles that force believers actively to trust in God may be especially beneficial in the context of the contemporary Western philosophical climate, which, according to Francis A. Schaeffer, DD, is “overwhelmingly naturalistic.”²³¹ Against this backdrop, Schaeffer, the late American pastor, theologian, author, and founder of the L’Abri study center, suggests that a Christian can be so influenced by the prevailing cultural mindset that “he lives most of his life as though the supernatural were not there.”²³² According to Schaeffer, this posture of “unfaith,”²³³ often coexisting with a notional acceptance of orthodox Christian doctrine, puts humans at the center of the universe, diminishes believers’ sense of the reality of their relationship with God, and reduces the Christian faith to a “good philosophy.”²³⁴ Situations that bring disciples to the end of their own

²²⁸ Colin G. Kruse, *2 Corinthians: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, ed. Leon Morris (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1987), 65-66.

²²⁹ *Ibid.*, 66.

²³⁰ Douglas F. Kelly, *New Life in the Wasteland: 2 Corinthians on the Cost and Glory of the Christian Ministry* (Edinburgh, Scotland: Christian Focus Publications, 2003), 29.

²³¹ Francis A. Schaeffer, *The Complete Works of Francis A. Schaeffer*, 2nd ed. (1982; repr., Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1993), 3:255.

²³² *Ibid.*, 3:258.

²³³ *Ibid.*, 3:259.

²³⁴ *Ibid.*, 3:255, 259.

human resources and constrain a greater God-dependence may thus serve to counteract current naturalistic influences in a helpful way.

Troubles Strengthen Faith

The Bible indicates that in addition to proving, refining, and exercising faith, troubles also strengthen believers' faith in God. The experience of Abraham, who continued to exercise trust in God's promise of a son in the face of long delays and human impossibilities, is a case in point. Paul reminds the readers of Romans that the Old Testament patriarch "considered his own body, which was as good as dead (since he was about a hundred years old)," as well as "the barrenness of Sarah's womb."²³⁵ In spite of these obstacles, that apostle points out that Abraham "grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised."²³⁶

Abraham's unfolding career reveals that the strengthening of his faith that occurred as he waited patiently for Isaac's birth prepared him successfully to navigate his greatest test – yet future – when God would call him to offer up this beloved and long-awaited son as a sacrifice.²³⁷ Having learned to know God as one "who gives life to the

²³⁵ Romans 4:19.

²³⁶ Romans 4:20b-21. The expression "in his faith" in Romans 4:20b is τῇ πίστει in the Greek text, which is in the dative case. If it is interpreted as a dative of means, the meaning would be that Abraham was strengthened "by [his] faith." If it is understood as a dative of sphere, the meaning would be that he was strengthened "as to [his] faith." The possessive pronoun "his" does not appear in the Greek text. Commentators and translations differ as to which is the most likely sense of the expression. Both are grammatically possible, and it is likely that both were true in Abraham's experience.

²³⁷ Genesis 22:1-19.

dead,” the patriarch was now prepared to offer up Isaac with fortified faith in the God who always keeps his promises and is able even to “raise the dead.”²³⁸

Paul’s experience similarly illustrates the strengthening influence that trouble has on faith. Having experienced God’s past rescue out of severe affliction in Asia when “he delivered us from such a deadly peril,” the apostle’s strengthened faith could now look forward with assurance to continued instances of the same saving power in situations of future challenge, confident that “he will deliver us again.”²³⁹

Troubles Promote Believers’ Sanctification

Second, scripture teaches that troubles benefit believers by promoting their holiness of character. The context of Paul’s assertion that “all things work together for good” for God’s people suggests that the “good” he has in mind refers to God’s purpose that his people be “conformed to the image of his Son.”²⁴⁰ According to John R. W. Stott, DD, prolific author and rector of All Souls Church in London, this verse means that God’s supreme goal for his people “is that we should become like Jesus.”²⁴¹ The context further suggests that this goal is advanced by the multiple difficulties God’s people experience as they follow Christ.²⁴²

²³⁸ Romans 4:17; Hebrews 11:19a.

²³⁹ 2 Corinthians 1:10.

²⁴⁰ Romans 8:28-29.

²⁴¹ Stott, 252.

²⁴² Romans 8:18, 35-36.

Similarly, the writer of Hebrews maintains that the troubles his readers are encountering are instances of “the discipline of the Lord.”²⁴³ While painful, these experiences are tokens of their sonship to God and expressions of their heavenly Father’s wisdom and love in the training of his children. Troubles are not capricious, but are sent “for our good, that we may share his holiness.”²⁴⁴ The writer directs his readers away from their present stress to the future result of it, which will be “the peaceful fruit of righteousness” for those who have been trained by the discipline of God.²⁴⁵

The New Testament writer James agrees with Paul, Peter, and the writer of Hebrews concerning the beneficial nature of believers’ troubles. James, however, extends the teaching of these other biblical writers by indicating that difficulties are a means to the formation of comprehensive Christian character in believers. Commenting on James’ exhortation to “let steadfastness have its full effect,”²⁴⁶ Douglas J. Moo, PhD, who serves as Blanchard Professor of New Testament at the Wheaton Graduate School, observes that steadfastness “is not itself the final goal of testing.”²⁴⁷ It is but a means to the end “that

²⁴³ Hebrews 12:5. The writer is quoting Proverbs 3:11-12. The word translated “discipline” is the noun παιδεία, which means upbringing, training, instruction, or correction. See BDAG, s.v. “παιδεία, ας, ἡ.”

²⁴⁴ Hebrews 12:10.

²⁴⁵ Hebrews 12:11. The word translated “righteousness” is the noun δικαιοσύνη, which, the commentator Donald Guthrie maintains, must be interpreted in the light of the “holiness” mentioned in Hebrews 12:10. See Donald Guthrie, *Hebrews: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, ed. Leon Morris (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1983), 255.

²⁴⁶ James 1:4a.

²⁴⁷ Douglas J. Moo, *The Letter of James*, Pillar New Testament Commentary, ed. D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2000), under “II. The Pursuit of Spiritual Wholeness: The Opportunity Afforded by Trials (1:2-18). A. Enduring Trials Brings Spiritual Maturity (1:2-4),” Kindle.

you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing,”²⁴⁸ language which, Moo contends, “summarizes the many dimensions of the ideal Christian character.”²⁴⁹

Troubles Focus Believers’ Hearts on Heaven

Scripture and theological writers assert that a third benefit of troubles is that they constrain God’s people to shift the focus of their desire from the things of earth to those of heaven. The Genevan Reformer John Calvin contends that Christians struggle to maintain a heavenly focus in their daily lives. According to Calvin, “God knows best how much we are inclined by nature to a brutish love of this world.”²⁵⁰ Similarly, well-known Christian author C. S. Lewis maintains that it is hard for people to turn their thoughts to God and that they commonly “regard God as an airman regards his parachute; it’s there for emergencies but he hopes he’ll never have to use it.”²⁵¹ Pastor and theologian John Piper, PhD, would agree with Calvin and Lewis, asserting that it is often the case that believers “have settled for a home, a family, a few friends, a job, a television, a microwave oven, an occasional night out, a yearly vacation, and perhaps a new personal

²⁴⁸ James 1:4b.

²⁴⁹ Ibid. “Perfect and complete” translates the Greek construction τέλειοι και όλόκληροι. Τέλειοι is a plural form of the adjective τέλειος, which means full-grown, mature, or adult. See BDAG, s.v. “τέλειος, α, ον.” Όλόκληροι is a plural form of the adjective όλόκληρος, which means whole, complete, or blameless. See BDAG, s.v. “όλόκληρος, ον.”

²⁵⁰ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Library of Christian Classics, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, ed. John T. McNeill (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1960): XX:712.

²⁵¹ C. S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain*, reprint ed. (1962; repr., New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1982), 96.

computer,” esteeming these things of greater value than the heavenly treasure held out by Jesus Christ.²⁵²

The observations of Calvin, Lewis, and Piper reflect the concern of Jesus over the dangerous tendency of temporal things to capture the hearts of his followers. Christ’s concern finds expression in his parabolic warning about hearers of the gospel who seem to receive it and make a hopeful beginning in the way of discipleship, only to fall away eventually when “the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and it proves unfruitful.”²⁵³ Aware of this danger, Lewis maintains that “We ‘have all we want’ is a terrible saying when ‘all’ does not include God.”²⁵⁴

As an antidote to this peril, Jesus summons his followers to “seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness,” adding a promise that all things necessary for this life will be faithfully provided by their loving heavenly Father who knows their needs.²⁵⁵ Similarly, the New Testament writers, while affirming the goodness of creation and endorsing a grateful enjoyment of God’s temporal gifts,²⁵⁶ also frequently exhort believers to concentrate on heavenly things and set their hearts on God.²⁵⁷

God augments these admonitions in his written word with providential difficulties which he sends into the lives of his children. These difficulties serve to remind Christians

²⁵² John Piper, *Desiring God: Meditations of a Christian Hedonist*, 10th Anniversary Expanded Edition, ed. Steve Halliday (Sisters, OR: Multnomah Books, 1996), 88.

²⁵³ Matthew 13:22.

²⁵⁴ Lewis, *The Problem of Pain*, 95.

²⁵⁵ Matthew 6:33.

²⁵⁶ 1 Timothy 4:4-5; 6:17.

²⁵⁷ See, for example, Philippians 3:19-20; Colossians 3:1-2; James 4:4; 1 John 2:15.

that this present world is not their true and lasting home. Calvin says of believers that the Lord “permits them often to be troubled and plagued either with wars or tumults, or robberies, or other injuries” which frustrate disciples’ misguided efforts to find satisfaction and security in thing present.²⁵⁸ Troubles confront Christians with the fact that “this life, judged in itself, is troubled, turbulent, unhappy in countless ways, and in no respect clearly happy,” and that the seemingly permanent pleasures of earth are in reality “uncertain, fleeting, vain, and vitiated by many intermingled evils.”²⁵⁹

Lewis, in support of Calvin’s point of view, asserts that the experience of pain or trouble “shatters . . . the illusion that what we have . . . is our own and is enough for us.”²⁶⁰ The writer asserts that the illusion-shattering impact of trouble is necessary because although people’s happiness lies in God, they will not seek it in him “as long as he leaves us any other resort where it can even plausibly be looked for.”²⁶¹ Thus, the providential troubles God sends into the lives of his children, while stressful, are “in our interests,” for in making “‘our own life’ less agreeable to us,” they function to “take away the plausible sources of false happiness.”²⁶² Lewis freely acknowledges troubles often seem overwhelming at first since their initial effect is to make “all my little happinesses look like broken toys.”²⁶³ However, it is his contention that despite the discomfort that

²⁵⁸ Calvin, *Institutes*, XX:713.

²⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁶⁰ Lewis, *The Problem of Pain*, 95-96.

²⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 96.

²⁶² *Ibid.*

²⁶³ *Ibid.*, 106.

accompanies struggles, these difficult experiences serve as vivid reminders to God's people that "all these toys were never intended to possess my heart, that my true good is in another world and my only real treasure is Christ,"²⁶⁴ thus restoring to disciples the Godward frame of mind they ought always to maintain.

Lewis maintains that regular experiences of trouble are needful for believers throughout this present life since the salutary lessons of difficulty are soon forgotten when carefree times return. Speaking of his personal experience, Lewis compares his behavior in such moments of relief to that of a puppy "when the hated bath is over – I shake myself as dry as I can and race off to reacquire my comfortable dirtiness."²⁶⁵ The repeated experience of seeing the way in which his whole nature immediately "leaps back to the toys" when trouble ceases, is, Lewis asserts, a response common to all believers.²⁶⁶ The writer's conclusion, therefore, is that "tribulations cannot cease until God either sees us remade or sees that our remaking is now hopeless."²⁶⁷ Because of the wayward tendencies of the human heart on this side of heaven, troubles will always be a component of Christian experience, serving to re-focus their desires on the solid and lasting joys of heaven.

²⁶⁴ Ibid.

²⁶⁵ Ibid, 107.

²⁶⁶ Ibid. 106.

²⁶⁷ Ibid., 107.

Troubles Equip Church Leaders for Ministry

The Bible portrays trouble as an essential means God uses to equip church leaders for their ministries. Scripture teaches that this equipping happens in two ways.

Troubles Prepare Church Leaders to Assist Others Who Are Experiencing Troubles

First, the Bible shows that church leaders' troubles serve an important function in preparing them to be helpful to others. Paul informs the Corinthians that the affliction he had experienced in Asia and the subsequent comfort he had received from God were divinely purposed, "so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God."²⁶⁸ According to New Testament scholar Philip Edgcumbe Hughes, ThD, Paul uses the word "comfort" in its basic Greek sense of standing beside people to encourage them in the midst of a severe test, which suggests that "those who are continually experiencing comfort from God are peculiarly fitted to minister to those who stand in need of comfort."²⁶⁹ Paul tells his Corinthian readers that his affliction is "for your comfort,"²⁷⁰ since by God's design the apostle's troubles have prepared him to be an effective minister to fellow believers facing similar difficulties.

Commentators variously explain how experiences of suffering equip church leaders to be effective helpers of their fellow sufferers. Kelly contends that one of the

²⁶⁸ 2 Corinthians 1:4.

²⁶⁹ Philip Edgcumbe Hughes, *Paul's Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, New International Commentary on the New Testament, ed. F. F. Bruce (1962; repr., Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1986), 11-12.

²⁷⁰ 2 Corinthians 1:6.

blessings that comes to ministers through difficult experiences is that “we develop a tender, compassionate spirit for others, particularly those who may be passing through a similar trial.”²⁷¹ Kruse, on the other hand, maintains that church leaders who have experienced hardships become channels of comfort to struggling Christians through an ability to testify in a compelling way to God’s grace given in trials, thus providing to others “a forceful reminder . . . of God’s ability and willingness to provide the grace and strength they need.”²⁷² Moreover, Kruse asserts, through the personal testimony of church leaders to their firsthand experience of God’s comfort in affliction, they may motivate others to seek and find similar strengthening grace and encouragement from the Lord in the struggles they are facing.²⁷³

Paul’s story of being equipped to minister to others through troubles finds a point of contact with the ministry of Jesus Christ himself. The writer of Hebrews explains that the incarnation of the Son of God – his “being made like his brothers in every respect” – was fitting and necessary “so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God.”²⁷⁴ First and foremost, Christ’s true humanity was required in order for him once for all “to make propitiation for the sins of the people” through his death on the cross.²⁷⁵ Secondly, his incarnate life on earth provided a context in which “he

²⁷¹ Kelly, *New Life in the Wasteland*, 157.

²⁷² Kruse, *2 Corinthians*, 61.

²⁷³ Ibid.

²⁷⁴ Hebrews 2:17.

²⁷⁵ Ibid.

himself suffered when tempted,” with the permanent and ongoing result that “he is able to help those who are being tempted.”²⁷⁶

Jesus’ temptations and sufferings extend beyond those suffered on the cross to include the sum total of the sorrows he experienced during the entire course of his life on earth. New Testament scholar F. F. Bruce, Rylands Professor of Biblical Criticism and Exegesis at the University of Manchester, contends that Christ’s sharing in the struggles of humanity in a fallen world was an important element in his becoming a perfect and complete Savior since “a man must sympathize with those on whose behalf he acts, and he cannot sympathize with them unless he can enter into their experiences and share them for himself.”²⁷⁷ For Christ, the mercy and faithfulness requisite for his high priestly office were forged through his personal acquaintance with human struggle. For believers, the realization that in Christ “we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses,” imparts the confidence to come to him for mercy and grace in times of need, for he is “one who in every respect has been tempted as we are.”²⁷⁸

Troubles Force Church Leaders to Depend on Christ

Second, scripture teaches that troubles force leaders to depend on Christ. This is crucial to the nature of their calling, since ministers’ spiritual experiences and successes may lead them to depend on themselves rather than on the Lord. This forced lesson appears to have been the case with Paul. His apostolic office, combined with “the

²⁷⁶ Hebrews 2:18.

²⁷⁷ Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 44.

²⁷⁸ Hebrews 4:15.

surpassing greatness of the revelations”²⁷⁹ he had received from God, called forth a divine prophylactic against the hazard of pride. Paul recounts that “a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to harass me, to keep me from becoming conceited.”²⁸⁰ The Bible does not specify the nature of Paul’s “thorn,” and Kruse maintains that it is a general term which, when used metaphorically, denotes “something which frustrates and causes trouble in the lives of those afflicted.”²⁸¹ The language Paul uses in describing the impact of his trouble, whatever it may have been, indicates that it was an ongoing struggle for him, perhaps persisting for the remainder of his life.²⁸²

Beyond guarding him from pride, Paul says that his “thorn” also served a more positive purpose. He intimates that it became the occasion for Christ’s revelation to him that “my grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.”²⁸³ Kelly observes that at times “God has to let every door slam in our ministerial face” in order to teach this important lesson to church leaders.²⁸⁴ Experiences of inadequacy prompt church leaders to abandon reliance on their own strength, intelligence, and resources and transfer their trust to the omnipotent Christ for the power they need in accomplishing the

²⁷⁹ 2 Corinthians 12:7a.

²⁸⁰ 2 Corinthians 12:7b. Hughes remarks that the thorn, attributable to Satanic agency, was permitted by God and over-ruled by him for Paul’s good. See Hughes, *Paul’s Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 447.

²⁸¹ Kruse, *2 Corinthians*, 205. The Greek word is σκόλοψ, which refers literally to a pointed stake, thorn, splinter, or injurious foreign body. See BDAG, s.v. “σκόλοψ, στος, ό.”

²⁸² According to 2 Corinthians 12:9, Paul’s three-fold prayer for the removal of the thorn was answered, not with its removal, but with the spoken assurance that Christ’s grace is sufficient for Paul, and that his power is made perfect in weakness. Moreover, key verbal expressions in Paul’s account of his thorn – κολαφίζη and ὑπεραίρωμαι in verse 7, ἀρκεῖ and τελεῖται in verse 9, and εὐδοκῶ, ἀσθενῶ, and εἰμι in verse 10 – are in the present tense, suggesting that Paul was recounting a struggle that was constant or recurring in nature, rather than one that was confined exclusively to the past.

²⁸³ 2 Corinthians 12:9.

²⁸⁴ Kelly, *New Life in the Wasteland*, 30.

work he has called them to do. According to the Bible, it is then – precisely in the context of their weakness – that the power of Christ rests upon them,²⁸⁵ their ministry of the gospel is attended with supernatural energy, and their sufficiency for ministry is most clearly seen to be from him.²⁸⁶

Summary

This section of the literature review has surveyed salient insights from the Bible and theology about troubles in the Christian’s life. It summarized biblical teachings that portray difficult experiences as normal aspects of Christian experience in “this present time,” assure God’s people that difficulties are not incompatible with God’s love for them, and encourage them to meet hardships with faith, patience, and mutual help to one another.

The review summarized biblical and theological insights on the multiple benefits that come to Christians through troubles. Difficult experiences serve to nurture faith, promote sanctification, and focus the hearts of believers on heaven. This section of the literature review concluded with a summary of insights from biblical texts concerning the role of troubles in equipping church leaders for ministry by preparing them to assist others who are experiencing troubles and encouraging them to depend on Christ instead of self for the resources necessary to accomplish the work to which they have been called by God.

²⁸⁵ 2 Corinthians 12:9b.

²⁸⁶ 2 Corinthians 4:7.

Summary of the Literature Review

This literature review has provided a summary of the findings of extant research on three areas of particular relevance to a study of pastors in the “sandwich generation.” It began with a presentation of the stresses and strains research has found to be associated with multigenerational caregiving. The review proceeded with a discussion of research on how caregivers respond to the strains they encounter through a variety of coping strategies which serve to decrease the negative impact of the stress they experience as they navigate their multiple life roles. Next came a section devoted to salient findings concerning the benefits caregivers experience as they provide support to aging parents and adult children, including varying types and levels of intrapersonal, interpersonal, and practical gains.

The literature review concluded with an overview of the teachings of the Bible and theology on troubles in the Christian life, noting that difficulties are represented in scripture as normal aspects of Christian experience, as evidences of the love and care of God for his people, and as opportunities for blessing and benefit that are to be met with faith and patience on the part of believers. Biblical teachings on the significant benefits God uses to impart to private Christians and church leaders were also surveyed.

The literature review establishes that extant research has provided a significant body of data helpful to members of the “sandwich generation” by enabling them to understand their caregiving experiences against the backdrop of current social and demographic trends, by pointing them to coping strategies may be beneficial in assisting them to navigate their multiple roles with less stress, and by sensitizing them to the

potential benefits that may accrue to them through caring for their aging parents and adult children.

However, significant gaps still remain in the research. Additional studies are needed to achieve an adequate understanding of how ministers as a distinct vocational group are perceiving and experiencing what it means to be part of the “sandwich generation.” It may be that they are navigating their multiple responsibilities and roles with more success and less stress than the general population of multigenerational caregivers are experiencing. If so, then greater knowledge about the experience of “sandwich generation” pastors might become a fruitful source of much-needed assistance to non-clergy persons in the “sandwich generation.” On the other hand, there may be facets of the pastoral vocation that make membership in the “sandwich generation” more challenging and stressful for clergy than it is for others. If this is the case, then additional research might highlight particular areas of clergy need and suggest corresponding interventions that may be geared to decreasing stresses and strains in ways that enable “sandwiched” ministers to continue to function effectively as leaders of their congregations. It is hoped that the present exploration of how pastors navigate the simultaneous demands of ministering in their churches and caring for their multigenerational families may be helpful in advancing these ends.

The following chapter will discuss significant matters pertinent to the methodology of this study of pastors in the “sandwich generation.”

Chapter Three

Methodology

The purpose of this study was to explore how “sandwich generation” pastors navigate the simultaneous demands of ministering in their churches and caring for their multigenerational families.

The following questions guided the research:

1. How do “sandwich generation” pastors describe the impact of navigating the simultaneous demands on their personal lives?
 - a. How do they describe the challenges?
 - b. How do they describe the benefits?
2. How do “sandwich generation” pastors describe the impact on their marriages?
 - a. How do they describe the challenges?
 - b. How do they describe the benefits?
3. How do “sandwich generation” pastors describe the impact on their ministries?
 - a. How do they describe the challenges?
 - b. How do they describe the benefits?
4. How do “sandwich generation” pastors seek to navigate their challenges and function successfully in their various roles as caregivers, marriage partners, and ministers?

The assumption that guided the study is that pastors learn in the context of their daily responsibilities of caregiving while leading congregations. A qualitative study was designed and conducted to gain an understanding of the point of view of pastors who are simultaneously fulfilling these dual roles.

Design of the Study

The study followed a qualitative approach. This approach was the most appropriate one given the nature of the subject area and the project's goals and inherent limitations. The nature of the subject favored a qualitative approach given the absence of research on pastors in the "sandwich generation." Due to this absence, the large-scale surveys and interviews common in quantitative studies were unfeasible. The research gap further suggested that an attempt to arrive at conclusive findings that would answer all questions and be universally generalizable would be premature. The qualitative method was most suitable in this case because, as seasoned researcher Michaela Mora explains, it is "by definition exploratory, and it is used when we don't know what to expect . . . to go deeper into issues of interest and explore nuances related to the problem at hand."²⁸⁷

The goal of the project also favored the qualitative approach. Sharan B. Merriam, Professor of Adult Education at the University of Georgia, in her widely-used book, *Qualitative Research: A Guide to Design and Implementation*, writes, "Qualitative researchers are interested in understanding how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences."²⁸⁸ Although the broad and flexible nature of qualitative research eludes simplistic definitions, Merriam points out that it "embodies by nature the characteristics of a focus

²⁸⁷ Michaela Mora, "Quantitative vs. Qualitative Research – When to Use Which," n.p.: Surveygizmo, March, 2010, accessed March 8, 2018, <http://www.surveygizmo.com/survey-blog/quantitative-qualitative-research/>.

²⁸⁸ Sharan B. Merriam, *Qualitative Research: A Guide to Design and Implementation* (San Francisco: Jossey Bass, 2009), 5.

on process, the researcher as the primary instrument of data collection and analysis, a process that is inductive, and a product that is richly descriptive.”²⁸⁹

Finally, the inherent limitations of the study dictated the use of a qualitative approach. Time and other resources were limited. The researcher was the sole instrument of data collection and analysis and could gain access to respondents who were able to provide information that would contribute to an understanding of how pastors navigate the roles of caregiving and congregational leadership.

Participant Sample Selection

In view of both the nature and the stated purpose of the study, the researcher elected to utilize nonprobability sampling in selecting interviewees. According to Merriam, nonprobability sampling (versus probability sampling) is “the method of choice for most qualitative research.”²⁹⁰ The specific form of nonprobability sampling employed was that known as purposive, which entails selecting “information-rich” cases expected to yield in-depth data about matters which are centrally important to the purpose of the study.²⁹¹ To implement this approach, the researcher identified and interviewed seven study participants who embodied the attributes essential to the study, as set forth in the following selection criteria:

First, all participants would be clergy persons with a minimum of ten years’ experience in pastoral ministry. This criterion enhanced the findings by ensuring that the

²⁸⁹ Ibid., 14.

²⁹⁰ Ibid., 77.

²⁹¹ Ibid.

participants had extensive firsthand knowledge of the challenges and demands of the pastoral vocation.

Second, all participants would have at least one living parent age 65 or older and would either be raising one or more underage children, younger than 18, or providing at least some financial, caregiving, or emotional support to a grown child age 18 or older. This qualification was necessary for each participant to be classified as a “sandwich generation” person and thus able to provide information relevant to the topic.

Third, all participants would have a minimum of five years’ pastoral experience prior to becoming caregivers for aging parents. This criterion ensured that the participants were equipped to discern and articulate the discrete sets of impacts associated with the differing responsibilities of pastoral ministry and caregiving.

Fourth, all participants would hold a personal belief in the inerrancy of the Bible.²⁹² The limited scope of the study prohibited an exploration of the experience of “sandwich generation” pastors representative of the full spectrum of theological perspectives found among U. S. church leaders. Similarity of viewpoint on the watershed issue of biblical authority therefore would enhance the applicability of the study’s findings to a significantly large, albeit limited, segment of the American pastoral community.

Fifth, all participants would be male. Although earlier studies suggested that the vast majority of caregivers at the time were women, research has now established that 40

²⁹² Biblical inerrancy means that the Bible is true in whatever it affirms. As well-known pastor, theologian, and author R. C. Sproul explains, “Christians affirm the infallibility and inerrancy of the Bible because God is ultimately the author of the Bible. And because God is incapable of inspiring falsehood, His word is altogether true and trustworthy.” See R. C. Sproul, *Essential Truths of the Christian Faith* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 1998): 16.

percent of all caregivers are male.²⁹³ Moreover, the literature indicates that there are important differences in the type of care typically provided by men and women and that some forms of stress typically vary in intensity along gender lines.²⁹⁴ Therefore, to narrow the focus of the study and provide greater depth of understanding in the Research Question analysis, the researcher determined that all interviewees would be male.

Sixth, all participants would be pastors who report “doing well” or “flourishing” as they navigate the simultaneous demands of ministering in their churches and caring for their multigenerational families. This final criterion was chosen in the belief that it would likely facilitate the distillation of certain recommendations concerning “best practices” that may be helpful to other clergy facing similar demands and challenges as members of the “sandwich generation.”

Data Collection

Data was collected through face-to-face interviews. The interviews were recorded using a digital device and then transcribed into printed form using a word processing computer. To facilitate in-depth information sharing while also being respectful of the

²⁹³ National Alliance for Caregiving and AARP Public Policy Institute, *Caregiving in the U. S.: 2015 Report* (n.p.: National Alliance for Caregiving and AARP Public Policy Institute, 2015), 6, accessed April 9, 2018, <https://www.aarp.org/content/dam/aarp/ppi/2015/caregiving-in-the-united-states-2015-report-revised.pdf>.

²⁹⁴ Studies have found that “reports that men take responsibility for the same Instrumental Activities of Daily Living tasks as women (i.e., managing medications, grocery shopping, housework, and transportation. Women report being more involved in Activities of Daily Living (i.e., bathing, dressing, and toileting). Women are also more likely to be involved with meal preparation for care recipients, while men are more likely to be involved in managing care recipients’ finances. See National Alliance for Caregiving and The Center for Productive Aging at Towson University, *The MetLife Study of Sons at Work*, 8. Research by Ben Gurion University’s Ayala Malach Pines, PhD, and her colleagues shows that women caregivers report more job burnout and couple burnout than do men. See Ayala Malach Pines et al., “Job Burnout and Couple Burnout in Dual Earner Couples in the Sandwiched Generation,” *Social Psychology Quarterly* 74, no. 4 (December 2011): 378.

interviewees' time, the interviews lasted from one and one-half to two hours. A semi-structured interview format was used.

The option of using unstructured interviews was considered and dismissed. Merriam points out that the unstructured interview is an appropriate choice "when the researcher does not know enough about a phenomenon to ask relevant questions."²⁹⁵ Its purpose, in fact, is often to facilitate "learning enough about a situation to formulate questions for subsequent interviews."²⁹⁶ Literature on the "sandwich generation" is already extensive. The literature review incorporated into the study equipped the researcher with adequate information to avoid the necessity for the completely open-ended approach of the unstructured interview.

The structured interview was also deemed not to be optimal for this study. With its predetermined wording and order of questions, this most formal of interview strategies is most appropriate for surveys and studies of a quantitative nature. When applied in a qualitative project, Merriam contends that the structured interview "may not allow you to access participants' perspectives of the world," and could even result in drawing from interviewees a "reaction to the investigator's preconceived notions of the world."²⁹⁷

The conclusion, then, was that semi-structured interviews, incorporating a mix of more precisely worded and less precisely worded questions, represented the best strategy for the collection of research data. It was anticipated that this approach would facilitate the harvesting of interviewees' views pertinent to the research questions and would also

²⁹⁵ Merriam, *Qualitative Research*, 91.

²⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 78.

afford the researcher the freedom to ask impromptu follow-on questions in response to any unanticipated nuances and new ideas that might emerge during the interviews.

The following interview protocol was used to collect data during the interviews. The questions were not always phrased in the exact words given below, nor were they always posed in the order listed. In addition to these prepared questions, the researcher also used spontaneous follow-up questions, or probes, to gain specific examples, clarifications, or additional details:

1. Tell me briefly what a typical week is like for you caring for your parent(s) and child(ren) and ministering in your church?
 - a. What are the main kinds of care you provide to your parent(s)?
 - b. What are the main kinds of support you provide to your child(ren)?
 - c. What kinds of challenges does caring for your parent(s) and child(ren) pose for your marriage?
 - d. What kinds of challenges does caring for your parent(s) and child(ren) pose for your ministry?
 - e. What kinds of challenges does caring for your parent(s) and child(ren) pose for your personal life?
2. In what ways do you think that typical week would be different if you weren't supporting your young adult child(ren) and/or caring for your aging parent(s) while you're leading your church?
3. Tell me about how you've sought to meet the demands you face on time, energy, and resources as you go about fulfilling these multiple roles week in, week out?
4. Talk about some of the blessings and benefits that have come while navigating these simultaneous roles as a spouse, parent, caregiver, and minister?
 - a. Tell me about a recent time when caregiving became a blessing in your marriage?
 - b. Tell me about a recent time when caregiving became a blessing in your ministry?

- c. Tell me about a recent time when caregiving became a blessing in your personal life?
5. Describe what a really good typical week looks like for you during this time of multiple challenges?

Data Analysis

This study utilized the constant comparative method to analyze the data collected during the interviews. Merriam emphasizes that “the much preferred way to analyze data in a qualitative study is to do it simultaneously with data collection.”²⁹⁸ She describes the analysis process ideally as one that is “recursive and dynamic.”²⁹⁹ Therefore, as the interviews were being conducted, the researcher began to listen for salient bits of information responsive to the research questions and for possible patterns of response that could be emerging. After all interviews were complete and had been transcribed, a more intense phase of data analysis was undertaken, involving careful examination of the transcripts for segments or units of data responsive to the research questions. These responsive data units were initially coded and grouped together under provisional interpretive headings or categories that reflected a common theme or pattern. Further analysis by a process of comparison then sought to identify patterns within and between sets of interview data. Finally, additional analysis further refined the themes into the final categories that represented the end-product of the study. These are presented and discussed as findings in Chapter Five.

²⁹⁸ Ibid., 171.

²⁹⁹ Ibid., 169.

Researcher Position

Merriam points out that it is impossible for people engaged in qualitative research to be completely objective or to completely capture an objective “truth” or “reality” in their studies.³⁰⁰ One reason is that researchers bring certain biases to their work. Merriam maintains that in the interest of strengthening the validity of their research, “Investigators need to explain their biases, dispositions, and assumptions regarding the research to be undertaken.”³⁰¹ By making their position clear, researchers enable their readers to evaluate the potential impact of these authorial subjectivities on the conduct and conclusions of their studies.

The researcher, therefore, wishes to point out to readers the following personal views, experiences, and characteristics that may influence the discussion and findings that follow:

First, the researcher is a Christian and is a pastor with thirty-two years’ experience leading congregations in the Presbyterian Church in America, a theologically Reformed and biblically conservative Protestant denomination.

Second, the researcher believes that the Bible is the inspired and inerrant word of God, completely true and reliable in all that it teaches and affirms.

Third, the researcher has personal experience with the research topic, being a member of the “sandwich generation” who has provided, and is providing, various kinds and levels of caregiving to aging parents and two adult children and their families.

³⁰⁰ Ibid., 215.

³⁰¹ Ibid., 219.

Study Limitations

Researchers have long recognized that the findings of qualitative studies, unlike those of quantitative studies, cannot be generalized due to the nature of the qualitative research process. Thus, the anticipated insights gained from this study are not presented as the “definitive answer” to questions related to pastors in the “sandwich generation.” Beyond the inherent limitations of all qualitative studies, this study was further limited by the unavailability of multiple investigators to assist in data collection and analysis, as well as by the impossibility of site visits to the venues in which caregiving takes place for the purposes of field observation and examination of any documentation that might possibly shed additional light.

With these limitations understood, it is nevertheless the researcher’s hope that the findings of the study will be applicable to other pastors in the “sandwich generation.” The enhancement of the ability of “sandwich generation” pastors successfully to navigate the dual roles of caregiving and congregational leadership is one of the researcher’s conscious goals. It will, however, fall to readers to decide what may be adopted and used in their own contexts, since “the burden of proof lies less with the original investigator than with the person seeking to make application elsewhere.”³⁰²

Merriam states that maximum variation “allows for the possibility of a greater range of application by readers of the research.”³⁰³ To this end, the researcher employed two strategies that incorporated this variation principle into the study. First, within the boundary of the fourth participant selection criterion outlined above, the researcher aimed

³⁰² Ibid., 224.

³⁰³ Ibid., 227.

to select participants who serve in a variety of denominational contexts. This approach was deemed most likely to enhance the applicability of the study findings to “sandwiched” clergy serving the broadest possible segment of the church.

Second, the researcher sought to enhance the practical applicability of the study through a highly detailed and descriptive presentation of the data, data analysis, and findings. For, as noted researchers Yvonna S. Lincoln and Egon G. Guba point out, “The best way to insure the possibility of transferability is to create a thick description of the sending context so that someone in a potential receiving context may assess the similarity between them and . . . the study.”³⁰⁴

Summary

This chapter on methodology began with a discussion of the reasons why the qualitative approach is more appropriate for a study seeking to explore how pastors of the “sandwich generation” navigate the simultaneous demands of their ministries and caring for their multigenerational families. It proceeded to explain the rationale for the use of a purposive sampling and set forth the criteria for the selection of the study participants. This chapter also stipulated that data was collected through semi-structured interviews, provided a facsimile of the interview protocol that was used, and discussed the constant comparative method that was employed to analyze the data. The chapter concluded with a disclosure of the researcher’s position and a discussion of the limitations that apply to the study’s findings.

³⁰⁴ Yvonna S. Lincoln and Egon G. Guba, *Naturalistic Inquiry* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1985): 125.

Chapter Four

Data Report and Analysis

The purpose of this study was to explore how “sandwich generation” pastors navigate the simultaneous demands of ministering in their churches and caring for their multigenerational families. The assumption that guided the study is that “sandwich generation” pastors learn in the context of their daily responsibilities of caregiving while leading congregations. The goals were both to achieve a deeper theoretical understanding of the “sandwich” phenomenon as it pertains to ministers and to gain insights that prove helpful in supporting those who are navigating the dual demands of ministry and providing care to their families.

The following research questions guided the research:

1. How do “sandwich generation” pastors describe the impact of navigating the simultaneous demands on their personal lives?
 - a. How do they describe the challenges?
 - b. How do they describe the benefits?
2. How do “sandwich generation” pastors describe the impact on their marriages?
 - a. How do they describe the challenges?
 - b. How do they describe the benefits?
3. How do “sandwich generation” pastors describe the impact on their ministries?
 - a. How do they describe the challenges?
 - b. How do they describe the benefits?
4. How do “sandwich generation” pastors seek to navigate their challenges and function successfully in their various roles as caregivers, marriage partners, and ministers?

Introductions to Participants and Context

The findings of the study are the product of analysis of data gathered through interviews of seven study participants. All participants met the selection criteria set forth in Chapter Three. Unless otherwise noted, all participants serve as lead pastors of congregations. All are married. Additional relevant introductory information about each is provided below.

Jack, age 45, has been in ministry for sixteen years. His widowed mother, age 73, is retired and lives out of town. His wife's parents, both in their mid-70s, also live out of town. Jack and his wife have two daughters. The oldest, age 19, is a college sophomore, and the youngest, age 17, is a high school senior.

Tony, age 55, has been a pastor for twenty-seven years. His parents live in a different state. His 85-year-old father, an Alzheimer's patient, lives and receives care in a skilled nursing facility. His mother, age 82, continues to live in her home. Tony's parents-in-law live in a retirement facility in a different state. Tony and his wife have two daughters and one son, all in their 20s. Both daughters are married, while the son is a senior in college and is still single.

Stuart, age 58, is a minister with thirty-four years of experience. His father is deceased, and his mother, age 85, lives in a different state. His wife's parents, who divorced some years ago, are in their 70s and live in a different state. Her father has remarried, while her mother has remained single. Stuart and his wife have three children. Their 22-year-old daughter, still single, recently graduated from college and has come back home to live while completing an internship. The other children, a 19-year-old son and 17-year-old daughter, are both single and attend college. Several weeks before his

interview, Stuart and his wife ended their role as foster parents to two young children, ages 2 and 8. They had served in this capacity for almost two years.

Peter, age 65, has pastored the same congregation where he was initially called at the time of his ordination thirty-four years ago. His father is deceased, as are both of his wife's parents. His mother, age 96, lives with his sister in a city two hours away. Peter and his wife are the parents of four adult sons, including a set of twins. The oldest, age 40, is divorced and lives in a different state. The twins, age 38, are both married. One lives several hours away, while the other, a foreign missionary, lives overseas. The youngest son, age 30, is single and lives in a different state.

Chris, age 49, has eighteen years of experience in ministry. At the time of his interview, he was preparing to leave the church he planted ten years ago for a new position as director of a regional church planting network. Chris's parents and his wife's parents are in their 70s. His parents divorced when he was in middle school, and both remarried. His mother divorced her second husband and, eight years ago, relocated to the same town where Chris resides. His father and step-mother live in a different state. His wife's parents also live in a different state. Chris and his wife have five children. Their daughter, age 23, was recently married and lives with her husband in a nearby town. The other children, all sons, are unmarried. Their 22-year-old son lives in a city an hour away, where he is working and completing his college education. Their 20-year-old son lives on the campus of the junior college he attends on an athletic scholarship. The two remaining sons are under age 18 and are in high school.

Sean, age 64, is the executive pastor of a large multi-staff church. He has been in ministry for thirty-six years. His father is deceased, and his 93-year-old mother resides in

a nearby assisted living facility. His wife's parents, both in their mid-80s, live in an assisted living facility in a nearby town. Sean and his wife have three sons and one daughter, all over the age of 18 and single. Their two oldest sons, both in their 30s, face special challenges. Their eldest suffers from mental health issues and lives in a nearby townhouse. Their second oldest, who is physically disabled, lives in his parents' home. Their youngest son, age 29, is a business owner and lives in a different state. Their daughter, age 22, is a senior in college.

Jeff, age 65, has thirty-two years of ministry experience. For the past six years, he has held a part-time position as pastor to senior adults in a large multi-staff congregation. Jeff also serves part-time as the chaplain for a hospice organization and works part-time for a funeral home. His father died more than thirty years ago while Jeff was in seminary. His 99-year-old mother, due to a rapid decline in her health, moved to a skilled nursing facility near the home of Jeff's brother shortly before the interview. Jeff's mother-in-law died several years ago, and his father-in-law passed away earlier in the year. Jeff and his wife have two adult daughters. The oldest, age 35, is divorced. She and her adopted five-year-old son live in a city two hours away. The youngest daughter, age 32, is married and has three children. She lives abroad with her family, where they serve as missionaries.

The findings arising from analysis of data from the interviews of the participants have been set forth below, organized according to the four research questions.

How Do “Sandwich Generation” Pastors Describe the Impact of Navigating the Simultaneous Demands on Their Personal Lives?

The first research question explored the challenges and benefits experienced by the research participants in their personal lives as they care for their families while

leading churches. A number of themes emerged as they shared some of the positive and negative aspects of being “sandwiched.”

How Do They Describe the Personal Challenges?

Six themes emerged as interviewees described the personal challenges they experience as pastors in the “sandwich generation.” These challenges induced stresses, both individually and working in tandem. The stresses were most often experienced as varying degrees of anxiety, anger, guilt, sadness, and depression. The six themes relating to personal challenges were as follows: Full Plates, Consequential Issues, Role Reversals, Relational Conflicts, Things Looming on the Horizon, and Complicating Factors.

Full Plates

The first theme to emerge was that caring for children and aging parents while leading churches often left the participants feeling they had more responsibilities than they were able to manage. Six participants mentioned this stress overload. “I’ve lost dad; I’m trying to walk the girls [his wife and daughters] through that; and I’ve got a major health issue myself. And all the while there’s a ministry where I’m to lead the congregation,” said Jack, reflecting on the recent death of his father. While processing his own grief and raising two daughters, Jack was also facing a major health crisis. Having enumerated his roles and responsibilities, Jack chuckled, realizing afresh that he was carrying an impossible load: “It makes for a full plate; you can’t do all that at once.”

Stuart also spoke candidly of the stress he felt while carrying many his many responsibilities. “The bottom line is, I feel like someone’s going to suffer,” he said. “It’s

either going to be the church, the kids, my marriage, my parents, or in-laws, or whatever. It feels inevitable that I'm going to look back on this and say, 'Oh my gosh, I neglected my mom.'" Stuart has been leading the church he planted ten years ago. Two of his children are in college. A third, recently graduated from college, has returned home to live while completing an internship. His wife has been busy pursuing her role as the executive director of a non-profit organization. Additionally, the couple had taken on the responsibility of fostering two young children. When asked what life was like with so many activities going on at once, Stuart admitted often feeling exhausted and dispirited, like "I can't do it."

Consequential Issues

A second theme voiced by the "sandwiched" study participants was the challenge of facing issues of great moment for their family members. Because of the weightiness of the issues, the pastors experienced burdening and stress as they provided care. Such issues pertained to aging parents and children alike.

Issues Relating to Parents

All research participants reported that they had helped a parent in the midst of a significant challenge at some point during the last twelve months. These challenges included failing health, surgeries, transitions to nursing homes, disaster recovery, and end-of-life experiences. While the pastors felt privileged to assist their parents in these situations, they also confided that the cost was sometimes physical and emotional exhaustion.

“He was stubborn as a mule, and really hard to deal with,” Chris recalled, describing the week he recently spent with his 74-year-old father. His father’s home had been severely damaged by a hurricane, and Chris had volunteered to help with the repairs. Upon returning home, Chris had told his wife, “I’m never going to help him again; this was the worst decision ever.” Several months later, illness struck. Chris’s father, who is not a believer, was diagnosed with prostate cancer, and leaned heavily on him for support. While he cared deeply for his father, Chris said, “It’s been a challenge to figure out how best to love, to pray for him, to serve him.”

Regarding his issue of great moment, Peter remarked, “How could you know? But I wish we had.” He was recalling the time when his father’s health had suddenly declined steeply. Although he knew the transition would be hard on his parents, Peter had transferred his parents from his home to a nursing home where his aging father could be cared for in a safer setting geared to his increasing needs. Then, six weeks after Peter’s parents moved out, his father passed away. He still felt a sense of regret as he looked back on having to make such a consequential decision at a difficult time, not knowing what the outcome would be.

Issues Relating to Children

Six research participants also reported experiencing stress associated with consequential issues in the lives of their children. These issues included navigating the trauma experienced in the wake of a friend’s suicide, divorce, wanderings from the faith, unhealthy relationships with members of the opposite sex, permanent physical disability, mental illness, unemployment, and significant injuries sustained in accidents.

Jack said, “It’s so substantial at this point; it’s never been so consequential.” His oldest daughter had recently transitioned to college, and he was reflecting on the stress and uncertainty that attended parenting her in this new phase of her life. Whereas before, the major issues she faced had involved decisions about whether to participate in this or that sport or activity at school, the stakes were now much higher, Jack said. Salient issues included his daughter’s choice of a major and the kind of person she will choose to date and eventually marry. Jack added, “I feel like I’ve gone from knowing what to do, to, ‘I’ve got to figure this thing out again.’” His comment reflected the sense of uncertainty parents experience as they support their children in new and unfamiliar situations of great import.

Study participants sometimes experienced sadness as they watched their children grapple with issues that are intractable and are accompanied by social stigma. Sean said, “There’s a real hurt that a parent feels for their child when [there’s] something that they go through that people don’t understand.” He was expressing how he felt about his 34-year-old son, who has struggled with mental health illness. Sean and his wife have been walking with their son through these problems since they first began to surface during his high school days. They have done what they can to help him through periods of homelessness, confinement to mental health facilities, and brushes with the law. However, in spite of receiving a wide variety of treatments over many years, this son has continued to struggle. He has remained unmarried and unemployed.

The sadness of seeing children grappling with serious difficulties usually mixed with other difficult emotions, the interviewees indicated. Sean mused, with some regret, that his son would likely be married with children by now “if things were normal.” Thus,

he continued, “I think attitudinally one of the things you have to do is just embrace where you are in life, and not look at what is happening with other people and not be envious or despondent that those times aren’t happening to you.”

Role Reversals

A third theme related to the personal challenges of being “sandwiched” was the stress experienced through role reversal. Because of their parents’ diminished physical or mental capacities, the pastors found they must do for their aging parents many of the things their parents had once done for them. Five of the participants reported stress from this quarter. Sean, who does his best to help his 85-year-old mother manage her finances, has been frustrated by her decision-making when she is not under his watchful eye. He said she has been all too likely to write checks in response to solicitations from scam artists who specialize in taking advantage of the elderly. Whenever Tony went to the skilled nursing facility to visit his father, an Alzheimer’s patient, he found it necessary to feed the one who once fed him. He was sad to see what has become of his father when he compared the present reality to the picture of who his parent was in the past.

Jack said, “It was the first time in my life, I think, when I could say I was in some ways parenting or leading my mother.” He was recalling the dramatic change he noticed after his father died. Although his mother had always been a capable, decisive person, he remembered that now “she just locked up,” looking to him for advice and assistance with such simple matters as filing his father’s death certificate and moving small amounts of money from one bank account to another. “I’ve just never been down this road before,” he said. Jack found this reversal of roles with his mother awkward and disturbing.

Sometimes role reversal took the form of dealing with uncomfortable topics when parents have come seeking guidance. These conversations were further complicated by the fact that the boundary between being a pastor and a son can be unclear. Chris exclaimed in his interview, “I’m just a son!” He had just shared his sense of inadequacy and discomfort whenever his father and step-mother have approached him, often separately, to discuss intimate details of their marriage, including finances and sexual issues. His father would vent about his troubled marriage and ask Chris for advice in dealing with his alcoholic wife. She, in turn, would confide in Chris when she was upset about the way his father was treating her. Although he would prefer to avoid it, Chris said, “I do marriage counseling, I’m doing chaplain counseling, all of that.”

Relational Conflicts

A fourth theme that emerged in the interviews was the challenging relational conflicts most of the pastors experienced in their caregiving roles. While none of the participants reported having conflict with their children, they commonly spoke of disconcerting and stressful clashes with their parents and siblings.

Conflicts with Parents

Six participants mentioned having conflict with the aging parents for whom they cared. Although conflicts varied widely in intensity, in each case they were cited as a source of stress. Stuart said, “All of our in-laws are exasperating in some way.” Several times each year, he and his wife have traveled to another state to visit and help his widowed mother and his wife’s parents, both in their 70s. Stuart described his father-in-

law as angry and defensive and his mother-in-law as prone to worry and centered on herself. When Stuart and his wife have spent time with his mother, he said, she tended to hover and be a micro-manager. Although he loves his mother and parents-in-law and was committed to caring for them, he admitted that being around them caused him stress.

“She became pretty caustic and abusive to [my wife] and me,” Chris shared. He was describing the behavior of his mother, who reacted negatively when he and his wife brought up some things that needed to change in their relationship with her. Chris’s mother had moved to town to be near him and his family following her divorce. In the absence of clear boundaries and expectations, his mother was soon out of sorts with Chris and his wife. His mother wanted Chris to manage her finances, a responsibility he refused to take on. Also, she had come to town expecting her daughter-in-law to spend a lot of time with her as a “shopping buddy,” an expectation which fit neither the desires nor the schedule of Chris’s wife. Chris’s mother was deeply offended at the suggestion that adjustments were needed and soon called a family meeting at which she announced that she was moving back to the state where she had grown up, “where I’ll be loved by people.” That was a few years ago, and his mother ultimately decided not to move away, Chris said. Although the relationship has improved, clashes of expectation continue to cause stress from time to time within the family.

Conflicts with Siblings

Four of the pastors identified conflict with one or more siblings as an added source of stress. Although the presenting problem was usually a difference of opinion about care being given to aging parents, deeper issues were often in play. Tony said, “I

think there was underlying unhealthiness even before, so this maybe exposed some of the unhealthiness, the patterns that we had.” Tony intimated that he felt caught in the middle of conflicts between his mother and his brother and half-sister. On the surface, the siblings’ concern about their mother was her seemingly not fulfilling her responsibilities toward their Alzheimer’s-stricken father. But Tony expressed his conviction that the real problem was that his brother and half-sister were “anti-mom.” Bitterness had taken root when his mother had strongly disapproved of his half-sister’s choice of a marriage partner years earlier, and these old wounds have never healed.

Chris said, “I think there’s a lot of bitterness, a lot of pain, a lot of isolation and abandonment because of the sexual abuse.” Whenever his sister called and screamed at him after their mother had complained to her about some shortcoming or other on Chris’s part, he suspected that his sister’s hostility was rooted in the abuse she had suffered at the hands of her stepfather years ago. Additionally, his sister often remarked that Chris and his wife come across as people who “have it all together.” This perception, coupled with the fact that their mother appointed Chris as the executor of her estate and chose to live near him instead of near her daughter, led Chris to believe that the conflicts with his sister were less about details of their mother’s care and more about his sister’s jealousy of him.

Things Looming on the Horizon

A fifth theme regarded the challenge faced by “sandwiched” pastors in the anticipation of care needs within the family that will continue – or even increase – in the future. Six of the participants reported feeling stress from such an anticipation. While

unsure of exactly what tomorrow would bring, they strongly suspected that ongoing and added family care responsibilities were waiting for them on the horizon.

In some cases, the concerns centered on the likelihood of increasing need as parents continued to age and decline. Regarding his mother, Chris said, “She doesn’t need any of my income at this point, but ... she’s one sickness away – potentially – from being more dependent” His comment echoed concerns expressed by others that they would likely be faced with added caregiving-related expenses in the days ahead.

Stuart shared a similar concern, living as he does in an area where the cost of living is high. When asked about what he anticipates going forward in terms of caregiving-related expenses for his elderly mother and in-laws, he noted the possibility that the time will come when they are no longer able to live independently. Contemplating this, he confessed, “I just don’t know how we’re going to do it. I just look at what’s going to happen in the next ten years ... it’s just a big question mark. I can’t even conceive of bringing people here. Just the expense of it”

Others experienced stress through the awareness that their parents’ eventual demise would present them with further practical responsibilities and relational complications. Tony expressed this, saying, “Unfortunately I think the stresses – even if dad dies – will only get worse in some ways, dealing with the estate stuff, helping mom. There’s a stress of knowing there’s more to come.” Stuart was anxious about his sister, who is homeless and struggles with addictive behaviors. He said that his sister has no one to depend on except him and his mother, as she has alienated all the other people in her life. Thus, he intimated, “When my mom eventually passes away ... I’ve got to deal with

those situations, too. So, I've got all these things looming on the horizon that I know are coming and coming soon."

Complicating Factors

A sixth theme under the heading of personal challenges emerged in the interviews of three of the participating pastors. As they told their stories, it became evident that each had a complicating factor that augmented the strain arising from their other challenges. While not directly related to their caregiving role, in each case the complicating factor contributed a significant additional layer of stress.

Loss of Employment

Jeff suddenly lost his job six years ago when the leaders of the church he had served as pastor for eighteen years unexpectedly asked for his resignation. When it happened, Jeff said he was so demoralized that for an entire year "I bet I didn't pick up my Bible once except for going to church" Although he and his wife have been managing financially, their household income has decreased dramatically. Also, he still struggled to forgive the people responsible for his termination. The hardest part of all is not understanding why he had been asked to leave. With deep emotion, he described his struggle:

It would have been much easier if I had committed some big sin But when there's no real reason They just said, "Well, we're going in a different direction." There's nothing there to confess. So, it's just you, not something you did. That's been the most difficult part of it.

Now approaching his 66th birthday, the pain and embarrassment are still with him.

At this stage of his life, Jeff wondered if he will ever serve in full-time ministry again.

Major Health Crisis

Within weeks following the death of his father, Jack began experiencing shortness of breath. Ironically, he learned that he was suffering with the same defective heart valve that had caused his father to have two valve-replacement surgeries over the years. Jack's own valve was failing rapidly, and he had major surgery to replace it two months after his father died.

Jack's surgery was successful, and his convalescence went well. However, not surprisingly, Jack's health crisis brought significant stress into his life. As he put it,

Dad had survived it twice. So, I wasn't as afraid I was going to die, so much as I was dreading the brutality of the procedure itself. So, you've got that going on. Trying to take care of mom, trying to shepherd my girls. And all the while with the congregation watching. And just trying to decide, what does that look like? How do I do that?

Loss of Key Friendships

Chris's complicating factor was the abrupt and concurrent loss of multiple close friendships. The rupture of these relationships, which happened for a variety of reasons, was devastating. With visible feeling, he recounted in great detail the sudden loss of "seven peers, seven older men, discipleship peers, who walked me through every season of my life, from Christianity as an eighth grader, to marriage, to my calling to ministry."

The stress of these personal losses, combined with the simultaneous pressures Chris was experiencing in his vocational and caregiving roles, almost proved too much for him. As he remembered, "There was a period of about seventy-two hours when I was very manic, suicidal. I was even angry at God that he I just wanted to remove all these roles, because I felt like I was being rejected at every turn."

How Do They Describe the Personal Benefits?

The challenges notwithstanding, the “sandwiched” pastors also reported benefitting personally as they navigated their simultaneous roles as caregivers and congregational leaders. Two themes pertaining to personal benefits stood out in the interviews. These themes were Personal Growth and Enriched Relationships with Care Recipients.

Personal Growth

A strong majority of the participants reported they had grown personally as a direct result of caring for family members. Significant areas of growth included self-awareness and spiritual maturity.

Growth in Self-awareness

A number of interviewees remarked that the challenges of being “sandwiched” had stimulated fruitful reflection on ways their internal emotional dynamics were influencing their responses to stresses with care recipients and others. They judged the insights gained through such reflection to be encouraging markers of growth in emotional maturity and found such insights helpful in understanding themselves, others, and events unfolding around them.

“I don’t think I know well how to do emotions,” Jack said when asked what his challenges as a “sandwiched” person have taught him. Jack, who described himself as preferring action over contemplation, explained that his wife had been primarily responsible for his growing self-awareness in the days following his father’s death. He

explained, “I remember [my wife] saying things like, ‘You’re not dealing with this properly. You need to talk more. You need to cry and grieve.’” Eventually, as a result of her gentle encouragements, Jack gave himself permission to grieve. Jack said he did not claim to have figured out exactly how to “do emotions”; in times of stress his default tendency still was to “just put my head back down and keep going. It’s just easier if I do the next thing.” He realized this may not be the healthiest response. But he recognized that he has gained valuable insight into an area where he wanted to continue to grow.

Stuart also reported growth in self-awareness through his caregiving experiences. He acknowledged that the stresses of fostering made him more aware of his own inward character. Although initially blaming the stresses of fostering for his negative thoughts and behavior, Stuart explained that he came to understand that these outward challenges were exposing and revealing the person he already was. In the past, Stuart said, he had been inclined to excuse his outbursts of anger by saying, “That’s just not me.” Now, however, he has learned to say in times of anger or impatience, “Well, it *is* me” (emphasis his). This new awareness of character weakness has benefited Stuart by bringing to light areas that still need to be transformed and refined by the power of God working within him.

Growth in Spiritual Maturity

The pastors mentioned growth in spiritual maturity as a second personal benefit of caregiving. The consensus was that the stresses involved had played an important role in deepening their relationship with God. The range of significant markers of spiritual growth mentioned in the interviews included increased reliance on prayer, a more vital

devotional life, growth in Christlike character, success in letting go of bitterness and extending forgiveness to others, a deeper awareness of personal sin leading to repentance and increase in sanctification, personal experiences of God's faithful provision in times of need, and seeing God work through their weakness.

Peter's aging father grew increasingly obstinate and uncooperative as he continued to decline, and Peter's anger and impatience increased in reaction. Distressed more with himself than with his father's behavioral issues, Peter sought advice. Slowly, he gained perspective and grew in patience toward his father. He concluded that, difficult as they had been, these challenges had proved helpful in "recognizing my own heart, the darkness of my own heart, in the midst of it." He counts it a blessing that he has grown to be more like Jesus Christ as a result.

Chris was another participant who reported that his challenges have brought him significant spiritual gains. While acknowledging that losing close friendships at the same time he was experiencing severe conflict with his wife and mother had been difficult in the extreme, he said that he now recognized that "God [was] bringing me back to a sense of what it meant to have union with Christ and how our union together, our marriage, needed Christ." Summing up the spiritual benefits he has gleaned through his experience as a "sandwiched" pastor, Chris was thankful that "all of these seasons, all of these pressures, God has used to sanctify me and make me depend upon him."

Enriched Relationships with Care Recipients

A second theme related to the personal benefits of being “sandwiched” is that of relational enrichment with care recipients. Enriched relationships with both children and parents were reported by the interviewees.

Enriched Relationships with Children

Chris was the only research participant who enumerated the personal benefit of enriched relationships with children. “I’ve seen them grow,” he said, speaking about his children. “I think I’ve tried to be a pilgrim with them, and they’re a pilgrim with me through some of this.” As an illustration of the close bonds that have developed, Chris reported that two of his children had recently called to encourage him as the new director of a church planting network. “That’s the blessing flowing back,” Chris said, obviously moved deeply as he remembered. “So beautiful to see that. Helping me through the pilgrimage.”

Enriched Relationships with Parents

Most of the pastors reported the personal benefit of richer relationships with their parents through their experiences of caring for them. Sean spoke of the satisfying conversations he is still privileged to have regularly with his mother and his wife’s parents as “golden moments” deeply treasured. He and others mentioned a spectrum of relational benefits that included the bonus of having more frequent contact with their parents at this advanced stage of life, the positive impact their children experience through being around their grandparents, the happiness they feel in talking, encouraging,

serving, and caring for their parents, hearing their stories, and the joy of seeing them grow spiritually.

The advantages, Peter said, were that “we’re together and hearing each other’s stories as grown-ups. Now seeing it through grown-up eyes, and seeing what they were doing, trying to help me grow up, those kinds of things.” Another advantage, he added, was that his parents “were very involved, very engaged ... with my boys.” He valued the passing of meaningful family stories across the generations and appreciated how the lives of his own children have been enriched through the involvement of their grandparents.

Chris’s face was earnest as he elaborated on relational gains with both his parents. The bonds have deepened as, over time, Chris has sensed how both his father and mother have grown in their faith. “I have seen [my mother] grow in the Lord,” he said, marveling. “And I’ve seen her be stabilized, I’ve seen her be a better steward of money because I’m a good steward of money. I’ve seen her grow in her love for the scriptures, I believe, because she knows that’s actually one way we can connect.” Chris’s relationship with his father has deepened as well. He explained that, from the time of his conversion in middle school, his constant prayer has been for the conversion of his father to Christ. He explained, “I’d spent my whole life running after my dad and wanting him around. And he was always running away.” But that has changed significantly in the past year as Chris has supported his father through cancer surgery and helped him repair his severely storm-damaged home. Chris said, “He’s called me now more in the last year than he probably has his whole life.” Especially moving was the note his father had written after going through his cancer surgery. In this note, his father had mentioned the name of Jesus and expressed to Chris how much he had valued Chris’s spiritual direction and counsel

over the years. Visibly moved as he spoke, Chris said, “I had no idea.” He went on, “So, there are gems, there’s beauty – beauty out of ashes. There are gems being polished up, that even on this side of heaven, being able to see any of those, have been a very great reward.”

Summary

Study participants reported significant personal challenges and benefits related to their experience of being “sandwiched.” Challenges were experienced as stresses associated with the six salient themes of Full Plates, Consequential Issues, Role Reversals, Relational Conflicts, Things Looming on the Horizon, and Complicating Factors. The stresses entailed gave rise to a range of negative emotions of varying intensity that included anxiety, anger, guilt, sadness, and depression.

Participants also reported experiencing personal benefits as members of the “sandwich generation.” The salient benefits were expressed by the themes of Personal Growth (in the areas of self-awareness and spiritual maturity) and Enriched Relationships with Care Recipients, namely, the children and aging parents to whom participants provided care and support.

How Do “Sandwich Generation” Pastors Describe the Impact on Their Marriages?

The second research question examined the impacts of being “sandwiched” on the marriages of the pastors. All indicated experiencing marriage impacts in the form of both challenges and benefits.

How Do They Describe the Marriage Challenges?

The pastors reported experiencing marital challenges as they fulfilled their roles of leading churches and caring for family members. They mentioned fewer challenges in the realm of marriage than in the personal domain. Two themes emerged in the interviews. These themes were Marriage Conflicts and Miscellaneous Problems.

Marriage Conflicts

A majority of participants reported experiencing marriage conflicts as they navigated their ministry and caregiving roles. These conflicts often revolved around care provided to children. Stuart said, “I was feeling like, okay, we just keep having the same old conversations.” He and his wife were growing weary in the midst of their fostering experience. What they thought would be a relatively brief term of caregiving for their two foster children had lasted almost two years. Their relationship had begun to suffer because overcommitted days meant each was having trouble marshaling sufficient time and emotional resources to invest in their relationship. Stuart confided that although he thought that he and his wife were “okay,” he was troubled by the “arguments here and there” that were occurring with increasing frequency.

Chris remembered saying, as he and his wife were arguing, “It’s not education. It’s not a part of her education.” When their daughter went off to college, Chris’s wife had decided to go back to work to provide extra income for the family. On the one hand, Chris appreciated his wife’s industry. However, he realized that the money she earned was primarily being used to fund their daughter’s participation in a sorority on campus. He did not think it was right for his wife to siphon so much time and energy away from

ministry and family so that one child could participate in what he regarded as a non-essential part of the college experience. He and his wife did not agree on priorities, and conflict ensued.

There were also occasional conflicts over spouses' roles in church ministry. Chris said he put it bluntly to his wife: "You need to find another role in the church." As they approached the fifth anniversary of their ministry in the church plant, he was feeling that his wife needed to scale back her ministry involvement and devote herself more to providing care and stability for the family. Besides, he said, there had begun to be some clashes in the women's ministry involving his wife. All things considered, Chris felt it best for her to step back. When he asked her to do so, however, his spouse perceived it as a demotion coupled with a lack of respect and support for her on his part. "My wife took it as I'd fired her," he said. It took some doing to work things out.

Miscellaneous Problems

A second theme – albeit a minor one – emerged relating to marital challenges associated with being "sandwiched." The pastors reported a diverse assortment of other marriage problems which they assessed in each case as having little to no negative impact on the overall quality of their marriages. These problems included making necessary marriage adjustments when children departed for college or aging parents required more time and attention, having less time together because of multiple responsibilities on the part of both marriage partners, going through stretches of time when they felt more like business partners than lovers, encountering inconveniences such as a lack of privacy when aging parents co-resided, being caught in the middle of relational struggles

occurring between their spouses and their parents, and enduring occasional temporary separations when one of the partners was called away to care for parents or adult children.

How Do They Describe the Marriage Benefits?

All study participants reported marital benefits associated with their caregiving roles. They indicated that the positive impact exceeded the negative impact in their marriages. The two themes that surfaced in the category of marriage benefits were Relational Enrichment with Spouse and Enhanced Ability to Support Spouse.

Enriched Relationship with Spouse

A majority of interviewees indicated that their marriages had been enriched through the experience of being “sandwiched.” They reported such relational gains as the marriage partners’ enhanced appreciation for each other, a better ability to communicate, a deeper intimacy that resulted from navigating challenges together, and an increasing level of emotional maturity that enabled them to face difficulties in a healthier way.

“When you go through hard times, it really draws you close,” Stuart said. He also shared that it was not until after the challenge of fostering had ended that, looking back, he could see that his marriage had been strengthened through the experience. Having given themselves a task that was both demanding and satisfying, the couple could look back with pride and say, “We did that. And I didn’t do it with anybody else, you know? And we survived that together.”

Tony remarked, “In a weird way, we’ve come closer,” when asked what impact being “sandwiched” had on his relationship with his wife. He explained that caring for both sets of elderly parents has fostered intimacy by confronting them with important issues that they might not otherwise have addressed. “I think if we both had lost our parents a long time ago and we weren’t faced with dealing with aging parents, and then you’re aging yourself, I don’t know if you’d deal with it the same way,” he elaborated. “I think it’s healthy to see your frailty.” Facing that together, the bond between them has deepened over time.

Besides fostering greater intimacy, being “sandwiched” also at times brought about a heightened sense of spouses’ admiration for one another. Sean said, “I think our appreciation for each other, that I married a woman who has, you know, she is tough. Spiritually, she’s always been well-grounded.” As he talked about his wife, he asserted that his esteem for her has grown over time as they have partnered together to guide their children through multiple challenges while caring for both sets of their parents. Sean has watched his wife respond to difficult situations with a blend of kindness and firmness and has witnessed the genuine character of her faith. He added that while he had believed his wife to be of high character when he had married her, “it’s only until it’s tested that you see if you’ve got the real deal.”

Enhanced Ability to Support Spouse

In addition to experiencing an enriched relationship with their spouses, some of the participants mentioned an enhanced ability to support their wives as a benefit of caregiving. When asked if being “sandwiched” has helped his marriage in any way, Jack

responded in the affirmative, saying, “Part of it is shepherding her heart with regard to death itself and losing a parent.” While his wife had been “a huge blessing” to him when his father died, Jack confided that she can be “overwhelmed” at the prospect of her own parents dying one day. But having experienced care and sustaining grace from the Lord and others during the time of his own grief, Jack felt that he was now better equipped to help his spouse prepare spiritually and emotionally for the day that must ultimately come.

Similarly, Tony said, “The blessing is I’m just a lot more aware to help her.” He was explaining that his wife was often disconcerted by the behavior of her elderly father, a retired minister. Tony’s wife remembered her father in his younger days as kind and gentle. Now suffering with dementia, he was prone to outbursts of anger and abusive speech. Tony’s wife has been deeply troubled by this, wondering how one who had long preached God’s word could allow such things to come out of his mouth. Tony’s experience in dealing with his own father, who suffers from Alzheimer’s, was thus quite helpful. Having learned that these disturbing behavioral problems are symptomatic of the underlying neurological condition, he has been able to reassure his wife that “It’s just a part of the disease. It’s not just a spiritual thing.”

Summary

Research participants reported that being “sandwiched impacted their marriages with challenges and blessings. The two challenge-related themes that emerged were Marriages Conflicts and Miscellaneous Problems. These challenges were relatively minor and did not negatively impact the overall quality of the marriages. The themes related to

marriage benefits were Relational Enrichment with Spouse and Enhanced Ability to Support Spouse.

How Do “Sandwich Generation” Pastors Describe the Impact on Their Ministries?

The third research question inquired about the impact of being “sandwiched” on the research participants’ role as ministers. As with the previous research questions, the pastors reported both challenges and benefits in the domain of their leadership of congregations.

How Do They Describe the Ministry Challenges?

The pastors had little to report concerning the challenges being “sandwiched” posed to their ministry roles. Three mentioned no significant challenges at all. The only prevalent theme that emerged was that of Missing Time from Work.

Missing Time from Work

Four of the pastors reported having to miss work occasionally to care for their parents or children when special needs arose. Peter said there had been a period when, due to his parents’ decline, he frequently found it necessary to accompany them to medical appointments in the middle of his workday. This made him uncomfortable, because “I [felt] I should be doing something at work, but I was taking care of them.” Although he felt torn, Peter indicated that caring for his parents in this way did not alter the overall quality of his ministry.

Sean recalled, “I took a couple of days off, and took the bus ... and picked him up and brought him home, and tried to just spend time with him, tried to help him in the recovery process.” He was describing the time he had to travel out of state to check his oldest son out of the hospital where the son had been admitted for psychiatric observation. Sean said it was one of the few instances he found it necessary to take significant time off from work to care for family members. Like Peter, Sean did not assess that his caregiving role had a negative impact on his ministry.

How Do They Describe the Ministry Benefits?

Six of the pastors reported that the experience of being “sandwiched” was attended with benefits to their ministries. The three themes that emerged relating to ministry benefits were Enhanced Effectiveness in Preaching, Enhanced Effectiveness in Shepherding, and Greater Appreciation for the Congregation.

Enhanced Effectiveness in Preaching

Three of the research participants said their caregiving role had a beneficial impact on their pulpit ministries. Sometimes the pastors’ encounters with personal limitations in the course of helping family members shaped the content of their sermons by supplying authentic and compelling illustrations of important biblical themes. Stuart said, “I shared a sermon ... where I just kind of poured it all out to folks, talking about [how] Christ uses the weak things of the world.” He was recalling a message he had preached shortly after he and his wife had relinquished their role as foster parents before the children for whom they had been caring had received a permanent home. He knew the

decision had been necessary; he and his wife found themselves increasingly overwhelmed by this added responsibility. Still, deciding to give up fostering earlier than planned left Stuart with a sense of guilt and failure. Bringing the Bible's truths to bear on his own experience, he explained, had helped him effectively communicate and apply the truth to the needs of his hearers as well. He remembered encouraging his congregation not to be afraid to "confront your inability and weakness, [because] that's how God works; he works in and through the weak."

Participants also spoke about how their "sandwich" experiences had impacted the tone of their pulpit ministries. Like Stuart, Tony said he was grateful that the rigors of caregiving have provided him with a helpful reservoir of content to weave into his messages. But just as important, he said he sensed that caring for his frail and aging parents has given him a more sensitive heart and a deeper compassion toward people who are weak and in need. Tony said that God has used his caregiving experience to make him more tender, and "I think that tenderness has come out in the preaching."

Enhanced Effectiveness in Shepherding

Most of the pastors were enthusiastic in describing the beneficial impact their care for family members had exerted on their pastoral care for church members. In light of the centrality of this topic, and combined with its importance to the interviewees themselves, more detailed treatment of this theme is appropriate. Five significant sub-themes appeared in participants' responses when asked how their caregiving experiences have influenced their pastoral work in a positive way. These sub-themes are: It's Made Me

More Human; I Know How They Feel; Going Down that Road with Others; Don't Be Too Quick to Go; and You Need a Pastor Right Now, Not a Friend.

It's Made Me More Human

Some participants asserted that aspects of their caregiving experiences – in particular, the more difficult ones – have opened doors of relatability with those to whom they minister. “It’s a huge thing,” Stuart enthused. He spoke of how he is able to reassure people with serious dysfunctional issues that “Hey, I’ve got a homeless sister with mental health issues, and we have divorce in our situation, we have addiction, we have the death of an aging parent ... all of those, you know?” The fact that Stuart has personal experience with many of the same problems that vex those to whom he ministers is something that has “made me more human,” he believed.

I Know How They Feel

Caregiving enables ministers to understand the problems of their congregants at a deeper level. Sean spoke of a widow in his congregation with a daughter with mental disabilities much like those that afflicted his son. He said his own caregiving challenges have afforded him an effective platform from which to minister to her and others facing similar struggles. While inexperienced pastors were prone to tell congregants they know how they feel, Sean asserted that, when it comes to families with mental illness, “*I know how they feel*” (emphasis his)!

Going Down that Road with Others

Participants reported that their experiences of personal hardship in the “sandwich” have turned out to be divine preparations for effective pastoral work. When Jack’s father died two years ago, he was impressed by the Lord’s sufficiency and also by the great comfort he received through the prayers and support of Christian friends. During year following his father’s death, he had the opportunity to minister to two other families as loved ones were dying. The sequence of events had taught Jack that “God is not just sending me down that road [of difficulty]; he’s actually going to equip me to go down that road with other people.” He added that “these [things] are not distractions from ministry; this is the Lord working in *me* as a minister” (emphasis his).

Don’t Be Too Quick to Go

Caring for their aging parents in the midst of serious illnesses and surgeries also taught pastors the value and importance of ministry in a hospital setting. Jack said that he now devoted more time and attention to this than he did previously. Even before his father died, he knew that hospital visitation was a vital facet of pastoral ministry. As he explained, “When I was in that room, I was in that room. You had my undivided attention. But you probably had it for five minutes.” Now he said:

Lots of days ... I understand that the most important thing I can do ... is to sit in that room. If God is a God who is Emmanuel – who is *with* us – then *how* is God with us? Oftentimes, he’s with us through his people. So, sit in that hospital, and don’t be too quick to go (emphases his).

You Need a Pastor Right Now, Not a Friend

Some research participants reported that caring for their family members has impressed upon them the difficulty – and the necessity – of learning to function as a pastor to people who know them well in other roles. Chris said his experiences of caring for his parents have taught him how to put on his “pastor’s hat” when the situation warranted. As he has supported his own parents in the dual roles of pastor and son, he said, “I’ve been able to let go of them in those familiar roles more and *be* their pastor, not worry about being their son as much” (emphasis his). He contended that faithful and effective ministry required him to distinguish these roles in his mind, particularly when it was necessary to offer counsel and advice that would be unpalatable to the people who raised him. Chris said he was learning to apply the same distinction in his dealings with church members and leaders alike. As an example, he mentioned a recent discussion he had with his church leaders concerning changes needed in the congregation’s structure and functioning. When he sensed their hesitancy to consider his recommendation was rooted in part in their tendency to view him as a friend rather than a ministry leader and strategist, he recalled telling these elders, “You don’t really need me to be your friend right now. I know we built this thing on friendship, but what we need right now is a good process.”

Greater Appreciation for the Congregation

A third theme appearing in the interview data pertaining to ministry benefits of caregiving was that pastors gained a greater appreciation for their congregations.

Participants reported that this was due to the significant support and encouragement in their caregiving roles that they had received from people in their churches.

Tony expressed profound gratitude for his church's board of elders for the practical support they have given him in the form of regular family leave time to care for his parents. He explained that when he first began making his three-hour drives to spend time with them, "I was trying to take vacation, and sometimes I was trying to take the computer, trying to squeeze in three or four hours of work" Soon finding the effort to fit these hurried caregiving trips into the margins of his ministry schedule extremely stressful, Tony asked his leaders to grant him two days each month to be with his parents. They readily granted his request, calling the new policy "family leave." He said that this was a great relief, because "I knew that I could be away comfortably ... with a clean conscience that this is time away to help my family." Tony did not hesitate to characterize his church's response as "fabulous."

Jack also expressed great appreciation for the love and support he receives from his congregation. He said that on the day he had his open-heart surgery, the large crowd gathered with his family in the surgery waiting area included a large contingent of church members. To express their care and support, each of them had made a four-hour drive to the hospital where the procedure took place. Jack also spoke of an elder who "called me every day after dad died ... until sometime that summer." Two years later, this leader – who has become a "father figure" to him – still calls or comes by the church office regularly to check on Jack and offer him friendship and encouragement. Thus, as Jack concluded with gratitude, "We know that we are cared for, in that sense."

Summary

Study participants reported that although being “sandwiched” did pose challenges in their role as ministers – most commonly, in the form of Missing Time from Work occasionally to care for family members – it had no significant negative impact on their overall ministries. The pastors did report that their caregiving role had yielded significant benefits for their ministries. The three emergent themes relating to ministry benefits were Enhanced Effectiveness in Preaching, Enhanced Effectiveness in Shepherding, and Greater Appreciation for the Congregation.

How Do “Sandwich Generation” Pastors Seek to Navigate Their Challenges and Function Successfully in Their Various Roles as Caregivers, Marriage Partners, and Ministers?

The research participants reported navigating their challenges in a variety of ways. Three themes emerged: Managing Self, Relying on Social Support, and Accessing Formal Support.

Managing Self

All participants mentioned the theme of practicing self-management in the midst of their multiple roles. They understood that leading a disciplined life mentally, emotionally, and physically was essential to their resilience as they navigated their various responsibilities. Making Sense of the Situation and Caring for Self emerged as sub-themes under this broader theme of Managing Self.

Making Sense of the Situation

The research participants reported managing themselves cognitively by conceptualizing the experiences they encountered in their various roles – including the attendant challenges and difficulties – through an interpretive mental framework that enabled them to assess their experiences as coherent and positive. The pastors’ interpretive frameworks were distinctly shaped by the teachings of the Bible and by their faith in the God of scripture. Their mental frameworks strengthened the interviewees to function successfully by furnishing them with Convictions about God’s Character, Glimpses of God’s Providence, and Desires to Honor God’s Name.

Convictions about God’s Character

Several of the pastors said they found it important to view their challenges through the lens of their biblical understanding of what God is like. Tony confessed, “I’m a firm believer in God’s sovereignty.” He explained that his knowledge of God as an all-powerful King who orders every detail of his children’s lives and is always aiming at their good gives him strength and encouragement to rise to the demands of his busy schedule, face periodic conflicts with his siblings, and continue to care for his elderly parents in their ongoing struggles.

Sean remarked, “God has you there for his purposes and his plan, and ultimately for his glory.” He was discussing how his theology strengthened him as he continued to serve the church while caring for two sons with serious disabilities. Sean admitted that while his sons’ problems “may not be what you would order,” he found courage to face these things through his assurance that he and his family are in the hands of a good and

loving God who allows hardships for purposes that – albeit mysterious – are always wise and loving.

Participants also reported their belief in God’s unlimited power gave them hope even in the midst of calamities that seemed beyond human remedy. Referring to the gospel story where Jesus healed a man’s son after the disciples had been unable to bring relief, Sean explained:

There are those stories there for people like us, to say, “Hey, God’s got this. You’ve got to wait, and you’ve got to trust. The story’s not over.” As long as [my son] is alive, God can still work in his life, turn things around.

Sean’s confidence in God’s omnipotence leaves room for the possibility that his oldest son, who has long struggled with mental health issues, may find significant healing through the Lord’s powerful intervention. This hope, in turn, energizes him to continue to serve in his various roles as husband, minister, and caregiver.

Glimpses of God’s Providence

The conviction that God is intimately involved in every detail of life enabled participants to discern his hand at work in arranging their lives and circumstances so that they had more time to support and care for family members. These encouraging glimpses of God’s providence strengthened their sense that caring for their aging parents was a heaven-mandated mission, and this helped them find coherence and purpose in the midst of developments that might otherwise be disheartening. Jeff said, “Looking back on this, I can see ... the timing, allowing me to help my mom clean out the house and then sell it.” He was explaining that while he still found it “painful and embarrassing” to have been fired from his church six years ago, he also recognized God’s active hand in the

matter because his termination had coincided with the emergence of his aging mother's need for help in selling her house and disposing of many of her possessions in preparation for moving to a retirement home. Since he was out of work, Jeff now had time to devote to helping her with these details. This enabled him to find positive meaning in his job loss, because he was convinced that helping his mother was as worthy an endeavor as leading a church. He remarked, "It just freed me to do, maybe what's really important, you know, making sure my mom's okay."

Tony also detected God's governing activity in a difficult ministry transition from his previous church to his current one just as a sharp decline in his parents' health required more of his time be devoted to caring for them. He said, "I see God's hand; it's perfect at this time of my life. I see the Lord's hand in putting me here so I have time, [my wife] has time, to care for both our families." As Tony made his monthly drive to spend a few days with his mother and father, he traveled in the knowledge that his heavenly Father had specifically ordered his life in a way that allowed him to care for them. This brought him gladness and imparted deep significance to his caregiving role.

Desires to Honor God's Name

The participants' faith in God and knowledge of his word also shaped their goals and desires for themselves and for their family members to whom they provided care. These faith-informed goals buffered against disappointment and disillusionment when times of ease were interrupted by hardship and difficulty. As Jack faced the sadness of his father's death and the daunting challenge of his own open-heart surgery, he said his main objective was to exercise faith in God's character and purposes. His reasoning, he

explained, was, “If he’s going to take me down a hard road, why not trust him to sustain me? And even more than that, I’m going to trust him to use it. There will not be, for the Christian, meaningless suffering.” Convinced there must be a coherent purpose in the midst of his challenges, Jack preferred exercising faith and growing in usefulness over aiming for a life of personal comfort.

Sean intimated that for him, “The ultimate goal is that God would be glorified as we journey through this thing.” While he would prefer challenge-free circumstances, making this his highest goal would only lead to despair in the midst of a broken world. The road he walked, though long and difficult, was the pathway God has laid out for him, Sean believed. He found meaning in the journey and would rather glorify God by walking it in faith than waste his time pining for the perfect wholeness God’s people are promised only when Christ returns.

Caring for Self

Caring for Self was the second sub-theme under the broad theme of Managing Self. All the pastors interviewed reported regularly making time for at least one activity or practice aimed at caring for themselves physically or providing an enjoyable diversion from their other roles and responsibilities. They were convinced that taking care of themselves was key to their sustainability in navigating their multiple roles. The forms of self-care varied among the participants. Caring for self included such pursuits as regular exercise, engaging in hobbies, making time to get away, structured reflection through journaling, and regular medical appointments to maintain health.

“All we had to do was decide whether we were going to the beach or the pool, and which drink we wanted to have,” Stuart said, laughing. He was recalling that, after he and his wife had relinquished their role as foster parents, they had treated themselves to an all-inclusive vacation week at an off-shore resort. Periodic vacations and times away from the daily grind to renew his creative energy and re-connect with his wife were essential to his perseverance, Stuart is convinced.

Tony said with a grin, “[My wife] often jokes that I have so many different hobbies.” He named hunting, fishing, golf, and riding motorcycles as some of the things he regularly enjoyed. He described these hobbies as “a huge, profound blessing” that helped him maintain a healthy perspective in the midst of his many responsibilities. Tony also kept honey bees in his backyard and indulged his love for working with his hands through the part-time handyman business he recently launched. He found his beekeeping and handyman work particularly meaningful since his father had taught Tony these skills when Tony was a boy. He explained, “I learned from my dad to work with my hands like he did.” He added that as his father’s Alzheimer’s disease advanced, “all these beehives went kaput.” Resolving to keep the tradition alive, he moved the beekeeping equipment to his home and thought of his father as he enjoyed the hobby they shared when Tony was a boy. He confided, “I think there’s a way it’s – even as I’m working on it, I can tell, I think of dad – it’s a little bit of a coping mechanism.”

Relying on Social Support

A second theme that emerged was Relying on Social Support. Participants said they depended on others to help them fulfill their responsibilities. The two sub-themes

that surfaced under the theme of Relying on Social Support were Support from the Family and Support from the Church.

Support from the Family

Social support for the pastors' caregiving role was frequently provided by members of their families. Study participants did not report actively soliciting help from family members. Rather, family members themselves took the initiative to provide help because of the relational bonds and interconnections naturally existing within the family units. Some negotiation and coordination, however, were needed for the purpose of allocating specific caregiving roles and responsibilities among various family members. Support was provided by the pastors' spouses, siblings, and – less commonly – by more distant relatives.

Spouses

All participants reported that their spouses provided significant support in caring for aging parents. The pastors' wives focused primarily on caring for the wives' own parents. However, the spouses did not hesitate to care for their husbands' parents as well when there was need. Spouses provided a broad range of care to parents, including emotional support and practical help with such activities of daily living as feeding, dressing, and toileting. They also helped out regularly with housework, grocery shopping, transportation to medical appointments, coordination of home healthcare workers, and assistance with the management of finances.

Stuart recalled that on a recent trip to visit his mother, his wife “was very involved in some of the physical parts of it.” In addition to participating in day-to-day care for parents, spouses were also available to lend support in times of crisis as well. Jack spoke with deep appreciation about the way his wife “dropped what she was doing to help me take care of my dad,” in the wake of what ultimately proved to be his father’s fatal accident, adding that her support had been “a huge blessing” in those days of sadness and crisis.

The pastors’ wives also teamed up with their husbands to provide care to young adult children in times of special need. When their oldest son was injured in a serious bicycling accident, Peter and his wife had traveled out-of-state to offer practical help and emotional support. Similarly, while Jeff’s daughter was in the middle of her divorce, he recalled that he and his wife had frequently alternated out-of-town trips to be at their daughter’s side when they sensed she most needed their encouragement and support.

The pastors also reported receiving invaluable emotional support from their spouses at key times of personal need. “Look, I’m just telling you, I’m on the edge. I need your prayers.” These were the words Chris remembered saying to his wife in an extremely dark moment. Feeling overwhelmed by an array of difficulties and conflicts in his family, ministry, and friendships, he was near despair and contemplating suicide. His plea startled her, Chris recalled. And yet, his wife did pray, and he found it helpful to express his burden to her so that she could help him carry it.

“You need to cry through these things. You need to talk through these things. You’re not talking enough.” Jack recalled his wife gently speaking these words after his father died. Instead of grieving, Jack had put on his “pastor’s hat” and thrown himself

back into his ministerial role. He said his spouse's counsel and loving support were instrumental in persuading him to face the sadness surrounding the difficult loss of his parent. With her help, he gave himself time and space to grieve his loss. He was then able to continue fulfilling his responsibilities in a healthier way.

Siblings

All the pastors reported that they or their spouses had at least one brother or sister who assisted in caring for their aging parents. Siblings typically provided multiple forms of support, including practical, emotional, and financial. On the lighter extreme of the support scale, Stuart reported that it was "fortunate" that his wife's brother and family lived near his wife's 73-year-old mother and were thus in a position to help her occasionally. However, he said, "They're a younger couple, and they have five kids. They have their own issues and financial needs and things." Because of their circumstances, the assistance this brother provided to Stuart's mother-in-law was minimal. At the opposite end of the support scale, the siblings of others were heavily involved in parental care. Peter's 96-year-old mother has been co-residing with his sister, who serves as primary caregiver to their mother. The care and support provided by siblings serves to decrease the load carried by the pastors, thus providing them with more time and energy to allocate to their other roles.

More Distant Relatives

Two study participants reported that more distant relatives helped them bear the load of caregiving, and that this support was extremely valuable. Tony's nephew resided

with Tony's 82-year-old mother on her farm and performed a variety of chores in exchange for a rent-free place to live. While intimating that "it's a little bit of a convoluted situation" since his nephew did not always do his assigned chores in a thorough or timely manner, Tony admitted that having this extended family member to "cut the grass, take care of the lane, and do some maintenance stuff" decreased the work that would otherwise fall to him.

After Jack's father died two years ago, his mother moved back to the small town where she had grown up. An advantage of the relocation, Jack assessed, was that a number of his mother's brothers and sisters lived there as well. He was not only comforted in knowing that his mother was surrounded by family members who cared for her deeply, but the arrangement relieved him of a portion of the caregiving workload he would otherwise be required to bear. Jack explained, "If those [relatives] were absent or she [his mother] were still in [her former town], I would have greater responsibility, or she would show up here more often. So, that's the benefit of [her] having six siblings."

Support from the Church

All pastors in the study indicated that social support from the church enabled them to navigate their roles successfully. Whereas social support from family members in most cases flowed spontaneously from the natural bonds within family networks, the study participants reported they had solicited church support when they felt the need. The type of support churches provided typically differed in nature from that provided by family members. While family members usually lent support that was more practical (for example, providing financial support, transportation services, help with housework, and

the like) church assistance in most cases assumed the form of spiritual guidance and emotional support. Also, while family members' support tended to go to the care-receiving parents, church support was focused directly on the caregiving pastors themselves. Study participants reported seeking and finding help from three sub-groups in the church: Other Members of the Clergy, Non-clergy Church Leaders, and People in the Pews.

Other Members of the Clergy

Two pastors in the study reported that the support of other clergy members had been extremely helpful in sustaining them in their roles and responsibilities. In one case, the help came from a member of the pastor's own staff. Stuart said his associate pastor had taken on significant additional ministry responsibilities during the two demanding years that Stuart and his wife served as foster parents. When asked if this staff member had been helpful during that time, Stuart emphatically responded, "Definitely." He then added that the relationship is "almost like a co-pastorate. It's great."

Jack's said his associate pastor was teaming up well with him to share the pastoral load. He confided that several families in the church were currently experiencing crises and that "[the associate pastor] and I are dividing and conquering right now." Having the extra help on staff allowed Jack more time and emotional energy to devote to his family caregiving role.

Other study participants gleaned valuable spiritual guidance and emotional support from fellow pastors who were not members of their church staffs. Jeff said he harbored bitterness toward a member of his former church after he was fired. He felt

betrayed by this person, who had played a significant role in Jeff's ouster. "I'd wake up just thinking about him," he admitted. Finding it hard to let go of resentment and extend forgiveness on his own, Jeff finally approached a pastor and music director for help while he was working with them at a week-long summer camp for children. Jeff remembered taking them aside and saying, "Man, I've just got to deal with this forgiveness thing." Although they talked at length, Jeff reported that things did not change immediately. "I left there feeling the same way," he said. Months later, however, he invited his nemesis to lunch, and they are now slowly rebuilding their friendship. "So, I saw the Lord do something," he concluded, attributing the breakthrough he experienced in part to the patient ears and wise counsel of his supportive ministry friends.

Chris said he also leans on other pastors for help in difficult times. He has developed close friendships with a number of clergy members through his involvement in annual retreats for ministers. During the brief period he was suicidal, Chris instinctively turned to these friends for support. He explained that, in times of personal turmoil, "There are three people I call." Hence, "The day I was struggling with manic depression and felt suicidal, I called three people [snapping his fingers], just like that." He added, "God was working, made me aware enough of where I was to call out, have men pray."

Non-clergy Church Leaders

Most of the pastors said they received valuable support from non-clergy church leaders – elders or lay officers – as they navigated their roles and faced the demands of caring for their families. Some reported that the overall healthy quality of the relationships they enjoyed with church leaders was itself a source of great

encouragement. Stuart explained that “we [he and his leaders] don’t have conflict. It’s just very unified. We like hanging out with each other and have our elder retreat, which is always a blast.” These close and positive relationships energized and encouraged Stuart as he navigated his various roles.

Peter said his church leaders have a well-established track record of being aware of his busy schedule and encouraging him to devote time to other important responsibilities. He recalled that in the early days of his ministry, the elders of the congregation, concerned that he was not devoting sufficient time and attention to his children, strongly urged him to take more time off. He remembered them saying, “You do enough, you do a lot of nights, and you’re up early in the morning. Why don’t you quit about three o’clock every day and just take your boys and do stuff?” Later, these church leaders had extended the same support when Peter and his wife were caring for his mother and father when the parents co-resided with Peter. He said he was greatly encouraged at how the elders “seemed to deeply appreciate the fact that we took them in. So, they were very supportive.”

Some of the pastors also told stories of specific occasions when their lay leaders had helped them cope with specific caregiving issues and problems. Chris recalled the time he appealed to his church leaders for help in mediating the conflicts he was having with his mother and sister. Relationships were so strained that he and his sister were no longer on speaking terms. Chris said that one leader, in particular, had been particularly helpful in the situation. He “helped us work through that really hard season with my sister,” Chris shared, adding that “he was excellent – arbitrating, mediating”

Tony's church leaders lent support by generously allowing him regular time off from church work to care for his aging parents. He had sensed he was shortchanging both his parents and the congregation, so he approached the elders with a proposal that they grant him two days off each month to care for his parents, and they readily agreed. Tony continued to take this monthly time away to visit his parents on what the church calls "family leave," and said he has "felt a lot more comfortable, less guilty" since the leave policy was implemented. "Fabulous" was the word he used to describe the support his leaders have provided him.

People in the Pews

Most study participants said church members-at-large had been significant sources of support in enabling them to carry on effectively in their various roles. The support often came when the pastors approached friends in the congregation for advice and moral support. Sean recounted the difficult days when the aberrant behavior of his mentally-ill son caused him to doubt his qualifications for ministry. He wondered how he could continue to serve in the role of pastor since his adult son was at times engaging in illegal behavior and was having brushes with the law. To gain clarity on the matter, Sean remembered sharing his doubts with people in the congregation who knew him best. He said:

I asked that a lot of myself, and I asked that a lot of others who knew me, and knew the situation. And you know, [my son's] behavioral issues really didn't become acute until he was 26, 27, and he was out of the house at the time. You know, there were guys that said, "He's on his own. You raised him. We see how you raised him and we see how you raised the other kids."

His son's problems did not disappear. But Sean felt reassured and strengthened by the strong affirmation of these church members. As the result, his doubts about his qualifications eventually disappeared, and he found the support he needed to continue his ministerial role.

Peter recalled a time when church members had given him valuable advice and support. Increasingly concerned about his tendency to become angry when his elderly father became belligerent and uncooperative, Peter opened up about his anger to some friends in the congregation who had also had experience caring for aging parents. He explained, "I only went to two or three, but all of them had experienced the same emotions." He remembered them telling him, "Here's how we dealt with it. Here's what we did." Explaining that such problematic behavior was often beyond the control of the elderly, Peter's friends counseled, "Your job is simply to give them a stability as best you're able. To pray that God would give you the stamina in the midst of it. [And] whatever you do, don't whack them (chuckling)!" Strengthened and instructed by these supportive words of wisdom seasoned with a touch of humor, Peter found fresh patience to continue loving and caring for his declining father in spite of his off-putting ways.

Accessing Formal Support

The third theme that surfaced relating to the question of how the pastors functioned effectively in the midst of their wide-ranging roles and responsibilities was Accessing Formal Support. While the informal support the participants received from families and churches was important, there were also occasions when help from experts and specialists was required, and they did not hesitate to access it. These sources of

formal support did not feature prominently in the participants' narratives during the interviews. However, they mentioned their recourse to formal support in ways that suggested such support was often significantly helpful in assisting the pastors to navigate their multiple challenging roles. The two sub-themes that emerged under the broad theme of Accessing Formal Support were Support from Professional Practitioners and Support from Institutions.

Support from Professional Practitioners

All pastors in the study reported that doctors, nurses, and other medical professionals were helpful resources for assisting with care for family members. Medical appointments, therapy sessions, and surgeries administered by professionals were regular components of care for aging parents when formal intervention was required. At times, the care and treatment provided by medical professionals was also an important factor enabling the pastors themselves to continue functioning effectively. This was the case for Jack and Jeff, who both underwent surgeries while being “sandwiched.”

Less common, but also present in the interviews, were instances of support by other professionals. Participants engaged attorneys, as when Sean was seeking to obtain Social Security disability benefits for his physically handicapped son, Tony was helping his parents place their estate assets in a trust, and Peter was intervening on behalf of a son facing serious legal charges in the wake of a bicycle accident in which a motorcyclist had been killed. Chris and Stuart both reported engaging licensed professional counselors to help them deal with personal issues or matters involving family members for whom they cared. One participant, Chris, reported hiring a financial planner when his mother, having

spent down a large portion of her assets, moved to Chris's town and he recognized she needed help with money management. In all cases, these professional practitioners helped the pastors continue providing care for their family members while functioning effectively in their other roles.

Support from Institutions

The support of a variety of formal institutions also enabled study participants to navigate their various responsibilities. Hospitals and medical facilities formed a part of the resource network of a majority of the pastors when they or their family members needed health care. Assisted living centers and skilled nursing facilities were also mentioned frequently in the interviews, with most study participants reporting that one or more parents was currently living, or had lived, in such institutional settings. Several of the pastors identified colleges and universities as part of their support networks as these institutions of higher learning provided financial help to participants' children in the form of scholarships or work-study programs. Two of the interviewees reported receiving help from various levels of government. Jack's daughter has been attending college on a state-provided scholarship, and Sean's mentally disabled son has been receiving two forms of federal assistance: disability benefits from the Social Security Administration and support from the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program administered by the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Sean and his wife also found valuable encouragement and support as they cared for their son through their participation in a support group for families of the mentally ill sponsored by the National Alliance for Mental Illness. These institutions helped the pastors continue to function effectively either by providing

technical services that lie beyond the caregivers' personal expertise or by providing financial resources that allow caregivers to use more of their own money to meet other needs.

Summary

Study participants indicated that they navigated their challenges and functioned successfully in their various roles in a variety of ways. Three themes were salient on this point. The pastors Managed Self by making sense of the situation and practicing self-care. Second, they Relied on Social Support supplied by various members of their families and churches. Finally, participants also Accessed Formal Support from professional practitioners and various institutions.

Summary of Findings

Study participants reported that being “sandwiched” entailed personal challenges and benefits as well as challenges and benefits in their marriages and ministries.

Personal challenges that emerged related to the six themes of Full Plates, Consequential Issues, Role Reversals, Relational Conflicts, Things Looming on the Horizon, and Complicating Factors. The challenges gave rise to such negative emotions as anxiety, anger, guilt, sadness, and depression. Personal benefits surfaced as Personal Growth experienced in the forms of growth in both self-awareness and spiritual maturity, along with Enriched Relationships with Care Recipients.

Marital challenges were experienced in the forms of Marriage Conflicts and Miscellaneous Problems that were assessed as minor. Participants reported that the

challenges did not diminish the overall quality of their marriages. Marital benefits included Enriched Relationship with Spouse and Enhanced Ability to Support Spouse.

Ministry challenges were assessed as minor, with the only prevalent theme being Missing Time from Work. Benefits, which were reported to be significant, included the themes of Enhanced Effectiveness in Preaching, Enhanced Effectiveness in Shepherding, and Greater Appreciation for the Congregation.

Participants reported navigating challenges and functioning successfully in their roles in a variety of ways. Salient themes that emerged include Managing Self by making sense of the situation and practicing self-care, Relying on Social Support from members of families and churches, and Accessing Formal Support from various professional practitioners and institutions.

Chapter Five

Discussion and Recommendations

The purpose of this study was to explore how “sandwich generation” pastors navigate the simultaneous demands of ministering in their churches and caring for their multigenerational families.

The following research questions guided the research:

1. How do “sandwich generation” pastors describe the impact of navigating the simultaneous demands on their personal lives?
 - a. How do they describe the challenges?
 - b. How do they describe the benefits?
2. How do “sandwich generation” pastors describe the impact on their marriages?
 - a. How do they describe the challenges?
 - b. How do they describe the benefits?
3. How do “sandwich generation” pastors describe the impact on their ministries?
 - a. How do they describe the challenges?
 - b. How do they describe the benefits?
4. How do “sandwich generation” pastors seek to navigate their challenges and function successfully in their various roles as caregivers, marriage partners, and ministers?

This final chapter will begin with a summary of the literature review (Chapter Two) and the study findings (Chapter Four). It will then discuss the study findings in light of the literature review and the researcher’s experiences and perspectives, and conclude with recommendations for practice and further research.

Summary of Study and Findings

Summary of Literature Review

The literature review dealt with four topics relevant to the experience of “sandwich generation” pastors: stresses and strains of caregiving, coping strategies, benefits of caregiving, and biblical and theological insights on troubles in the Christian’s life.

Stresses and Strains of Caregiving

The literature established that caring for multiple generations of family members while married and working full time is stressful, with stresses often manifesting in a broad range of emotional/psychological and physical symptoms. Studies show that the caregiving role evokes a feeling of caregiver “overload,” which creates strain in the arenas of marriage, vocation, and household financial management. The literature shows that caregiving is not associated with significant negative impact on most “sandwich generation” marriages. However, strain is typically more intense in the areas of vocation and finances. Vocational strain manifests in a variety of workplace impacts, including missing time on the job, juggling work schedules, decreasing work hours, passing up promotions, changing jobs, transitioning from full-time to part-time work, leaving the workforce altogether, and – in rare cases – being fired from a job because of irreconcilable conflicts between caregiving and vocational responsibilities. Financial strain results from the significant costs often associated with caregiving, which include both present costs (out-of-pocket expenses and lost wage income) and future costs (lower retirement account balances, lower pensions, and lower Social Security benefits). When

care recipients require expensive medical treatments and surgeries or long-term care in skilled nursing facilities or other health-related institutions, caregivers can also face catastrophic costs.

Coping Strategies

The literature review also established that persons facing challenges engage in a variety of coping strategies (thoughts, perceptions, and behaviors) which function to manage or reduce the level of stress they experience in adversity. Multiple models of coping strategies were reviewed, two of which were of particular relevance to the present study. The first, proposed by Neal and Hammer in a comprehensive national study of working “sandwich generation” couples, consists of two basic categories: responses aimed at increasing resources available to deal with problems, and responses aimed at reducing demands associated with problems.³⁰⁵ The second, proposed by Newman and Pargament, points to the significant role of religion can play in coping, furnishing people with cognitive categories for viewing hardships as intelligible and sent for a benevolent purpose, and suggesting ways of solving or coping with problems consistent with their understanding of God’s will and character.³⁰⁶ The literature suggested that no single coping strategy is universally effective; rather, the greatest buffering effect against stress is achieved through the use of a variety of coping responses.

³⁰⁵ Margaret B. Neal and Leslie B. Hammer, *Working Couples Caring for Children and Aging Parents: Effects on Work and Well-Being* (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers, 2007), 128.

³⁰⁶ Jon S. Newman and Kenneth I. Pargament, “The Role of Religion in the Problem-Solving Process,” *Review of Religious Research* 31, no. 4 (June 1990): 391.

Benefits of Caregiving

The literature also established that caregivers in the “sandwich generation” commonly experience significant intrapersonal, interpersonal, and practical benefits. Benefits in the intrapersonal realm often include enhanced affective well-being (the experience of positive emotions such as joy, pleasure, and affirmation), enhanced cognitive well-being (consisting of life satisfaction, partnership satisfaction, and self-esteem), and the development of wisdom (an enhanced ability to discern what is most important in life and a clearer understanding of aging and its implications). In the interpersonal realm, benefits are often realized by caregivers in the form of enriched relationships with care recipients, spouses, and others. Practical benefits include the receipt of various types of reciprocal help from care recipients (such as child care and help with finances and household tasks) and the acquisition by caregivers of a wide range of useful and marketable skills.

Biblical and Theological Insights on Troubles in the Christian’s Life

Literature from the Bible and Christian theology established that hardships and difficulties of various kinds are normal for God’s people in this present age. Biblical writers and theologians contend that trials benefit believers by nurturing their faith, promoting their sanctification, and focusing their hearts on heaven. Additionally, biblical and theological literature contended that hardships serve a helpful purpose in the lives of church leaders by equipping them for their God-given ministries to church members. This equipping takes place as ministers’ experiences of trouble keep their pride in check, force

them to depend on God for strength, and prepare them to be more effective pastors to congregants facing similar trials.

Summary of Findings

The research questions probed the challenges and benefits experienced by the study participants as they simultaneously cared for multigenerational family members and led their congregations. The “sandwich generation” pastors were also asked how they navigated their challenges and functioned effectively in their multiple roles. The following is a summary of the findings.

Challenges Experienced by “Sandwich Generation” Pastors

Personal Challenges

Six themes related to personal challenges emerged through analysis of the interview data. These were: having too much to do and too many roles to fulfill at once (Full Plates); dealing with matters of great moment in the lives of care recipients (Consequential Issues); being in the uncomfortable position of functioning as de facto parents as their aging parents became increasingly dependent due to physical and mental decline (Role Reversals); experiencing disagreements with care recipients and siblings (Relational Conflicts); anticipating that caregiving responsibilities would continue and intensify in the future (Things Looming on the Horizon); and experiencing various non-caregiving-related crises which amplified stress across all life roles (Complicating Factors). The resulting stresses and strains gave rise to varying levels anxiety, anger, guilt, sadness, and depression.

Marriage Challenges

The major marriage challenge reported by study participants was conflict with spouses. Conflict was typically related to disagreements about the care and parenting of children, although in one case it centered around disagreement over the spouse's role in church ministry. The pastors also gave scattered reports of miscellaneous other marriage problems such as needing to make adjustments as children left home for college or having less time together because of the many responsibilities being carried by both marriage partners. None of the reported challenges significantly affected the overall quality of these "sandwich generation" marriages.

Ministry Challenges

Research participants reported minor challenges to their ministries due to their being "sandwiched." The only prevalent theme was the occasional need to miss time from work in order to care for aging parents or children. The pastors concurred that this had no significant negative impact on the quality of their ministries.

Benefits Experienced by "Sandwich Generation" Pastors

Personal Benefits

The pastors spoke of personal benefits associated with their caregiving role, with two themes emerging: personal growth and enriched relationships with care recipients.

One form of personal growth was enhanced self-awareness. This came about as participants considered how the relational and emotional dynamics formed in the past were influencing their responses to present challenges. In short, being "sandwiched"

resulted in clearer self-understanding. A second form of personal growth related to spiritual maturity. The pastors grew spiritually as they learned to rely on Christ for strength, turned more consciously to prayer, developed a more robust devotional life, repented of sin, extended forgiveness to others, and developed Christlike character. Their faith also grew as they saw God providing for their spiritual and temporal needs and working through their weakness to accomplish his purposes for them.

The pastors experienced enriched relationships with care recipients as another personal benefit. Though they acknowledged significant relational conflicts, they assessed the overall impact of being “sandwiched” on family relationships as positive. Participants found satisfaction in caring for aging parents and children, speaking of “golden moments” they experienced as they shared family stories and observed spiritual growth in care recipients.

Marriage Benefits

Two themes surfaced as study participants spoke of the benefits of their “sandwiched” experience for their marriages: enriched relationships with their spouses and an enhanced ability to support their spouses.

Participants’ marriages were enriched as growth in mutual appreciation took place, communication improved, and couples enjoyed a deeper level of intimacy as they worked through challenges together.

Participants’ ability to support their spouses grew as well. The pastors reported their caregiving efforts left them better prepared to give encouragement and helpful

counsel to their wives when they were disturbed by their aging parents' decline or by thoughts of their parents' eventual death.

Ministry Benefits

Three themes of ministry benefits emerged in the study: enhanced effectiveness in preaching, enhanced effectiveness in shepherding, and greater appreciation for the congregation.

Caregiving enhanced sermon content by providing helpful illustrations of biblical truths and relevant applications of scriptural content to the needs and struggles of hearers. Caregiving also strengthened the tone of preaching, as the pastors' deepened understanding and sympathy for strugglers came through in their messages.

The effectiveness of the participants' shepherding was also enhanced through their caregiving experiences. Five subthemes emerged, as follows: improved relatability as congregants saw them facing struggles similar to their own (It's Made Me More Human); greater ability to empathize with church members facing difficulties (I Know How They Feel); more effective ministry to struggling church members stemming from the pastors' experience of God's grace and mercy in their own challenges (Going Down that Road with Others); increased commitment to a ministry of presence in hospital settings when church members or their loved ones were gravely ill (Don't Be Too Quick to Go); and an improved ability to function intentionally in their official ministerial role in pastoral care situations (You Need a Pastor Right Now, Not a Friend).

The ministers' increased appreciation for their congregations was a third ministry benefit that came as the pastors received emotional support and encouragement from

other clergy, non-clergy church leaders, and church members at large. As the result of such support, participants experienced greater satisfaction and effectiveness in their ministerial role.

How “Sandwich Generation” Pastors Navigate Their Challenges

Three themes emerged as participants responded to questions about how they manage their challenges and function effectively in their multiple roles. These themes were: managing self, relying on social support, and accessing formal support.

Managing Self

Management of self was a key practice. Analysis of the data yielded two sub-themes: assigning meaning to their challenges (Making Sense of the Situation) and adopting habits and practices that provided refreshment and diversion (Caring for Self).

The pastors Made Sense of the Situation by interpreting their challenges through the lens of a mental framework that permitted them to assess their circumstances as coherent and positive. Their interpretive frameworks were shaped by the doctrines of scripture and their faith in the God of the Bible. Salient features included an understanding of God’s revealed character as sovereign, loving, wise, and holy; a sensitivity to God’s providential activity in the midst of all of life; and a preference for honoring God in trials over experiencing a life free of difficulties. These perspectives gave the pastors consistent resiliency.

Participants also practiced management of self by intentionally engaging in activities and pursuits that helped them maintain a healthy perspective and brought

needed refreshment to body and mind (Caring for Self). They exercised regularly, pursued hobbies, practiced reflection through journaling, took periodic vacations and retreats, and obtained recommended medical diagnostic tests and preventive care to maintain their physical health.

Relying on Social Support

The pastors also coped by relying on social support from family members and churches. Family support – emotional, practical, and financial – was offered by spouses, siblings, and more distant relatives. Church support most often took the form of advice and emotional encouragement offered by other members of the clergy, non-clergy church leaders, and people in the pews.

Accessing Formal Support

Finally, the study participants coped by accessing formal support from professional practitioners and institutions. They engaged doctors, nurses, other medical professionals, attorneys, counselors, and financial planners. The assistance provided by these professionals was indispensable when specialized skills, knowledge, and expertise were required. Similarly, the pastors accessed the support of multiple institutions offering technical resources and services. Hospitals, skilled nursing facilities, assisted living centers, colleges and universities, federal and state governments, and organizations such as the National Alliance for Mental Illness enabled the pastors to care effectively for family members while continuing to serve as leaders of their congregations.

Discussion of Findings

As the present study is the first to be devoted exclusively to an examination of the experience of pastors in the “sandwich generation,”³⁰⁷ I feel it is most helpful to consider its findings in light of the existing body of literature on this social phenomenon.

Therefore, the discussion that follows will compare and contrast the findings summarized above with those of studies that have examined the “sandwich” phenomenon without regard to the vocational status of research participants. As a “sandwiched” pastor, I will also add my own voice as a third element in the conversation.

The findings of this study exhibit both consistencies and contrasts with other “sandwich generation” literature. They also contain new insights suggesting that the experience of “sandwich generation” pastors may differ somewhat from that of “sandwiched” people in other vocations. It should be kept in mind that, in contrast to study participants in the reviewed literature, all participants in the present study reported “doing well” or “flourishing” as they navigate the simultaneous demands of ministering in their churches and caring for their multigenerational families. The potential impact of this distinction on the study findings will be explored in the discussion that follows.

³⁰⁷ My literature search using the Academic Search Premier search engine in preparation for the literature review in Chapter Two revealed that in the entire body of research going back to Miller’s initial work on the “sandwich generation” in 1981 no peer-reviewed study had yet been published on the topic as it pertains specifically to clergy members.

Consistencies with the Literature

Challenges

Consistent with the literature, the research participants reported that being “sandwiched” brought challenges and stresses to their personal lives and marriages. This finding imparts a note of realism to the present study. Specifically, it should prepare even those “sandwiched” pastors who assess they are “doing well” to anticipate the experience of navigating simultaneous ministry and family caregiving responsibilities will most likely entail some degree of burden and difficulty.

In the personal realm, the stresses often stemmed from challenges mentioned in previous studies of the “sandwich generation,” including having too much to do and too many roles to fulfill at once (Full Plates), facing the discomfort of caring for aging parents in ways that parents had once cared for them (Role Reversals), and experiencing disagreements with care recipients and other family members (Relational Conflicts). The resulting stresses manifested in negative emotions which appear in the literature as well: varying degrees of anger, anxiety, guilt, sadness, and depression.

Marriage challenges, when present, typically took the form of increased conflict with spouses. Consistent with the findings of previous studies conducted by Loomis and Booth and others,³⁰⁸ the pastors reported that these challenges did not have a negative impact on the overall quality of their marriage relationships.

My own experience as a “sandwiched” pastor resonates with my study participants and the literature. I can well relate to the challenge of a Full Plate. Three

³⁰⁸ Laura Spencer Loomis and Alan Booth, “Multigenerational Caregiving and Well-being: The Myth of the Beleaguered Sandwich Generation,” *Journal of Family Issues* 16, no. 2 (March 1995): 139; and Russell A. Ward and Glenna Spitze, “Sandwiched Marriages: The Implications of Child and Parental Relations for Marital Quality in Midlife,” *Social Forces* 77, no. 2 (December 1998): 667.

years ago, my life was already busy when my parents' health began to decline steeply. To my roles as pastor, Christian school headmaster, husband, father, grandfather, and doctoral student, I was now adding the role of caregiver – with greater needs and responsibilities looming on the horizon. As Jack said in his interview, “You can’t do all that at once.” I also experienced the psychological vertigo of role reversal with my father. He eventually declined to the point of dependency on others for virtually all activities of daily living. For months, I and a care team of family members and professionals took turns bathing, shaving, dressing, and feeding him. We got him out of bed in the morning, tucked him in at night, and cleaned him up when he soiled himself. It was hard, stressful work. It was also sad to witness his decline from the strong, capable, and independent man he once had been.

Benefits

My study findings are also consistent with literature associating significant benefits with the “sandwich” experience. This serves to counterbalance the challenges discussed above and offers genuine hope that “sandwich generation” clergy can expect to realize significant gains alongside the strains they will likely encounter.

Most of the pastors enthusiastically spoke of the benefits they gained. They mentioned they had grown personally, most often expressing this benefit as growth in spiritual maturity. This is best viewed as an aspect of cognitive well-being, which, as studies by Hansen and others point out, is detached from – and may even be enhanced by – the presence of difficult challenges in people’s lives.³⁰⁹ The spiritual growth reported

³⁰⁹ Thomas Hansen, Britt Slagsvold, and Reidun Ingebretsen, “The Strains and Gains of Caregiving: An Examination of the Effects of Providing Personal Care to a Parent on a Range of Indicators of

by participants is also consistent with the reviewed scriptures which assert that troubles benefit believers by promoting their holiness of character and conforming them to the image of the Son of God.³¹⁰

Study participants also reported the benefit of enriched relationships with spouses and care recipients. The pastors mentioned enhanced mutual appreciation, better communication, and deeper intimacy as marital gains realized through the challenge of caregiving. As Stuart said of his marriage, “When you go through hard times, it really draws you close.” The study by Pines also found that “sandwich generation” couples who partnered to care for multiple generations of family members often developed more meaningful relationships.³¹¹

Reports by the pastors of stronger relationships with care recipients find an echo in the literature as well. Chris pointed to the “blessing flowing back” in the form of closer bonds with his supported young adult children, saying, “I’ve tried to be a pilgrim with them, and they’re a pilgrim with me through some of this.” Sean confided that he treasured the “golden moments” that often came as he spent time with his elderly mother and parents-in-law. These remarks parallel and may even be considered to go beyond the findings of other literature on the “sandwich generation” suggesting that enhanced relationships with care recipients may result from caregiving.³¹² These “sandwiched”

Psychological Well-Being,” *Social Indicators Research* 114, no. 2 (November 2013): 342; and Karen L. Warner, “The Rewards of the Sandwich Generation,” *The Journal of Practical Nursing* 45, no. 4 (December 1995): 20.

³¹⁰ Hebrews 12:10-11; James 1:2-4.

³¹¹ Ayala Malach Pines et al., “Job Burnout and Couple Burnout in Dual Earner Couples in the Sandwiched Generation,” *Social Psychology Quarterly* 74, no. 4 (December 2011): 377.

³¹² Berit Ingersoll-Dayton, Margaret B. Neal, and Leslie B. Hammer, “Aging Parents Helping Adult Children: The Experience of the Sandwiched Generation,” *Family Relations* 50, no. 3 (July 2001): 262; and

clergy who found themselves “doing well” often reported that the relational gains they experienced with family care recipients far exceeded expectations and represented some of the greatest blessings of their lives.

My experience as a member of the “sandwich generation” has also been accompanied by benefits similar to those mentioned by my study participants and the literature. I sense I have grown spiritually as I have witnessed God’s guidance and provision for me and my family. The way the Lord opened a door enabling me to care for my parents in their final months is a case in point. As their health declined, my wife and I learned that our daughter and her husband, a working couple, were facing several years of extensive business travel for both and a relocation for the family. They would soon need child care for their three young children and were unsure how the need would be met. After prayer and conversation, we all agreed that the entire situation was God’s call to my wife and me to a new form of service. We resigned from our jobs – mine as a pastor and hers as a part-time Christian school librarian – moved to our daughter’s new home, living literally under the same roof, and began our new vocation as “full-time sandwiched persons” supporting and caring for three generations of family members: my infirm parents, three young grandchildren, and indirectly our daughter and her husband. Thus, we were available to the entire family while our own needs continued to be met, and we are convinced that the Lord is the one who coordinated and arranged it all.

In agreement with the literature and my study participants, enriched relationships have also been a part of my experience as a “sandwiched” person. My wife was been

Kim Parker and Eileen Patten, *The Sandwich Generation: Rising Financial Burdens for Middle-Aged Americans* (Washington, D. C.: Pew Research Center, 2015), accessed January 28, 2018, <http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2013/01/30/the-sandwich-generation/>.

completely helpful and supportive, and we are closer through partnering to serve our extended family at such a sensitive and vulnerable time. Caring for the grandchildren has been a delight and has resulted in closer bonds with them. My brother and I have also deepened our ties as we have worked together to serve our parents through very challenging days as they declined and died.

The greatest relational blessing, however, has been the privilege of caring for my parents at the end of their earthly lives. We were given the precious gift of time together. We shared memories, family stories, laughter, scripture, prayers, and sometimes tears. These were “golden moments” indeed. It was not all easy. There were times of sadness, fear, uncertainty, and pain for us all. But in a time of great struggle, I saw my parents’ courage, dignity, gratitude, faith, humility, and even humor. I now realize I did not fully appreciate what strong and special people they were until I saw them facing death, and their example is one I hope to be able to emulate.

Coping

Coping is a third area in which my study findings were consistent with the literature asserting that people in challenging circumstances buffer stress by means of a variety of perceptions, cognitions, and behaviors. Most participants coped in more than one way by managing self, relying on social support, and accessing formal support. This resort to multiple ways of coping is consistent with the contention of Pearlin and Schooler that a variety of coping responses is most likely to provide the greatest buffering effect against stress in difficult circumstances.³¹³

³¹³ Leonard I. Pearlin and Carmi Schooler, “The Structure of Coping,” *Journal of Health and Social Behavior* 19 (April 1978): 13.

The patterns of coping adopted by my study participants who were “flourishing” as “sandwiched” pastors exhibited striking similarities to the coping strategy model devised by Neal and Hammer through their research on working “sandwich generation” couples. According to this model, there are two basic coping responses: one aimed at increasing resources available to deal with problems, and the other, at reducing demands associated with problems.³¹⁴ The pastors’ consistent reliance on informal social support and frequent resort to formal support from professional practitioners and institutions are examples of responses designed to increase the resources available to address the problems and challenges they faced.

Another prominent feature in the interviews was the participants’ employment of religious categories to control the meaning of their challenges. This is a form of cognitive coping which, according to Pearlin and Schooler, is the most common coping strategy used by people under stress.³¹⁵ Consistent with the studies of Newman and Pargament, framing their difficulties from a religious perspective enabled the ministers to interpret them as meaningful, positive, and sent for benevolent purposes,³¹⁶ which served to impart resilience and strength to face the challenges of each day.

My experience as a “sandwich generation” caregiver resonates at significant points with both the study participants and the literature on the topic of coping. Rather than searching for a “one-shot” panacea, I have managed my stressful challenges in a variety of ways.

³¹⁴ Neal and Hammer, *Working Couples Caring for Children and Aging Parents*, 128-130.

³¹⁵ Pearlin and Schooler, “The Structure of Coping,” 6.

³¹⁶ Newman and Pargament, “The Role of Religion in the Problem-Solving Process,” 391, 400.

I pursued ways of reducing the demands and responsibilities confronting me – most conspicuously, by taking a hiatus from vocational ministry in order to have a less congested schedule and free up time and energy to travel back and forth to care for my family at regular intervals. Concurrently, I increased available resources, assembling an effective social support network consisting of various family members and people in the church my wife and I attended after I resigned my pulpit. My wife and brother, my sister-in-law, my niece, and her husband all played indispensable roles in caring for my father throughout his final decline. Their care for him was also a vital source of encouragement to me. I, in turn, also supported and encouraged them as we shared the load of caregiving. The pastoral staff, officers, and members of our new church exerted a bolstering influence through regular phone calls and personal contacts. They prayed for us and offered friendship that was well-received and truly life-giving.

I also coped by drawing heavily on the formal services of professional practitioners and institutions. Multiple physicians, nurses, social workers, and home health workers were vital members of the care team. Two hospitals, a skilled nursing facility, a local hospice, a patient transport service, and a medical supply company brought to the table critical services and expertise that my family and I were unable to provide as informal caregivers.

Finally, intentional management of self was a vital component of my coping strategy. On the practical side, I engaged in a regimen of physical exercise that included cycling and strength training. My goal was to work out six days per week, and I was able to accomplish it most weeks. Exercise served as a helpful stress reliever while sustaining the strength required to travel back and forth on care visits and assist my father with

activities of daily living (bathing, dressing, toileting, transferring, etc.) as he declined. I guarded my physical health by getting annual physical exams, staying current with medical diagnostics appropriate for a person of my age and sex, and promptly seeking medical attention whenever I was not feeling well. I carefully budgeted funds for caregiving-related travel and expenses and doubled down on all aspects of personal money management and planning throughout my “sandwiched” years. This kept anxiety at bay and sustained my optimism that our financial future as a couple would remain secure. My favorite new “hobby” became participating in the ministry of our new church. The pastors and leaders would probably have said I was helping them when I agreed to lead a small group and accepted the opportunities they offered me to preach and teach. In reality, they were sustaining me by providing avenues to indulge my interest in continuing to serving God’s people through the exercise of my spiritual gifts.

My management of self included a spiritual component as well. I found that the best and most effective form of coping with the demands of the “sandwich” was a disciplined effort to frame my challenges through the lens of my understanding of the truth about God and all of life as revealed in scripture. On the one hand, this enabled me to care for my declining parents with an open-eyed realism rooted in the biblical doctrine of the fall and its consequences. At the same time, the teachings of the Bible gave me the strength-imparting confidence that my parents’ deaths would not mean their extinction as persons, but would be the end of their temporal struggles and the doorway of entry into the glorious presence of Christ, awaiting the hope of a bodily resurrection at the last day. Each day of caregiving was undertaken with the conviction that God was truly for us and was working even these difficult circumstances together for our good. With his faithful

help and presence, I was strengthened by the persuasion we would get through it – and we did.

Contrasts with the Literature

The findings of this study run counter to the literature at several significant points, with the pastors assessing the impact of the challenges they experienced in some of their roles differently than did participants in other studies of the “sandwich generation.” More specifically, my study participants reported less significant negative impacts in the personal, vocational, financial domains than we might expect based on the findings of the reviewed “sandwich generation” literature.

The Impact of Personal Challenges

While the pastors were consistent with the literature in their reports of the negative psychological and emotional impacts associated with their “sandwich” experience, there was not similar consistency with the literature’s suggestion that caregiving is commonly associated with negative physiological impacts. Nearly three-quarters of participants in *The MetLife Juggling Act Study* reported that caregiving had a negative impact on their health,³¹⁷ and the *Caregiving in the U.S. 2015* study found that significant numbers of respondents associated caregiving with declines in health and high

³¹⁷ National Alliance for Caregiving and the National Center on Women and Aging at Brandeis University, *The MetLife Juggling Act Study: Balancing Caregiving with Work and the Costs Involved* (n.p.: MetLife Mature Market Institute, 1999), 8, accessed April 5, 2018, <http://www.caregiving.org/data/jugglingstudy.pdf>.

levels of physical strain.³¹⁸ By contrast, reports of physiological problems associated with caregiving by participants in this study were conspicuous by their absence. Jack underwent surgery to replace his defective aortic heart valve, but medical professionals labeled it a congenital defect unrelated to his experience of being “sandwiched.” My own experience resonates with the study participants in contrast with the literature, as I do not associate any negative physiological impacts with my caregiving role.

The reasons for the absence of negative physiological impacts among this limited sample of “sandwiched” pastors are unclear. It may be that the number of interviewees in this study was too small to detect the potential negative physiological impacts more likely to come to light in a larger study. Alternatively, it may be that pastors who are more strongly constituted and healthier physically to begin with are more likely to assume active multigenerational caregiving responsibilities. A third possibility is that pastors who subscribe to the inerrancy of scripture or who serve in churches or denominations that do may have at their disposal certain resources (not yet understood) that render them less susceptible than other clergy to negative caregiving-related physiological impacts. A fourth possibility is that pastors as a vocational group may enjoy greater strength and health than the general population. Finally, it may be that “sandwich generation” pastors such as those in this study who report “doing well” or “flourishing” possess certain qualities or adopt practices that serve to diminish the negative impact of simultaneous ministry and caregiving responsibilities on their physical health. This discrepancy

³¹⁸ National Alliance for Caregiving and AARP Public Policy Institute, *Caregiving in the U. S.: 2015 Report* (n.p.: National Alliance for Caregiving and AARP Public Policy Institute, 2015), 10, accessed April 9, 2018, <https://www.aarp.org/content/dam/aarp/ppi/2015/caregiving-in-the-united-states-2015-report-revised.pdf>.

between the findings of this study and the literature may either be confirmed and explained or shown to be merely apparent by future studies of pastors in the “sandwich generation.”

The Impact of Vocational Challenges

A second significant point of contrast with the literature relates to the negative impact of the “sandwich” experience on caregivers’ vocations. Nearly two-thirds of participants in *The MetLife Study of Sons at Work* reported that caregiving had negatively impacted their careers.³¹⁹ Research has shown that specific negative vocational impacts include absenteeism,³²⁰ decreased productivity,³²¹ passing up promotions and assignments, the inability to acquire new job skills and keep up with changes in necessary job skills,³²² and, in some cases, loss of employment.³²³

By contrast, the participants in this study reported that while caring for family members occasionally necessitated absences from work, the quality of their ministries was not affected negatively. Jeff was fired from his church, but the event was unrelated to his family caregiving role. As I have previously indicated, when the needs for care and

³¹⁹ National Alliance for Caregiving and The Center for Productive Aging at Towson University, *The MetLife Study of Sons at Work: Balancing Employment and Eldercare* (Westport, CT: MetLife Mature Market Institute, 2003), 8, accessed April 5, 2018, <https://www.towson.edu/chp/departments/interprofessional/undergrad/gerontology/centeraging.html>.

³²⁰ Dan Witters, “The Cost of Caregiving to the U. S. Economy,” *Gallup Business Journal*, December 1, 2011, <http://news.gallup.com/businessjournal/151049/cost-caregiving-economy.aspx>.

³²¹ Ann O’Sullivan, “Pulled from All Sides: The Sandwich Generation at Work,” *Work* 50, no. 3 (March 2015): 492.

³²² National Alliance for Caregiving and the National Center on Women and Aging at Brandeis University, *The MetLife Juggling Act Study*, 5.

³²³ National Alliance for Caregiving and AARP Public Policy Institute, *Caregiving in the U. S. 2015*, 56.

support within my family increased, I resigned as pastor of my church in order to devote myself more fully to the caregiving role. While some might consider my resignation to be the ultimate negative vocational impact, I took this step realizing that the hiatus was not necessarily permanent and convinced that it was the best course to follow.³²⁴

The reasons for the discrepancy between this finding and the literature on the “sandwich generation” cannot be determined at present. Future studies of “sandwich generation” pastors may have a harmonizing effect or may sustain the disconnect and shed light on the reasons for it. The disparity, if confirmed, may ultimately be found to relate to a number of factors. There may be characteristics of the ministerial vocation or of those who pursue it that make pastors less susceptible to negative caregiving-related job impacts than “sandwiched” persons in other vocations. It could also be that pastors who subscribe to biblical inerrancy or serve in congregational contexts holding this conviction are less vulnerable to caregiving-related vocational strains than ministers who do not subscribe to inerrancy or do not serve in churches or denominations that subscribe to it. Finally, it may be that the “sandwiched” pastors who experience fewer negative vocational impacts are those who reflect characteristics and practices similar to those of the pastors in the current study who report “doing well.”

³²⁴ This course of action may not have been feasible for me at an earlier stage of life because of financial practicalities. As it was, at the time of my resignation I was within a few years of reaching my Social Security full retirement age, was already receiving a pension as a retired chaplain in the U.S. Army Reserve, and had accumulated a significant sum in a denomination-sponsored tax-deferred retirement account. These resources, combined with our arrangement with our daughter’s family (we receive room and board and a stipend in exchange for caring for the grandchildren), made the present hiatus from vocational ministry economically feasible for me and my wife.

The Impact of Financial Challenges

The final point of contrast with literature on the “sandwich generation” concerns the negative financial impact of caregiving. Multiple studies have documented the significant expenses commonly incurred by “sandwich generation” caregivers. According to a study by the Pew Research Center, 30 percent of “sandwiched” persons report being barely able to meet their basic expenses, with another 11 percent reporting an inability to meet even basic expenses.³²⁵ Expenses reported in studies include significant present costs (in the form of out-of-pocket expenses and lost wage income resulting from caregiver workplace accommodations) as well as future costs (lower pensions and Social Security benefits and lower savings and retirement account balances due to reductions in caregivers’ contributions). *The MetLife Juggling Act Study* projected average lifetime losses of \$659,139 in total wealth for “sandwiched” research participants.³²⁶

The absence of reports of financial strain by pastors in the present study represents a conspicuous departure from the “sandwich generation” literature. Some participants mentioned bearing expenses for support of their parents and children. Others expressed concern over possible costs that might arise in the future. Chris, for example, said, “[My mother] doesn’t need any of my income at this point, but ... she’s one sickness away – potentially – from being more dependent.” None of the pastors, however, voiced significant concern over their present caregiving-related expenses or articulated worries about their financial security in retirement.

³²⁵ Parker and Patten, *The Sandwich Generation*.

³²⁶ National Alliance for Caregiving and the National Center on Women and Aging at Brandeis University, *The MetLife Juggling Act Study*, 10. Additionally, some “sandwich generation” caregivers bear catastrophic costs associated with family members’ needs for expensive treatments, surgeries, or extended stays in specialized institutions such as skilled nursing facilities.

The caregiving expenses my wife and I have borne have included both present and future costs. Our present costs were largely travel expenses as my wife made regular trips to care for her mother during her final illness, and as I regularly traveled to care for my father during his decline. While it is difficult to calculate our future costs with accuracy, we are aware that the ministry hiatus will result in a smaller balance in my retirement account, as my annual contributions ceased when my church employment ended in mid-2016. These present and future costs, while significant, are not expected to compromise our financial security as we enter our retirement years.

In light of the literature and my experience, the study participants' silence about the financial strains often associated with being "sandwiched" is surprising. Possible reasons could include a reticence on the part of the pastors to share such sensitive information in the interviews, or simply a lack of awareness on their part of the present and future costs involved in caregiving. Further research on "sandwich generation" clergy may shed light on this significant discrepancy between the literature and the findings of the present study.

New Insights

The findings of the present study contain two new insights that expand the body of knowledge about the "sandwich generation" contained in previous literature.

A New Supportive Community

One new insight arising from this study is the significant level of emotional support "sandwiched" pastors receive from their workplace – the church. While the

literature is replete with studies that report on strains and challenges that “sandwiched” persons typically experience in their work settings, the participants in this study emphasized the generous support they received from the congregational communities they serve. They frequently mentioned being supported, encouraged, and counseled by other members of the clergy, non-clergy church leaders, and people in the pews. Stuart said his relationship with the associate pastor of his congregation is “almost like a co-pastorate. It’s great.” The elders of Tony’s church, eager to help, granted him two days of “family leave” each month to care for his aging parents. He described their support as “fabulous.” Members of Peter’s church steadied him by offering understanding and valuable advice when he asked for help in overcoming his tendency to become angry and then feel guilty when his father’s behavior was difficult and uncooperative.

My own experience as a “sandwiched” pastor also includes many instances of support from the church. Church leaders and members regularly prayed for my wife and me as we cared for our aging parents, and often expressed interest and wrote notes of encouragement. The church cheered whenever our loved ones seemed to improve, expressed concern when they declined, and grieved with us when they died. One gesture of support is particularly memorable. My wife’s father died while she and I were overseas on a teaching mission. Members of the congregation quickly purchased an airline ticket making it possible for her to return home in time for her father’s funeral.³²⁷ This example, and the many other expressions of support that were lavished on us by the church during our “sandwiched” days, strengthened our hands and encouraged our hearts.

³²⁷ We were in a country where travel was restricted, which made the arrangements for her return on such short notice extremely difficult. The congregation not only gifted us the ticket, but a member who owned a travel agency went to extraordinary lengths to expedite the arrangements.

Our caregiving experience would have been far more difficult in the absence of such thoughtful and generous care.

The congregations represented in this study function as supportive communities in ways that make a significant positive difference in the experience of their “sandwich generation” pastors. While there is no mention in the secular literature of similar levels of workplace support for other “sandwiched” persons, the support “sandwiched” clergy often receive from their churches is consistent with the biblical command in Galatians 6:2 that believers are to “bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.”³²⁸

A New Way of Professional Development

A second new insight provided by this study is clear evidence that pastors experience the benefit of enhanced vocational skills as a result of being “sandwiched.” The ministers consistently reported an increased effectiveness in the core job skills of preaching and pastoral work and credited it to caring for their aging parents and children. Stuart spoke of how his caregiving experiences had prepared him to use sermons more skillfully to encourage his congregants to “confront your inability and weakness, [because] that’s how God works; he works in and through the weak.” Tony said that caring for his aging parents had given him greater tenderness for the weak, and that this increased empathy “has come out in the preaching.” The effective pastoral care Jack was able to render to others after he lost his father and underwent major surgery made him conscious that “God is not just sending me down that road [of difficulty]; he’s actually going to equip me to go down that road with other people.” Thus, he has learned that the

³²⁸ Galatians 6:2.

challenges he and his family navigate together “are not distractions from ministry; this is the Lord working in *me* as a minister” (emphasis his).

This theme of enhancement of vocational skills through the challenges of family caregiving is absent from the secular literature on the “sandwich generation.” The Bible and theological literature, on the other hand, frequently mention the theme of church leaders being better equipped for ministry through difficult experiences. Paul informs his readers in 2 Corinthians 1:4 that his troubles – combined with the help God had given him in the midst of them – had increased the effectiveness of his ministry by preparing him “to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.”³²⁹ Similarly, Kelly maintains that it is through difficulty that ministers “develop a tender, compassionate spirit for others, particularly those who may be passing through a similar trial.”³³⁰

My experience as a “sandwich generation” pastor is consistent with the testimony of the Bible and the study participants in this regard. Caring for my parents has given me a depth of compassion and concern for the aged and infirm not present before. Enduring their loss has given me a firsthand understanding of the grief of those who lose immediate family members. I can now say, with Sean, “*I know how they feel*” (emphasis his and mine).

My membership in the “sandwich generation” officially ended with the death of my father in March of 2018. My wife’s parents are both gone now, as are mine. What

³²⁹ 2 Corinthians 1:4.

³³⁰ Douglas F. Kelly, *New Life in the Wasteland: 2 Corinthians on the Cost and Glory of the Christian Ministry* (Edinburgh, Scotland: Christian Focus Publications, 2003), 157.

remains for me now, along with priceless memories and the hope of a joyous reunion, is the desire to be a supporter and encourager of church members and fellow ministers who find themselves on the tough-yet-rewarding “sandwich” road.

May the great Shepherd of the sheep graciously strengthen them and teach them how to be good and faithful “jugglers for the Lord.”

Recommendations for Practice

Recommendations for Pastors

Pastors who are “sandwiched” (or who anticipate being “sandwiched” in the future) should not fear. Rather, they should have great hope. We have seen that the experience will be challenging. And yet, as the pastors in this study have clearly demonstrated, it is possible to “flourish” under the simultaneous responsibilities of congregational ministry and caring for family members in need. One of my important goals at the outset of this project was to discover and propose a set of “best practices” that would be helpful to fellow pastors in the “sandwich.” I believe the Lord has kindly allowed me to accomplish this goal. Based on my study findings, then, here are the recommendations I judge likely to be most beneficial in assisting “sandwich generation” pastors to juggle their multiple roles in an effective and sustainable way:

Expect to Be “Sandwiched”

The “sandwich” phenomenon is expected to grow larger as the twenty-first century unfolds. Our parents are living longer, and their lengthening lifespans are often attended by increasing physical and cognitive challenges. The size of America’s elderly

population is projected to grow, and many of the aged will need various degrees and types of care and support. Concurrently, the number of available caregivers is projected to shrink, as our society faces a growing shortage of doctors, nurses, and professional home health workers. Thus, care for seniors will increasingly fall on their own children and other family members. These informal caregivers will also be fewer in number (because our parents generally had fewer children than did previous generations), and many of them will be middle-aged (because our parents generally had their children later in life). Significant numbers of young adult children of the middle-aged will need various kinds and levels of support as well. Many members of the rising generation are continuing their formal educations longer, getting married later, and requiring more time to establish their financial independence. As a result, being “sandwiched” with responsibilities both for aging parents and young adult children may become the “new normal” in American society as the twenty-first century unfolds. Rather than being blindsided, pastors will do well to anticipate becoming part of this growing trend. Those who normalize the experience in this way may find the “sandwich” less jarring when and if the time comes.

Anticipate Challenges and Stresses

Pastors should anticipate that being “sandwiched” will be challenging and stressful. We have learned from the literature and the study participants that adding the multigenerational caregiving role to a typical pastor’s already-full plate can be the proverbial straw that breaks the camel’s back. The multiple roles of members of the “sandwich generation” will at times impose varying levels of strain on their marriages,

ministries, finances, and personal lives. At times they will probably feel, as Stuart put it, that “I can’t do it [all].” Moreover, ministers should be forewarned that caring for family members is stressful in its own right. It is worrisome to see young adult children struggling to establish independence and grappling with consequential issues such as mental illness and divorce. And it is sad to see beloved parents decline and die. Although anticipating these stresses and strains will not make them disappear, a realistic estimate of what being “sandwiched” means will serve to buffer its negative impact. I forecast that greater resilience will be the experience of those “sandwich generation” pastors who realize that their struggles – rather than being signs of their personal shortcomings – are simply reminders that being “sandwiched” is objectively hard.

Think Biblically

“Sandwich generation” pastors should discipline themselves to frame their challenges in biblical categories. They should remember that they are God’s adopted and dearly-loved children in Jesus Christ. Their heavenly Father is sovereign and has arranged every detail of their lives – including the stresses of being “sandwiched” – for his glory and their good. Christ has promised to be with them always and to provide strength and resources sufficient for the needs of each day. Those whose thinking aligns with the revealed truths of scripture will be buoyed by a quiet confidence that their troubles are intended by God to bless rather than harm them, that he will supply all their needs, and that, for a believer in Jesus, the best is always yet to be. These truths will be vital to the effective coping and long-term sustainment of “sandwiched” pastors.

Act Practically

As they care for their family members in the midst of other important responsibilities, “sandwiched” pastors should act practically. They should practice self-care by taking steps to guard their health, getting regular physical exercise, maintaining a proper diet and healthy body weight, seeking to create space to pursue hobbies and other enjoyable activities, and making time as best they can to get away periodically from daily responsibilities. They should also carefully and prayerfully consider ways of increasing their resources and decreasing their responsibilities when the needs and burdens of family care are particularly intense. Increased resources might be found in the service and expertise of such professionals as home health workers, counselors, attorneys, or financial planners. Decreased responsibilities might result from declining the offer of a leadership role in a civic organization or postponing a contemplated ministry initiative. It may be wise, if possible, for “sandwiched” pastors to delegate some of their current congregational leadership duties to capable staff members or lay leaders. Such practical actions could be helpful components of an effective coping strategy.

Let Others Share the Load

The literature and study participants alike have underscored the importance of social support for persons in the “sandwich.” Pastors caring for family members should therefore allow others to share the load. As has been shown, abundant emotional and practical support is typically available from families and churches. Spouses, siblings, distant relatives, other clergy, congregational lay leaders, and people in the pews can – and should – be enlisted as members of the “sandwich generation” minister’s support

team. Christians are under orders from their King to fulfill the law of love by bearing one another's burdens. Most are willing and eager to do so.

Count the Blessings

Finally, pastors should recognize the benefits that being “sandwiched” will likely yield. I add my voice to the literature and the study participants in affirming that caring for family members in the midst of other roles and responsibilities, though challenging, is attended with significant blessing as well. “Sandwich generation” pastors can expect to see God growing them personally and spiritually. Their marriages will be enriched. They will become more effective preachers and pastors. They will have the great privilege of serving the people dearest to them in the world and will treasure many “golden moments” along the way. In sum, they will find themselves heartily agreeing with Chris’s observation that “There are gems being polished up, that even on this side of heaven, being able to see any of those, have been a very great reward.”

Recommendations for Churches

Be Supportive of “Sandwiched” Clergy

The findings of this study highlight the importance of robust congregational support for “sandwiched” ministers. Members of the “sandwich generation” are exposed to significant stresses and strains, and all study participants mentioned support from other clergy, non-clergy church leaders, and people in the pews as a vital resource enabling them to navigate their challenges and function effectively in their simultaneous roles as pastors and family caregivers. Effective support will include both emotional and practical

components. Regular prayer, counsel, and encouragement will bolster resilience. Practical help may take the form of family leave policies for “sandwiched” ministers or the provision of occasional financial assistance during caregiving-related emergencies. Churches that provide creative and generous support to their ministers may expect to reap rich dividends, as studies have demonstrated that the health and well-being of pastors and their families has significant implications for the health of the congregations they serve. Above all, being supportive of caregiving ministers is a way of honoring the Lord of the church, as it is an important fulfillment of the biblical mandate to “bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.”³³¹

Consider Ministries to “Sandwiched” People in the Church and Neighborhood

Congregations led by “sandwiched” pastors should consider establishing ministries to the “sandwiched” persons likely to be present in significant and increasing numbers in both the church and community. Ministers learning to navigate the “sandwich” effectively can be deployed in the interests of effective congregational care and outreach. They are uniquely equipped to minister to others caring for multiple generations of family members from a place of understanding and empathy. “Sandwiched” ministers are able also to prepare and equip church members to use their spiritual gifts for effective ministry to others who are “sandwiched.” Counseling services, seminars, and support groups could all be developed as means of caring for the needs of the flock and engaging neighbors with the gospel of Jesus Christ through deeds of mercy and words of truth.

³³¹ Galatians 6:2.

Recommendations for Further Research

As I pointed out in the discussion, the findings of this initial study on “sandwich generation” pastors run counter to the literature at several points. In striking contrast to the studies of “sandwiched” persons undertaken without regard to their vocations, the ministers reported no significant negative physiological, vocational, or financial impacts resulting from their “sandwich” experience. These discrepancies may be merely apparent and may have resulted from methodological limitations of the current study. Future studies aimed at confirming and explaining or debunking these inconsistencies would be helpful in advancing the body of knowledge concerning the experience of “sandwich generation” pastors. If further research confirms the disparities, it might also serve to further our understanding of characteristics of the ministerial vocation and those who pursue it which may moderate the liability of members of the clergy, at least those who hold certain theological views and serve in certain ecclesiastical contexts, to the negative impact of certain life stresses.

The participant selection criteria of this study may also reduce the applicability of its findings to some pastors in some segments of the church. All study participants were male and held a personal belief in the inerrancy of the Bible. This was intentional, as it was not possible in a study of this scope to attempt an examination of the experience of “sandwich generation” pastors of both sexes or who hold other views of the nature of scripture. Participant sample selection criteria were established that were deemed likely to enhance the applicability of the findings to a significant large, albeit limited, segment of the American pastoral community. Further studies of “sandwiched” female pastors or of clergy representing other theological convictions about the Bible would be helpful in

developing a more comprehensive understanding of experience across the entire spectrum of “sandwich generation” pastors.

The racial homogeneity of the participants also suggests the need for further research. For reasons of convenience rather than methodology, all interviewed pastors were white. Would pastors of other racial or ethnic groups describe their experiences in the “sandwich” differently? More studies examining such “sandwiched” pastors are needed to answer this question.

Finally, the degree of applicability of these study findings to pastors outside the U.S. context cannot be determined at present. All participants in this study were Americans serving churches in the United States. Further research inquiring into the experience of “sandwiched” pastors of other nationalities or who serve in churches abroad is needed to determine whether the “sandwich” experience is largely uniform for all ministers in all nations or whether significant differences may exist.

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