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PASTORS THRIVING IN MARRIAGE AND MINISTRY:
PURSUING HEALTH IN MARRIAGE WHILE LEADING
THROUGH CHURCH CONFLICT

By

STEVEN L. JONES

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE
FACULTY OF COVENANT THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

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Dr. David B. Calhoun, Faculty Advisor David B. Calhoun
Dr. Philip D. Douglass, Second Faculty Reader Philip D. Douglass
Rev. D. Christopher Florence, Dir. of D.Min. Program Ch. Florence

ABSTRACT

Those engaged in pastoral ministry face numerous obstacles, not least, conflict in the local church. When conflict arises, pastors often bring the negative aspects of this conflict into their marriages. As a result of this and other factors, the marriages of the clergy are in trouble and, according to some surveys the percentage of divorce in the clergy is close to that of the culture at large. The purpose of this study is to investigate how pastors pursue health in their marriages as they lead through conflict in the local church.

Although the existing literature addresses the marriages of the clergy as well as church conflict, nothing has been written on how these two important areas can actually work together to make the marriages of ministers, not merely survive but grow *stronger*. In the literature review, the researcher began with pertinent passages from the biblical literature. In addition to this, research was done in three other key areas; conflict and conflict resolution, marriage, and systems theory.

The study utilized a qualitative design using semi-structured interviews with three pastors in the Presbyterian Church in America and their wives, who were interviewed separately and as couples. The review of the literature along with an in-depth analysis of the nine interviews focused on how the pastor may lead through interpersonal conflict in the church in such a way that his marriage may actually grow stronger and healthier.

The interview findings revealed that when the pastors' marriages were challenged by conflict, by and large they sought to respond to that conflict in a way that honors God's biblical standards. If couples are graciously and biblically responding to the

inevitable conflict and suffering which comes their way there is great hope for growth and maturity in their lives and in their marriage.

The research indicates that it can be helpful to look for ways to guard marriage and family time from the very real demands of the ministry which is inclusive of, but not limited to, regular days off, vacations, and the pursuit of private and family devotions. Even though there is a need for occasional separation between marriage and ministry, the research suggests that total separation is neither possible nor should it be desired.

The pastor's ability to lead effectively during times of conflict in the church can further translate into health in the marriage. The research indicates that developing and sustaining the qualities of an effective leader is critical in cultivating a healthy marriage in the life of the pastor. The interviews reveal that a healthy marriage will then feed health back into the ministry.

This study has found that marriage and ministry are often seen in conflict with one another and this produces a false dichotomy which causes unnecessary tension in both the marriage and the ministry. It is recommended that there could be further research on the benefits of clergy couples understanding more clearly that both marriage and ministry is to be shared within the proper boundaries and roles of the pastor and his wife. The calling from God affects *both* of their lives. It is further recommended that seminaries may evaluate their coursework to include more teaching in the area of pastoral leadership as well as more extensive training on the pressures that ministry marriages face. The future health and well-being of churches depend much on healthy clergy marriages.

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real sense, we went through seminary together. I uprooted your lives from our home in Tennessee and you treated it as a grand adventure. Your love and support sustained me then and blesses me still. You truly are a “heritage from the LORD....” Psalm 127:3-5 I love each of you more than you could ever know. I also want to acknowledge my two sons-in-law; Will Cannon and Andrew Belmont. We prayed for you long before we knew you. You are both a sweet gift from God; to our first grandson, Eldon Boyd Cannon. How precious you are to your Papa and Nani. May you always, by grace, “...delight in the law of the LORD....” (Psalm 1)

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Scripture taken from the HOLY BIBLE, ENGLISH STANDARD VERSION. Copyright 2001 by Crossway Bibles a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. All rights reserved.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

There can be little doubt that there is ongoing conflict in people's lives and in churches. It has been noted that pastors face enormous pressure, often leading to conflict, without being adequately prepared. PCA pastor and author Alfred Poirer makes a provocative statement about the devastating effects of church conflict in the lives of pastors when he writes, "Christ is the reason many enter the pastorate. Conflict is the reason many leave. Most seminarians enter the pastoral office unaware of and ill-equipped to respond to the conflicts they will inevitably face in their churches."¹ But, as devastating as it is when a pastor must leave the church because of conflict, there is often further damage done in the home.

Pastoral ministry often negatively affects the pastor's marriage and family. It is difficult, if not virtually impossible, for the pressure of church conflict issues to be able to be compartmentalized in such a way that it stays exclusively at the church. Negative issues and conflict in the church, quite often, find their way into the pastor's home. One survey reveals that as many as eighty percent of pastors believe that pastoral ministry negatively affects their families. In addition to this, another thirty-three percent of pastors say that being in ministry is an outright hazard to their family.² "[T]he pastor must deal with critics and antagonists with integrity. If not, the pastor carries the negativity and passive

¹ Alfred Poirier, *The Peace Making Pastor, a Biblical Guide to Resolving Church Conflict* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2006), 9.

² H. B. London, Jr. and Neil B. Wiseman, *Pastors at Greater Risk, Real Help for Pastors from Pastors Who've Been There* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, From Gospel Light, 2003), 20.

aggressiveness home.”³ Sadly, many ministers are willing to sacrifice the health and well-being of their marriages on the altar of the ministry. One author writes,

Many times couples feel as if marriage is in conflict with ministry. The attitude seems to be: “If I really give to my marriage what all these books and counselors say I should, my ministry will suffer. Marriage is important, but my ministry is for God, and he deserves 100 percent.” This type of thinking translates into the resolve that ‘I will respond to anyone who calls at any time. If I have promised my wife that I will stay home, she will just have to understand that God’s work comes first.’⁴

The point to be made is that ministers must not see their marriages in conflict with their ministries. Rather, their spouses should be seen as their greatest supporter and often their only true confidant. The importance of the institution of marriage cannot be overstated. “Then the LORD God said, ‘It is not good that man should be alone; I will make a helper fit for him.’”⁵

Marriage is an age-old institution. Christianity has from the beginning seen it as divinely ordained for good and necessary purposes. One of those is to provide a man and woman with an intimately shared life in which they can develop deep love and companionship. In doing this they are coming very close to the essential goal of a Christian life-finding in their love for each other a reflection, and an expression, of God’s love for them and their love for God. A Christian minister’s task is to proclaim the message of divine love and to help those who respond to it to grow in love for one another.⁶

Dan Allendar and Tremper Longman give their readers a picture of the high calling of Christian marriage. “Our marriages have the opportunity and privilege of being

³ Paul A. Mickey and Ginny W. Ashmore, *Clergy Families, Is Normal Life Possible?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1991), 136.

⁴ Diane Langberg, *Counsel for Pastors' Wives* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1988), 14-15.

⁵ Genesis 2:18

⁶ David Mace and Vera Mace, *What's Happening to Clergy Marriages?* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1980), 23.

living pictures of the Trinity. We can reveal God by the way we love our spouses.”⁷ If this is true for Christian marriage in general, it must also be true for the marriage of a minister. Because the minister is often held up as an example, if the minister’s marriage is suffering, it is likely to have far reaching effects on others. “When a minister’s marriage does not demonstrate the warmth and tenderness of human love at its best, an observer could justifiably say, ‘If his religion doesn’t work in this closest of all human relationships, how can we be sure that it is really true?’”⁸

Problem and Purpose Statements

Statistics record that most pastors who leave the ministry, leave within their first five years. In addition to this, according to some statistics, fifty percent of pastors’ marriages will end in divorce.⁹ Much of the strain that pastors face relates to interpersonal conflict in the church. Pastors often feel the heat of conflict in a very close and personal way. Regardless of the extent of the conflict situation, the pastor is usually heavily involved with leading toward seeking a solution. By virtue of his position, he, himself, is often the target of conflict. For any number of reasons, this conflict has the potential to take a negative toll on his marriage. In his book entitled, *The Emotionally Healthy Church*, pastor and author Pete Scazzero reveals the pressure that stress in the church can have on the marriage of ministers.

“Pete, I’m leaving the church,” my wife Geri had muttered quietly. I sat still, too stunned to respond. “I can’t take any more of this stress---the constant crises,” she continued. Geri had been more than patient. I had brought home constant pressure

⁷ Dan B. Allender and Tremper Longman, III, *Intimate Allies, Rediscovering God's Design for Marriage and Becoming Soul Mates for Life* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 1995), xxiii.

⁸ Mace and Mace, 24.

⁹ Richard J. Krejcir, "Statistics on Pastors" <http://www.intothyword.org/apps/articles/default.asp?articleid=36562> (accessed 24 October 2011).

and tension from the church, year after year. Now the woman I had promised to love just as Christ loved the church was exhausted. We had experienced eight unrelenting years of stress. “I’m not doing it anymore,” she concluded. “This church is no longer life for me. It is death.”¹⁰

Pastor and author, Peter Brain, reminds us that this is not a new struggle and that the connection between church leadership and healthy marriages is a biblical issue.

The words of Paul to Timothy remind us of the close connection between marriage, family and ministry. ‘Therefore an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach...He must manage his own household well....for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God’s church? (1 Tim. 3:2-5).’¹¹

The biblical truth is that, an ongoing unhealthy marriage could potentially disqualify many men from a ministry that otherwise appears healthy.¹² Even though, by God’s grace, many ministers remain married, how healthy are the marriages that are fraught with the stress of ministry? How well have ministers “managed [their] own households well” when it comes to their marriages?

In light of the fact that Christians are all sinners saved by grace, times of conflict in the church are a given. Since this is true, if ministers are not intentional about searching for ways to protect and strengthen marriages through conflict, many more ministries may be destroyed and many marriages lost. The beauty of marriage as a

¹⁰ Peter Scazzero and Warren Bird, *The Emotionally Healthy Church, a Strategy for Discipleship That Actually Changes Lives* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 2010), 20.

¹¹ Peter Brain, *Going the Distance, How to Stay Fit for a Lifetime of Ministry* (Kingsford NSW, Australia: Matthias Media, 2006), 100.

¹² This is meant to be a very general statement on potential problems and would require a great measure of pastoral sensitivity and possible counseling in dealing with this issue.

picture of “Christ and the church,”¹³ is often shattered as pastors struggle to meet the needs of the local congregation.

While much has been written on ministry marriage and church conflict, nothing has been written on how these two important areas can actually work to make the marriages of ministers stronger. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to investigate how pastors pursue health in their marriages as they lead through conflict in the local church. In order to seek some answers to this problem, the following research questions were used:

1. In what ways has the health of your marriage been challenged during times of church conflict?
2. In what ways have you sought to separate your marriage from your ministry for the purpose of pursuing health in your marriage?
3. In what ways has the pastor’s ability to lead effectively during times of conflict in the church played a positive role in producing health in your marriage?

The Significance of the Study

This study is unique in that it addresses the direct connection between conflict in the church and the potential for real and lasting health in the ministry marriage as well as the fact that very little, if any, has been written on this directly. This study has significance for, at least, the following reasons: Pastors and their spouses are in a unique situation in their marriages. On the one hand they often receive pressure in their marriages from many different people. There is always a struggle in the heart of pastors of what they should or should not share with their spouse. In addition to this struggle to keep all the church issues close at hand, the pastor is human. He or she will be affected

¹³ Ephesians 5:32

by the sins of themselves as well as the sins of others. This type of “fish bowl” life has the real potential to shatter the marriage relationship. Learning how to, not only survive but thrive, in the midst of interpersonal conflict will be valuable knowledge for any pastor, whether senior, solo, associate, or assistant.

In addition to the value of the study for the personal health of the minister’s marriage, the church will benefit when marriages, particular the marriage of the minister, are healthy. It becomes very difficult to preach and teach on submission, compassion, serving one another, godly headship and leadership, and numerous other topics when the congregation is aware that the minister’s marriage is shaky at best or coming apart at worse. Ministers, although themselves broken, must seek to pursue health in their marriages, for the glory of God, as well as for the good of themselves and others in the church.

Lastly, in addition to the value of the study for the health of minister’s marriage and for the continued health of the church, there is another benefit. The scripture is clear that marriage is a picture of Christ and the church.¹⁴ If Christian marriages and particularly ministry marriages are unhealthy or fail, then one of our primary means of reaching out to a lost and dying world is compromised. What picture will we give to non-believers if our marriages are unhealthy or imploding? For these and other reasons, this study is significant.

As part of the investigation into this problem, the author has included some of the research connected to what is often called, “systems theory.”¹⁵ Given that it is likely that

¹⁴ Ephesians 5:22-33

¹⁵ This will be further defined in my literature review section.

many have not studied this theory in depth, the following terms will, hopefully, be helpful.

Definition of Terms¹⁶

Anxiety- Usually defined as “the response of the organism to real or imagined threat.”

Basic Self- The differentiated or emotionally mature part of the self.

Differentiation of Self- The ability to remain connected in relationship to significant people in our lives and yet not have our reactions and behavior determined by them.¹⁷

Emotional Maturity- The ability of the individual to manage the emotional part of the self in an adaptive way.

Emotional System- The emotional unit, a group of individuals who, by virtue of time spent together are involved in meaningful relationships.

Fusion- Emotional attachment of two or more selves for which the mother/child symbiosis is a paradigm.

System- The emotional relationships between or among individual human beings or individuals of other species.

Triangle- Three individuals emotionally related to each other start to pass their anxiety to each other, or “triangle.”

In addition to these terms Jim Herrington, et al., has provided a couple of other terms that may be helpful for to consider the different aspects and importance of relationships.

[T]wo forces are at work in every intimate relationship, whether we are aware of them or not. One is the *togetherness force*, encompassing all our needs for

¹⁶ Roberta M. Gilbert, *Extraordinary Leadership, Thinking Systems, Making a Difference* (Falls Church & Basye, VA: Leading Systems Press, 2009), 187ff. Unless otherwise noted, the definition of terms is listed in this work.

¹⁷ Jim Herrington, R. Robert Creech, and Trisha Taylor, *The Leader's Journey, Accepting the Call to Personal and Congregational Transformation* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2003), 18.

attachment and approval. This force drives us to give up our own beliefs for the sake of stability in the relationship. The other is the *individuality force*, which drives us to seek out independence and autonomy. It impels us to clarify and live out our unique mix of beliefs, gifts, and passions. However, we do not live in an ideal world. We are always vulnerable to excesses, and in the nuclear family we are especially vulnerable to the togetherness force.¹⁸

Given the reality that conflict is inevitable in the church, how do the marriages of ministers withstand the pressure of church conflict? Furthermore, is it possible for ministry marriages not only to withstand the pressure but instead actually be strengthened through the conflict? Lastly, how does a minister's leadership in the church contribute to a healthy marriage? This study will examine these important questions.

¹⁸ Ibid., 106. Emphasis in the original.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this study was to investigate how pastors pursue health in their marriages as they lead through interpersonal conflict in the local church. Even though much has been written on conflict in the church in general, as well as ministry marriage, very little has been written that addresses these two issues in such a way that the connection between them is evidently seen. Even less, if any, has been written to address how marriages might grow stronger and healthier in the midst of ongoing church conflict.

However, there are three prominent theme areas that touch on this crucial aspect of ministry that can help: conflict and conflict resolution, marriage relationships, and systems theory. In this chapter, representative material of the literature will be reviewed. The researcher will begin with three interrelated biblical passages that address the purpose of this study. As in all obedience in the Christian life, pursuing healthy marriages is directly connected to growing in spiritual maturity in spite of suffering, trials and adversity.

One final thought is needed before reviewing the relevant passages. Scripture indicates clearly that Satan would love to destroy the church. Churches and ministries are often destroyed because of the suffering that interpersonal conflict in the church brings to the lives of ministers and their families, as well as the church, herself.

Biblical Review

The fact that Christians will experience suffering is a promise from scripture. The Apostle Paul writes, “For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should

not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake, engaged in the same conflict that you saw I had and now hear that I still have.”¹⁹ Since this is to be expected, what does scripture prescribe as the proper response to suffering, persecution and trials? In the New Testament book of James one reads, “Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.”²⁰ Is it possible to have a joyful heart and even grow spiritually in the face of adversity? New Testament scholar, Dan McCartney writes, “A large part of the life of faith is one’s attitude toward things in life and one’s response to events. We often can do little to control our environment and the things that happen to us, but we can control the way we think about them and how we react to them.”²¹

Reformed, New Testament scholar and pastor Dan Doriani believes that the passage in James shows how trials can positively affect one’s faith. “From our vantage point, most trials seem like tragic accidents. Yet James says we should rejoice, because trials have a purpose. They can strengthen our faith.”²² How can this be possible when suffering and trials often come as a negative experience in the human life? McCartney writes, “The reason for the joy is not the suffering per se but rather its fruit, the character

¹⁹ Philippians 1:29, 30; other scripture references include Mt. 5:10-12; 1 Peter 3:14. “Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.” 2 Timothy 3:12

²⁰ James 1:2-4

²¹ Dan G. McCartney, *James* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2009), 84.

²² Daniel Doriani, *James* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2007), 21.

traits that it induces: endurance, maturity, and wisdom. The strange ability to experience joy at the same time as sorrow is a hallmark of genuine faith.”²³

Doriani agrees and adds an interesting analogy.

We do not rejoice over the trial itself, nor do we feign indifference to pain. Rather, disciples should be like women who rejoice to learn that they carry a child. A woman knows she faces nausea and painful childbirth, but she rejoices because she looks past the adversities of the process and sees the end—the birth of her child. So it is with the Christian.²⁴

Scholar Bo Reicke sees this passage as addressing not only individual Christians but congregations as well. He agrees that James shows that trials are designed to lead to spiritual growth in the Christian life.²⁵

Although people may struggle with the suffering that they encounter, Bible scholar and commentator J.A. Motyer says that suffering for the Christian should be seen as a way of life which moves one toward maturity. In regard to James’ exhortation to find joy in various trials, Motyer writes, “To us this may all sound quite amazing, but to James it is the clue to the meaning of life. He is nothing if not realistic: life is a tale of *various trials*.”²⁶

Simon Kistemaker, New Testament commentator in the Reformed tradition addresses how Christians are to respond in suffering. He writes,

The believer trusts in God for help, aid, strength, and comfort. He knows that God always responds to faith and provides the means to sustain the period of testing. The believer who possesses the virtue of steadfastness clings to God in faith,

²³ McCartney, 84.

²⁴ Doriani, 21.

²⁵ Bo Reicke, *The Epistles of James, Peter, and Jude* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1964), 13.

²⁶ J. A. Motyer, *The Message of James, the Tests of Faith*, ed. J. A. Motyer and John R. W. Stott, *The Bible Speaks Today* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1985), 29. Emphasis in the original.

persists in doing God's will, and cannot be diverted from his avowed purpose to serve his God.²⁷

In addition to James 1:2-4, another text from the New Testament addresses this same issue of how suffering and adversity should bring joy and are designed by God to lead Christians to spiritual maturity. The text reads as follows, "In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ."²⁸

In reference to the testing or suffering of the believer, commentator and scholar Wayne Grudem writes,

Peter deliberately employs this analogy to say that situations of testing are occasions when God refines and purifies the faith of his people as precious metal is refined in a fire (*cf.* Is. 48:10, 'I have tried you in the furnace of affliction'). The trials burn away any impurities in the believer's faith. 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.²⁹

Former Westminster Theological Seminary president Edmund Clowney gives several reasons why believers should be able to rejoice in their trials. In his rationale, not only does one's hope in Christ point one beyond the trials, but it is God's design for one's faith to be strengthened through one's sufferings.³⁰ Peter Davids, in his comparison of the

²⁷ Simon J. Kistemaker, *James, Epistles of John, Peter, and Jude*, ed. Simon J. Kistemaker, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1986), 33-34.

²⁸ 1 Peter 1:6-7

²⁹ Wayne Grudem, *The First Epistle of Peter, an Introduction and Commentary*, ed. Leon Morris, The Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1988), 63-64.

³⁰ Edmund P. Clowney, *The Message of 1 Peter*, ed. John R. W. Stott, The Bible Speaks Today (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1988), 51-53.

passages in James and 1 Peter, writes, “[T]his implies that there is something genuine that will survive the refining process, an idea which 1 Pet. 1:7 also shows to be latent in the terminology: James already assumes that the Christian will pass the test.”³¹

In contrast to the proposal that undergoing trials and suffering strengthens one’s faith in the present, J. Ramsey Michaels, writing on the 1 Peter passage, seems to put the total benefit of the refining process of the trials and suffering in the believer’s life as solely a future benefit.³² In addition to Michaels, Kistemaker seems to lean toward, primarily, a future benefit of suffering from this particular text.³³ Another scholar in agreement with this view of a future benefit from this passage is Edwin A. Blum.³⁴

When considering the benefits that come into people’s lives connected to suffering, there is at least one other New Testament text that deserves attention. Paul writes, “More than that, we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope

³¹ Peter H. Davids, *The Epistle of James, a Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1982), 68.

³² J. Ramsey Michaels, *1 Peter*, ed. David A. Hubbard and Glenn W. Bakers, Word Biblical Commentary (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1988), 27-37. A future benefit is certainly included in the other commentators researched, but benefit is not limited to the future only. There is clearly a general agreement as to the present benefit of trials.

³³ Kistemaker, 45-48. Although not entirely future. He gives illustrations that speak of the present benefit of trials proving the genuineness of a believer’s faith.

³⁴ Leon Morris and others, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary with the New International Version, Hebrews to Revelation*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein, The Expositor's Bible Commentary with the New International Version, vol. 12 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981), 220-221. The researcher fully agrees with the reality of a future benefit in our trials and suffering. Yet, the majority of the evidence seems to make a clear case for a present benefit as well. This is of primary importance for the study.

does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us."³⁵

Dr. Douglas J. Moo speaks very directly to the experience of trials and the resulting benefit as connected to a proper response. Commenting on this passage, he writes,

All suffering betrays the presence of the enemy and involves attacks on our relationship to Christ. If met with doubt in God's goodness and promise, or bitterness toward others, or despair and even resignation, these sufferings bring spiritual defeat to the believer. But if met with the attitude of 'confidence and rejoicing' that Paul encourages here, these sufferings will produce those valuable spiritual qualities that Paul lists in vv. 3b-4.³⁶

Dr. Moo makes a direct association between each of these passages as they address the present benefit of suffering.

The reason why the believer can 'rejoice in afflictions' is that he or she 'knows' that affliction 'produces endurance,' and endurance, in turn, 'a tested character,' and a tested character, in turn, hope. Sequences of this kind, in which suffering inaugurates a chain of linked virtues, are introduced as a stimulus to face difficulties with joy in two other NT texts (1 Pet. 1:6b-7; Jas. 1:2-4) and must have been popular in the early church—probably reflecting earlier Jewish exhortation.³⁷

Prolific author and Bible scholar, John Stott, contrasts types of suffering that he believes are, or are not, included in this passage from the Apostle Paul.

The 'sufferings' in mind are usually translated 'tribulations'. These are not what we sometimes call 'the trials and tribulations' of our earthly existence, meaning our aches and pains, fears and frustrations, deprivations and disappointments, but

³⁵ Romans 5:3-5

³⁶ Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, ed. Ned B. Stonehouse, F. F. Bruce, and Gordon D. Fee, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996), 303.

³⁷ Ibid.

rather *thlipseis* (literally, ‘pressures’), referring in particular to the opposition and persecution of a hostile world.³⁸

Former Westminster Theological Seminary professor, John Murray seems to agree when he writes,

When Paul says that tribulation works patience, he has in mind the tribulation which belongs to the context of the Christian profession; he is not making a general statement that this is the effect of all the troubles that visit men. ‘The tribulations’ are specific—they are those in Christ and for Christ’s sake. All the afflictions of the godly are in this category.³⁹

These authors and others speak directly to how scripture addresses the pastoral ministry, as well as all of life, as believers seek to live to the glory of Christ. Author and Bible scholar William Hendriksen agrees that this is the context of the suffering. “Here ‘in our sufferings’ means ‘in the midst of and because of’ the tribulations we experience in carrying on the work of the Lord.”⁴⁰

When addressing why Christians suffer in this life, Dr. Stott sees at least two reasons for that suffering, which include the present as well as the future. He also speaks of the proper response one should have to suffering.

First, suffering is the one and only path to glory. It was so for Christ; it is so for Christians. As Paul will soon express it, we are “co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory” (8:17). That is why we are to rejoice in them both. Secondly, if suffering leads to glory in the end, it leads to maturity meanwhile. Suffering can be productive, if we respond to it positively, and not with anger or bitterness.⁴¹

³⁸ John Stott, *Romans, God's Good News for the World* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1994), 141.

³⁹ John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1997), 164.

⁴⁰ William Hendriksen, *Exposition of Paul's Epistle to the Romans*, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1981), 170. Emphasis in the original.

⁴¹ Stott, 141.

The certainty of the chain that leads from adversity rightly responded to and its connection to spiritual health and maturity is as sure as the faithfulness of God. Bible scholars Tremper Longman and David Garland also see God's work in people's lives that comes through tribulation, conflict, and suffering as both a present and a future hope.

Looking back, we see that hope consummates a series of items beginning with tribulations.....So we are entitled to say that just as our present access gives hope of sharing the divine glory, so too do our sufferings. They help produce character, and approved Christian character finds its ultimate resting place in the presence of God, not in the grave. By means of this school of suffering, the Lord is fitting us for his eternal fellowship. Hope for the Christian is not wishful thinking, as it is so often in this world, but rather confident expectation.⁴²

The literature reviewed suggests that suffering and conflict designed for Christians' spiritual growth is the clear theme in these passages.

Suffering produces perseverance (3, *hypomone*, endurance). We could not learn endurance without suffering, because without suffering there would be nothing to endure. Next, *perseverance* produces *character*. *Dokime* is the quality of a person who has been tested and has passed the test. It is "a mature character; (JBP), 'the temper of the veteran as opposed to that of the raw recruit.'" Then the last link in the chain is that *character* produces *hope* (4), perhaps because the God who is developing our character in the present can be relied on for the future too.⁴³

The texts in scripture that deal with suffering and trials in the lives of Christians, and particularly pastors, are numerous. It would be beyond the purview of this present work to seek to address all of them. Still, the researcher would like to address one other passage from the Lord Jesus, himself, that speaks directly to this issue.

Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad,

⁴² Tremper Longman, III and David E. Garland, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary, Revised Edition, Romans - Galatians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 2008), 90.

⁴³ Stott, 142. Emphasis in the original.

for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.⁴⁴

Following on the heels of what is known as the Beatitudes, Jesus speaks directly to the reality of persecution in the lives of his disciples. The word translated, “blessed” is the Greek word, *makarios*, which literally means “happy.” British New Testament scholar, R.T. France writes, “It introduces someone who is to be congratulated, someone whose place in life is an enviable one. ‘Happy’ is better than ‘blessed,’ but only if used not of a mental state but of a condition of life.”⁴⁵ Commenting on verses eleven and twelve, France writes,

Insult and slander are the forms which persecution of Christians has often taken from the earliest times.....Since Jesus himself was abused and slandered, it should be no surprise that his followers receive the same treatment *on my account*...Indeed it should make them *glad* (*cf.* the same verb in 1 Pet. 1:6; 4:13), because it shows that they are in the true succession of God’s faithful servants.....On *reward*.....the idea is frequent in Jesus’ teaching (it was already implicit in 5:3-10)....but of a freely given recompense, out of all proportion to service (19:29; 25:21, 23). In *heaven* means not so much “after death” as “with God.”⁴⁶

Seen in this light, the idea of “reward” may be rightly interpreted to be a present benefit and not future only. This seems clear from the intent of the word translated “blessed” which implies a present blessedness or happiness.⁴⁷ So then, it is important to note that present persecution has both a present as well as a future benefit according to God’s perfect plan in the lives of Christians. Bible scholar and mainline Presbyterian pastor,

⁴⁴ Matthew 5:10-12

⁴⁵ R. T. France, *The Gospel According to Matthew, an Introduction and Commentary*, The Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1985), 108.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 111-112. Emphasis in the original.

⁴⁷ Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1992), 95.

Donald Hagner speaks of a clear connection to both present and future when he touches on the fact that a promised future has effects for Christian lives in the present.

These declarations of happiness are to some extent a manifestation of realized eschatology. The remarkable tension throughout is, of course, caused by the temporary delay of the final consummation. In this interim period those who may appear to enjoy anything but the favor of God are paradoxically pronounced blessed. In their present condition, and even as they experience intense persecution, they are already counted supremely happy. Salvation has begun; their time has come, and this assurance of the future is meant to transform their present existence.⁴⁸

In light of Dr. Hagner's words, it is very important for this overall discussion to note that the benefits that come into Christians' lives from persecution and suffering are benefits that they receive, to an important degree, in the here and now. What the researcher has seen throughout this biblical discussion is that responding rightly to suffering, trials, and persecution is connected to growing in spiritual maturity in all areas of life, not least the marriage relationship. The point is also clear that the blessings that come because of persecution may come in many forms. Christians are not promised "blessings" that always look like something that they may initially see as a positive thing. Yet, God brings situations into the Christian life that are designed to grow believers to be more like Christ, and they should see those situations for the blessing that God intends.⁴⁹

Reformed Bible scholar William Hendriksen lists three very important reasons why Christians are urged to rejoice in suffering and persecution.

- a. Because this persecution indicates the genuine character of their faith: b. Because Christian character is purged and made mature through suffering (Rom.

⁴⁸ Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 1-13*, ed. Bruce M. Metzger, Word Biblical Commentary (Nashville, TN: Word, Incorporated, 1993), 96.

⁴⁹ Daniel Doriani, *Matthew, Volume I: Chapters 1-13*, ed. Richard D. Phillips and Philip Graham Ryken, Reformed Expository Commentary, a Series (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2008), 130-135.

5:3, 5; James 1:3, 4; book of Job). c. Because persecution is followed by great reward in heaven; not a wage won by human merit, but the reward of grace.⁵⁰

Former PCA pastor, author, and Bible commentator, James Montgomery Boice adds his voice to those who speak of the scriptural truth that the persecution that faced in the Christian life may be the way in which God uses to grow believers up in their faith. “In the great wisdom of God, persecution is often the means by which the Christian is helped along the road to practical holiness and thereby made a little more like Jesus.”⁵¹

It seems clear that this passage in Matthew’s gospel speaks of both the present and future blessings of God. The old Puritan pastor and author Thomas Watson once wrote these words about the passage. “Religion will cost us the tears of repentance and the blood of persecution. But we see here a great encouragement that may keep us from fainting in the day of adversity. For the present blessed; for the future crowned.”⁵²

Watson further notes that “...chief persecutions are raised against the ministers.”⁵³ He elaborates with the words below.

The minister’s work is to preach against men’s sins which are as dear to them as their right eye, and they cannot endure this. Every man’s sin is his king to which he yields love and subjection....Men will not endure to have their king-sin crucified. This then is the work of the ministry, to divide between men and their lusts, to part these two old friends, no wonder it meets with so much opposition.⁵⁴

⁵⁰ William Hendriksen, *Matthew, New Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2002), 281-282.

⁵¹ James Montgomery Boice, *The Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 5-7, An Expository Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2006), 57.

⁵² Thomas Watson, *The Beatitudes* (East Peoria, IL: Versa Press, Inc, 2007), 259.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 263.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 264.

Watson also speaks with great clarity as to the various reasons that ministers are often the object of ridicule and slander. Men's natures since the fall are corrupt, and they will often persecute those who seek to help them the most.

What is the work of the ministry but to save men's souls? To pull them as 'brands out of the fire.' Yet they are angry at this. We do not hate the physician who brings such physic as makes us sick, because it is to make us well; nor the surgeon who lances the flesh, because it is in order to a cure. Why then should we quarrel with the minister?⁵⁵

As one considers persecution and conflict that comes in the lives of Christians, and certainly in the lives of gospel ministers, it may seem that much of this conflict would come primarily from non-believers. But conflict very often arises within the church. British pastor and Bible teacher, Martyn Lloyd-Jones writes these very important words.

You will find as you go through the Scriptures, and as you study the history of the Church, that the persecution is not confined to the world. Some of the most grievous persecution has been suffered by the righteous at the hands of the Church herself, and at the hands of religious people. It has often come from nominal Christians.⁵⁶

Bible commentator Iain Duguid offers these words of agreement that conflict and persecution often come from those that some would call nominal Christians who are looking for a church that makes no demands of them and caters to their felt needs.

These day's people often go to churches looking first of all to have their needs for friendship, teaching, and comfort met. Most people don't go asking where they can best use their gifts to serve the kingdom. They choose a church as a means to the end of meeting their felt needs rather than as a means to the end of serving God and his people. As long as a church measures up to their expectations, they

⁵⁵ Ibid., 265.

⁵⁶ D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Studies in the Sermon on the Mount* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1976), 116.

will stick around, but should the church, or the pastoral staff, fail them in some way, then they are quickly off through the exit, in search of a ‘better’ church.⁵⁷

The authors in this biblical review consistently indicate that suffering, properly responded to, will have the effect of producing spiritual maturity by God’s grace and design. With this biblical review in place, the researcher will now look at other relevant literature beginning with issues of conflict and conflict resolution.

Conflict and Conflict Resolution

Catholic professor Dean R. Hoge addresses the importance of understanding how conflict affects the pastoral ministry. “One of the two main reasons why ministers left parish ministry was the stress of dealing with conflict....Our research agrees with all earlier studies in finding that conflict distresses many Protestant ministers and ultimately drives some of them away.”⁵⁸ Liberal Christian scholar Donald P. Smith further notes,

Many ministers discover ways to reduce ambiguity and conflict in the expectations of others, or are fortunate enough to find themselves in a church where the conflict can be channeled creatively toward more effective ministry. Others bear the pain as long as they can, and if they are able, move to another congregation (more congenial to their ministry, they hope), or even leave the pastorate altogether.⁵⁹

Change as a Key Dynamic of Conflict

Given the importance of understanding conflict, the researcher will begin by looking at some of the factors that often contribute to conflict. According to the literature reviewed, one such factor is change. Harvard professors, Ronald Heifetz and Marty

⁵⁷ Iain M. Duguid, *Hero of Heroes, Seeing Christ in the Beatitudes* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2001), 108.

⁵⁸ Dean R. Hoge and Jacqueline E. Wenger, *Pastors in Transition, Why Clergy Leave Local Church Ministry* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdsman Publishing Company, 2005), 76.

⁵⁹ Donald P. Smith, *Clergy in the Cross Fire, Coping with Role Conflicts in the Ministry* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1973), 15-16.

Linsky speak of the problems that leaders can encounter when they challenge the habits that define people's lives, in large part because people are often unwilling to accept change.

[Leaders] appear dangerous to people when you question their values, beliefs, or habits of a lifetime..... The hope of leadership lies in the capacity to deliver disturbing news and raise difficult questions in a way that people can absorb, prodding them to take up the message rather than ignore it or kill the messenger.⁶⁰

If Heifetz and Linsky are correct, should there be a general assumption that any change will inevitably bring about conflict? Not necessarily. It seems that how people perceive change may matter most. "People do not resist change, per se. People resist loss."⁶¹ In another work by the same authors (with the inclusion of Alexander Grashow), they speak in more detail about this same belief held by some, that people always resist change.

You know the adage "People resist change." It is not really true. People are not stupid. People love change when they know it is a good thing. No one gives back a winning lottery ticket. What people resist is not change per se, but loss. When change involves real or potential loss, people hold on to what they have and resist change.⁶²

Still, the literature suggests that change is necessary for healthy churches.

Evangelical author Kevin G. Ford writes, "Unhealthy churches resist change and fear or deny the future, while healthy churches embrace change, even when it is painful."⁶³ It is important to note Ford's clarification that he is speaking of appropriate and healthy

⁶⁰ Ronald A. Heifetz and Marty Linsky, *Leadership on the Line, Staying Alive through the Dangers of Leading* (Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 2002), 12.

⁶¹ Ibid., 11.

⁶² Ronald A. Heifetz, Alexander Grashow, and Marty Linsky, *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership, Tools and Tactics for Changing Your Organization and the World* (Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 2009), 22.

⁶³ Kevin G. Ford, *Transforming Church, Bringing out the Good to Get to Great* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 2008), 33.

change, not just any change. “Every church needs transformation. Those that don’t change [will] die. Don’t get me wrong, I am not advocating change for the sake of change. The wrong kind of change can be toxic. Healthy change, however, is required for growth, maturity, and adaption.”⁶⁴

That there are those who will fail to embrace change is reiterated throughout the literature. Many will experience anxiety, and often exhibit the negative results of unresolved anxiety, including anger. Author Peter Steinke writes, “Put people together and inevitably anxiety will arise. Anxiety can become infectious. We can give it to others or catch it from them. What precisely triggers anxiety is unique to each system. Common activators are significant changes and losses. They upset the stable patterns and balance of the system.”⁶⁵

This anxiety, as has already been stated, will often arise when one is moving toward change. If not properly addressed, division is one result. Heifetz writes,

The people you are asking to make changes experience your initiative as a threat to something they value. What they value might be some deeply held belief about right and wrong or about the way the world works or should work. Or it may be nothing deeper than the desire to maintain what is stable, predictable, and familiar in their lives. Resistance to change stems from a fear of losing something important.⁶⁶

Given the fact that conflict seems inevitable at times, what can be done to alleviate the situation? Dr. Dan Allender speaks candidly of the lack of complete control in crisis and times of conflict.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 19.

⁶⁵ Peter L. Steinke, *How Your Church Family Works, Understanding Congregations as Emotional Systems* (Herndon, VA: The Alban Institute, 2006), 15. There will be a further look at systems theory later.

⁶⁶ Heifetz, Grashow, and Linsky, *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership, Tools and Tactics for Changing Your Organization and the World*, 96.

Crises serve to remind us that we are fundamentally not in control. In reality, we are dependent on grace, on a host of people and circumstances that operate well beyond our control [...] We also have competitors who are constantly at work to replace us. We have adversaries who want not merely to replace us but to destroy us.⁶⁷

How Might Pastors Address and Respond to Conflict?

One important question arises, “How might pastors address conflict and bring about peace in the church, in a way that is honoring to God and beneficial to the church?”

PCA pastor Alfred Poirier touches on this question when he writes,

One of my primary objectives in writing this book has been to ground peacemaking on a solid biblical and theological foundation as well as to place it within its ecclesiastical context...My hope is that this book will begin to remedy the current deficiency in pastoral studies by providing pastors-in-training as well as seasoned pastors with an overview of biblical peacemaking from the unique vantage point of the pastor.⁶⁸

Ken Sande has affirmed that grace must permeate the lives of pastors, certainly in times of conflict. “We must continually ‘breathe in’ God’s grace by studying and meditating on his word...When even one person in a conflict is faithfully breathing out this kind of grace, others will often receive God’s grace through us. As they do, they are less likely to be defensive and more inclined to listen to our concerns.”⁶⁹

Much of the literature asserted the importance of grace in seeking peace in the midst of conflict. Again, note these words from Sande.

Peacemakers are people who breathe grace. They draw continually on the goodness and power of Jesus Christ, and then they bring his love, mercy, forgiveness, strength, and wisdom to the conflicts of daily life. God delights to

⁶⁷ Dan B. Allender, *Leading with a Limp* (Colorado Springs, CO: Waterbrook Press, 2008), 29-30.

⁶⁸ Poirier, 15.

⁶⁹ Ken Sande, *The Peace Maker, a Biblical Guide to Resolving Personal Conflict* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2004), 170.

breathe grace through peacemakers and use them to dissipate anger, improve understanding, promote justice, and encourage repentance and reconciliation.⁷⁰

Seeking to continually respond to conflict with grace is not to say that people have no responsibility to biblically address the issues, especially calling one another to God-honoring obedience. As Dr. Bryan Chapell has noted, “Grace should not make obedience optional...Resting on God’s grace does not relieve us of our holy obligations; rather it should enable us to fulfill them (see Eph. 4:7-13).”⁷¹

Another aspect of conflict involves the reality that one can never fully know the motivations that others have for their actions. As Allender has noted, “We don’t fully understand our own motivation, let alone the heart of another. We can never be perfectly clear about the matters that are most important to us, so we stumble along with hopes that over time some of the dust will settle and we’ll be able to see a little more clearly.”⁷²

The literature reviewed thus far reveals a deep need for pastors to understand conflict as well as conflict resolution in the church. Pastor Robert Ramey’s heartfelt words surely represent the thoughts of many in ministry. “How I have wished for the absence of strife! Not only in my family and in my church family, but also in our nation and in the world. I have long been afraid of conflict—it scares me. I don’t know what will happen if it breaks out, so I tend to avoid it whenever I can.”⁷³

⁷⁰ Ibid., 11.

⁷¹ Bryan Chapell, *Holiness by Grace* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2001), 12.

⁷² Allender, *Leading with a Limp*, 80.

⁷³ Robert H. Ramey, Jr., *Thriving in Ministry* (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2000), 41.

Good Leadership for Effective Change

To assist in this look at conflict and its resolution, the researcher needs to briefly highlight the importance of good leadership and its connection to conflict and change. An understanding of effective leadership will help to address conflict in the church, and a discernment of leadership styles will likely impact the degree to which pastors bring residual conflict from the church into the home. The literature speaks to the reality that leadership involves pitfalls.

To lead is to live dangerously because when leadership counts, when you lead people through difficult change, you challenge what people hold dear—their daily habits, tools, loyalties, and ways of thinking—with nothing more to offer perhaps than a possibility...People push back when you disturb the personal and institutional equilibrium they know. And people resist in all kinds of creative and unexpected ways that can get you taken out of the game: pushed aside, undermined, or eliminated.⁷⁴

Poirer, coming from a Reformed Christian pastoral perspective, suggests that it is crucial to understand the need for spiritually mature Christian leadership that tries to seek reconciliation. He also mentions that fact that there are biblical qualifications for the leadership in the church. He writes,

I am emphasizing the central role of the church in mediation in order that we as pastors might be encouraged again to see that peacemaking is not a task reserved for lawyers or professional mediators. It is our calling. It is what it means to ‘rule’ over a church (1 Tim. 3:5; 5:17). Christ has given us the church, with its duly appointed elders, as the specific context for resolving disputes, for restoring peace and justice, and for bearing the sweet fruit of reconciliation (see Matt. 18:15-20; Luke 17:1-10; 1 Cor. 6:1-8; Eph. 3:10; 1 Thess. 5:12-13; 1 Tim. 3:1-8; 5:17; Heb. 13:17).⁷⁵

According to much of the literature, this issue of spiritual maturity and its importance, particularly for leaders, cannot be overstated. Pastor and author Peter

⁷⁴ Heifetz and Linsky, *Leadership on the Line, Staying Alive through the Dangers of Leading*, 2.

⁷⁵ Poirier, 209.

Scazzero writes, “The overall health of any church or ministry depends primarily on the emotional and spiritual health of its leadership.”⁷⁶ Scazzero goes to great lengths to make the connection between spiritual maturity and emotional maturity. He writes,

I believe the church of Jesus Christ is to be the primary vehicle for our growth in spiritual and emotional maturity. Sadly, for too long we have delegated “emotional” issues to the therapist’s office and taken responsibility only for “spiritual” problems in the church. The two are inseparably linked and critical to a fully biblical discipleship.⁷⁷

This seems to be an important point, for as Christian counselor, Dr. A.D. Hart writes, “The ministry can, from an emotional point of view, be regarded as the most hazardous occupation around.”⁷⁸

If pastors are to deal with conflict and change effectively, the literature suggests that they will need to deal in a spiritually mature way with the emotions of others as well as their own emotions. Heifetz and Linsky explain:

When you lead people through difficult change, you take them on an emotional roller coaster because you are asking them to relinquish something—a belief, a value, a behavior—that they hold dear. People can stand only so much change at any one time. You risk revolt, and your own survival, by trying to do too much, too soon.⁷⁹

Heifetz, writing from a purely secular perspective, nonetheless agrees that people need emotional maturity for leadership, not merely for themselves but also to know how to deal with the emotions of others.

Learning to take the heat and receive people’s anger in a way that does not undermine your initiative is one of the toughest tasks of leadership. When you ask people to make changes and even sacrifices, it’s almost inevitable that you will

⁷⁶ Scazzero and Bird, 20.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 19.

⁷⁸ Brain, 39.

⁷⁹ Heifetz and Linsky, *Leadership on the Line, Staying Alive through the Dangers of Leading*, 116-117.

frustrate some of your closest colleagues and supporters, not to mention those outside your faction. Your allies want you to calm things down, at least *for them*, rather than stir things up. As they put pressure on you to back away, drop the issue, or change the behavior that upsets them, you will feel the heat, uncomfortably. In this sense, exercising leadership might be understood as disappointing people at a rate they can absorb.⁸⁰

Effective Leadership Strategies for Conflict Resolution

At this point it may help to look at what the literature suggests are some strategies for conflict resolution, as well as strategies for leadership. Ken Sande in his landmark book entitled, *The Peacemaker*, lists a four step plan for conflict resolution, guided by scriptural principles. Sande's strategy begins with the proper motivation, works its way through dealing with personal sin, followed by seeking to show the other person his own contribution to the conflict. Lastly, Sande's conflict resolution plan involves forgiveness and restoration. Each of these steps begins with the letter G (see below), so that it might be remembered by alliteration. Each is also accompanied by a corresponding scripture verse. Sande calls his plan, "...a simple yet comprehensive approach to resolving conflict."⁸¹ The four step conflict resolution plan with scripture verses is as follows: *Glorify God* (1 Cor. 10:31); *Get the log out of your eye* (Matt. 7:5); *Gently restore* (Gal. 6:1); *Go and be reconciled* (Matt. 5:24).⁸²

Christian professor Gareth Jones also addresses conflict resolution from the perspective of scripture. Although his approach is not as succinctly articulated as that of Sande, one can discern his basic conflict resolution structure. He suggests that people should allow for diversity and debate within greater evangelicalism. Christians are to be

⁸⁰ Ibid., 141-142. Emphasis in the original.

⁸¹ Sande, 12.

⁸² Ibid., 12-13.

forgiving of others even as they are called to biblically judge. There should be unity in the body of Christ; a unity which includes humility, putting others and their interests ahead of one's own and living sacrificially for one's opponents. Jones also asks his readers to discern between primary and secondary importance of differences.⁸³

Heifetz and Linsky, rather than having a succinct approach to conflict resolution, seem to favor an extensive and detailed approach for ongoing, effective leadership. Their leadership strategy begins with a concept designed to get an overall view of the conflict called, "Get on the balcony."⁸⁴ The idea behind this pertains to the "...need to get perspective in the midst of action."⁸⁵ To gain this perspective, the authors write,

Getting people in a community or organization to address a deeply felt issue is difficult and risky. If people have avoided a problem for a long time, it should not be surprising that they try to silence you when you push them to face it. Both your survival and your success depend on your skill at reaching a true understanding of the varying perspectives among the factions. Learn from them their stakes and fears. As social workers say, "Start where people are at."⁸⁶

Global leadership guru, Mark Gerzon, also touches on this idea of a big-picture look at any leadership problem. He calls this "integral vision." Integral vision as Gerzon sees it entails gaining access to differing viewpoints in any situation but not being trapped by them. He writes, "Integral vision means understanding divergent worldviews but not being limited by or trapped within them. It means including *and* transcending different

⁸³ Gareth Jones, *Coping with Controversy, Helping Christians Handle Their Differences, Revised Edition* (Carlisle, Cumbria UK: Solway, 1996), 32-44, 46-72, 74-83.

⁸⁴ Heifetz and Linsky, *Leadership on the Line, Staying Alive through the Dangers of Leading*, 51.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 62-63.

viewpoints, holding diversity in our minds and hearts as part of a larger whole, all the while recognizing that each by itself is partial and incomplete.”⁸⁷

Harvard professor Dean Williams, doesn’t use the same language of “balcony,” but he does affirm that type of objective approach. He writes,

What the leader must do is seek to answer the questions, ‘What is going on in the system that I did not see from my normal vantage point?’ ‘Are there any tasks that are deficient or defective?’ ‘How have I, from my lofty perch, misread what is going on?’ And, ‘Since I last looked, how have things changed? Are there any new threats or opportunities? And, what realities are the people avoiding?’⁸⁸

Heifetz, et al., in their concept of the balcony, desires to help the reader see the importance of careful observation.

Observing from the balcony is the critical first step in exercising—and safeguarding—leadership. Despite a detached perspective, though, the observation itself must be close and careful. Once you find out where people are coming from, you can connect with them and engage them in change.⁸⁹

These authors further state that an effective leader will not let the conflict become personal. It is very often the case that the role of leader itself may bring about issues of conflict.

Leaders are rarely neutralized for personal reasons, even though an attack may be framed in personal terms. The role you play or the issue you carry generates the reaction. When the players chase you down the field in a soccer match, they are not after you personally. They want you because you control the ball. Even though people yell her name and block her way, a fine soccer player would never think of taking it personally. Taking a “balcony” perspective, she sees the game on the field as a whole and immediately adjusts her behavior to take account of the patterns she sees. Great players in any sport can do this.⁹⁰

⁸⁷ Mark Gerzon, *Leading through Conflict, How Successful Leaders Transform Differences into Opportunities* (Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 2006), 65. Emphasis in the original.

⁸⁸ Dean Williams, *Real Leadership, Helping People and Organizations Face Their Toughest Challenges* (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc., 2005), 259.

⁸⁹ Heifetz and Linsky, *Leadership on the Line, Staying Alive through the Dangers of Leading*, 64.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 65.

An integral aspect to leadership, according to the literature, is that people need to understand and adapt to change. Leaders need to help others with this adaption. When people fail to adapt, it produces extreme problems for the leadership. “[P]eople must face the challenge of adapting to a tough reality, and the adaptation requires giving up an important value or a current way of life. Leadership becomes dangerous, then, when it must confront people with loss.”⁹¹

Dean Williams seems to place this language of “adaptive change” under a category that he calls “creative challenge.” He writes, “In the *creative challenge*, a combination of events presents an unusual opportunity that, if the group can break from routine activity long enough to exploit it, might lead to a major and permanent new benefit.”⁹²

Christian consultant Kevin Ford believes that, although many churches say that they want change, this area of adaptive change or creative challenge is the very thing that churches oppose. He writes,

Why is it, then, that so many churches seem stuck at a dead end? As a consultant to hundreds of churches, I hear the same story over and over again. The names and circumstances change, but church leaders ask the same despairing questions: Why are we stuck? Why can’t we change? Why aren’t lives being changed? Why aren’t we going anywhere?...It’s not that churches deny the need to change—to move out into a transforming journey. Church members frequently invoke the need for transformation when they hire new pastors or ministry leaders. But these same leaders face a paradox: The churches resist the very change they claim to need.⁹³

⁹¹ Ibid., 13.

⁹² Williams, 35. Emphasis in the original.

⁹³ Ford, 25.

The Importance of Relationships

To help people adapt to change, the literature urges leaders to build trusting relationships and partnerships. “One of the distinguishing qualities of successful people who lead in any field is the emphasis they place on personal relationships.”⁹⁴ These trusting relationships within Heifetz’s structure are important, even if they are not always easy to maintain. For their protection, leaders should rely on these partnerships when initiating change.

Partners provide protection, and they create alliances for you with factions other than your own. They strengthen both you and your initiatives. With partners, you are not simply relying on the logical power of your arguments and evidence, you are building political power as well [...] Finding the right partners can be tough...Moreover, developing trust takes the time and the perseverance to move productively through conflicts. But without working together, your efforts incur greater risk.⁹⁵

This understanding of leadership that includes both trusting relationships and working together is certainly true in the church. Trinity Evangelical Divinity School professor David Larsen writes, “Christian ministry is always seen as shared ministry in the New Testament.”⁹⁶ Mark Gerzon calls this idea of partnership building “bridging.” He describes bridging in this way: “[Bridging is] building actual partnerships and alliances that cross the borders that divide an organization or a community.”⁹⁷

Harvard professors Roger Fisher and William Ury, along with attorney Bruce Patton, in their bestselling book entitled *Getting to Yes*, speak of leadership and building

⁹⁴ Heifetz and Linsky, *Leadership on the Line, Staying Alive through the Dangers of Leading*, 75.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 78.

⁹⁶ David L. Larsen, *Caring for the Flock, Pastoral Ministry in the Local Congregation* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1991), 115.

⁹⁷ Gerzon, 189.

trusting relationships as it pertains to negotiation, which certainly plays a role in addressing conflict. They write,

The human aspect of negotiation can be either helpful or disastrous. The process of working out an agreement may produce a psychological commitment to a mutually satisfactory outcome. A working relationship where trust, understanding, respect, and friendship are built up over time can make each new negotiation smoother and more efficient.⁹⁸

Christian author Peter Brain upholds to the need to build God-honoring friendships with others, despite the fact that it often takes more time than one may be willing to give. He says, “We all know the joys of friendship, but building friendships takes time. If they don’t appear to be productive, at least in the short-term, we can be tempted to skip the necessary time commitment to their growth. We experience a friendship deficit syndrome. We retreat more and more into ourselves.”⁹⁹ From the perspective of the Christian ministry, Andrew Irvine notes that these important relationships can, ironically, also be difficult and stressful in the church.

Relationships are a paradox: the greatest source of joy; the greatest source of pain. To say that, for the clergy, relationships are a major source of stress, is to state the obvious. But is it the obvious? To the outsider, looking in, it may not be quite so apparent. The minister is often seen as the one caught up in the joys of fellowship within a community of faith. The minister’s smiling face at the church’s garden tea and the jovial interaction at the church’s family supper hardly portray a person stressed by relationship.¹⁰⁰

Qualities of Godly Leaders

To reflect on the findings thus far on the topic of conflict and conflict resolution and effective leadership, the literature emphasizes the importance of a leader building and

⁹⁸ Roger Fisher, William Ury, and Bruce Patton, *Getting to Yes, Negotiating Agreement without Giving In*, Second ed. (New York: The Penguin Group, 1991), 19.

⁹⁹ Brain, 144.

¹⁰⁰ Andrew R. Irvine, *Between Two Worlds, Understanding and Managing Clergy Stress* (London: Mowbray, Wellington House, 1997), 90.

maintaining trustworthy relationships, being spiritually and emotionally mature, and able to help people adjust to healthy changes. As the researcher continues to construct a portrait of an effective leader, it is important to also consider his character. One vital characteristic a good leader must possess is humility. Secular author Mark Gerzon writes,

In the conflict, we may—or may not—be “right.” But in either case, we do not have to act self-righteously. As we have seen, arrogance is a characteristic of leaders who see only their own good qualities and only the bad qualities of their adversary. This is standard operating procedure in the world today. Unfortunately, good and evil are rarely so conveniently distributed. If you and I want to be successful leaders, we need to do just the opposite: recognize the virtues of humility.¹⁰¹

Dean Williams also speaks of the humility of knowing when to step aside and let others assume responsibility. He exhorts:

If you are honest and take responsibility for yourself as an instrument of power, a time may come when what is required to exercise real leadership is to get out of the way. In other words, you get to a point where you cannot do any more than what you have already done, and someone else must now step forward and assume responsibility.¹⁰²

Christian author Gareth Jones sees humility as a necessity in relationships with God and man, and a foundational reference point to a good leader.

Few themes are as dominant in the New Testament as that of humility (Lk. 14:7-14; Phil. 2:3, 4): we are not to think of ourselves more highly than we ought (Rom. 12:3, 4). In other words, all that we are comes from God. Whatever we have in the way of abilities, gifts (both natural and spiritual), and position in society, comes from him. To think highly of ourselves is, therefore, a contradiction in terms for Christians, who are to realize their total dependence upon God’s mercy. And so it is inappropriate to advance our own interests; we are to live for others, to acknowledge their interests and seek to advance those interests.¹⁰³

¹⁰¹ Gerzon, 238.

¹⁰² Williams, 262.

¹⁰³ Jones, 78-79.

Well known Christian author J. Oswald Sanders adds, “Humility is also a hallmark of the spiritual leader. Christ told His disciples to turn away from the pompous attitudes of the oriental despots, and instead take on the lowly bearing of the servant (Matthew 20:25-27).”¹⁰⁴

In the hope that this work would be a blessing to clergy and their families, much of the research has been from a Christian perspective. It is in this vein that one finds the most written about the important issue of biblical forgiveness, which is pervasive throughout the literature. Understanding the need for forgiveness is important in the Christian life and certainly in Christian leadership. Reformed author and counselor, Dr. Jay Adams has written these words on forgiveness, calling it the essence of Christian love.

Man’s greatest need is forgiveness. It is so easy for Christians to forget what it meant for them to come to Christ and be forgiven. But a lively sense of having been forgiven is essential to vital Christian devotion; without it, one easily leaves his “first love” (Rev. 2:4). And without it, he will tend to lack the forgiving attitude toward others that is essential to proper Christian living...¹⁰⁵

Reformed pastor and author Timothy Keller further asserts the importance of ongoing forgiveness. He states, “In its most basic form, this teaching is that *Christians in community are to never give up on one another, never give up on a relationship, and never write off another believer*. We must never tire of forgiving (and repenting!) and seeking to repair our relationships.”¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁴ Oswald J. Sanders, *Spiritual Leadership, Principles of Excellence for Every Believer* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2007), 62.

¹⁰⁵ Jay E. Adams, *More Than Redemption* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1979), 184.

¹⁰⁶ Shari Thomas and Tami Resch, *Beyond Duct Tape, Holding the Heart Together in a Life of Ministry* (Lawrenceville, GA: Parakaleo, 2011), 178. From the article by Timothy Keller entitled *Serving Each Other Through Forgiveness and Reconciliation*. Emphasis in the original.

A Doctor of Ministry dissertation by Covenant Theological Seminary student

Arthur Hunt found that pastors who have been mistreated by their churches after issues of conflict found it difficult to forgive. Hunt writes,

For pastors in this study the issue of forgiveness loomed large...All the pastors mentioned the ongoing struggle to forgive and to understand what exactly it would mean to genuinely forgive those whom they believed betrayed them. And most also admitted that it had proven much harder and taken far longer than they would have hoped or believed.¹⁰⁷

Ken Sande also writes of this struggle with forgiveness and what it takes to move beyond the conflict. He challenges:

It is impossible to truly forgive others in your own strength, especially when they have hurt you deeply or betrayed your trust. You can try not to think about what they did or stuff your feelings deep inside and put on a false smile when you see them. But unless your heart is cleansed and changed by God, the memories and the feelings will still be lurking in the background, poisoning your thoughts and words, and preventing the rebuilding of trust and relationship.¹⁰⁸

As the effective leader maintains healthy relationships through humility and a willingness to forgive, there is another crucial character element which the literature highlights. In his thought provoking work entitled, *Working the Angles*, Eugene Peterson writes on the nature of prayer.

Prayer is a daring venture into speech that juxtaposes our words with the sharply alive words that pierce and divide souls and spirit, joints and marrow, pitilessly exposing every thought and intention of the heart (Heb. 4:12-13; Rev 1:16). If we had kept our mouths shut we would not have involved ourselves in such a relentlessly fearsome exposure....But when we venture into prayer, every word may, at any moment, come to mean just what it *means* and involve us with a holy God who wills our holiness. All we had counted on was some religious small talk,

¹⁰⁷ Arthur J. Hunt, "I Never Expected *This* Would Happen to Me: An Exploration of How Pastors in the Evangelical Presbyterian Church View the Impact of Their Own Forced Exits in Situations Other Than Moral Failure" (Project/Dissertation, Covenant Theological Seminary, 2006), 138.

¹⁰⁸ Sande, 205.

a little numinous gossip, and we are suddenly involved, without intending it and without having calculated the consequences, in something *eternal*.¹⁰⁹

In a study dealing with the difficulties of pastoral ministry, many of the pastors surveyed mentioned prayer as contributing to their spiritual and emotional health. In the hurried pace and existence of pastoral life, pastors may believe that they understand what it means to pray. Former American Baptist pastor Anthony Pappas writes that pastors may not truly understand prayer.

By prayer I do not mean a casual request for God's presence. I do not mean unilateral instructions directed toward the divine. I do not mean a plea for relief. I mean rather a sincere opening of the heart and mind to the message God has placed within the soulstress. This prayer requires the belief that there is a blessing in the pain and confusion. That from the pain may come an impetus to change and from the confusion may come an insight into deeper truth.¹¹⁰

Dr. John Snyder, author and former pastor, discusses the area of prayer in the context of prayer partners. He suggests that in times of conflict and difficulty, pastors need prayer support. He writes, "[Pastors and leaders] should gather around them as soon as possible people who are willing to be their prayer partners and part of their support group....The immediate prayer and emotional support will be essential both before and during the trouble, if and when it begins."¹¹¹

At this point, the researcher will leave this look at conflict, conflict resolution and effective leadership to gain some invaluable perspective on what the literature speaks of pertaining to marriage relationships.

¹⁰⁹ Eugene H. Peterson, *Working the Angles, the Shape of Pastoral Integrity* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1987), 43. Emphasis in the original.

¹¹⁰ Anthony G. Pappas, *Pastoral Stress, Sources of Tension, Resources for Transformation* (New York: The Alban Institute, 1995), 26.

¹¹¹ John Snyder, *These Sheep Bite* (Babylon, NY: Appleseed Press, 2005), 211.

Marriage Relationships

This look at marriage relationships, although touching areas of marriage in general, will focus on how the pastoral marriage relationship inevitably interconnects with pastoral ministry. The literature suggests that clergy marriages often suffer from various kinds of neglect. Ministers, wrought with fatigue and discouragement, often have nothing left at the end of a long day of battle. H.B. London and Neil Wiseman write, “The pain, emotional struggles and declining commitments of others, coupled with your own fatigue, discouragement and despair, take a toll of your whole being and leave you with almost no reserve for your family or yourself.”¹¹²

Prioritizing Relationships

Relevant literature addresses the reality that pastors must make time for their families if they are to experience healthy families and marriages. “Where time is not thoughtfully invested in marriage and family, real losses will result.”¹¹³ Author Richard Roukema addresses the fact that ministers are often not good stewards of their time, which proves detrimental in many ways. “Conversations with the clergy over time have convinced me that most of them have scheduling problems, and that they have difficulty providing time for their families, for recreational pursuits, and most importantly for their own spiritual development.”¹¹⁴

The need for ministry marriages to be healthy can hardly be overstated. As mentioned already, because of sin in the pastor’s life as well as sin in the lives of others,

¹¹² London and Wiseman, 106.

¹¹³ Brain, 101.

¹¹⁴ Richard W. Roukema, *Shepherding the Shepherd, Negotiating the Stress of Ministry* (Enumclaw, WA: Pleasant Word, 2003), 73.

conflict in the church is inevitable. Since this is true, pastors must have solid relationships, and particularly strong marriage relationships, to help deal with the trauma associated with church conflict. This must not be accomplished by sacrificing marriage on the altar of ministry. Pastor Peter Brain writes,

Busy married pastors find themselves with the dual task of building a marriage and a ministry. This creates a tension between two challenges. Not only do pastors and their spouses want their marriages to be stable, joyful and growing, but the church and community, not to mention God himself, have similar expectations.¹¹⁵

The reality that healthy pastoral marriages have obvious implications for the church is another important aspect of the literature. Pastor and professor, Dr. Andrew R. Irvine writes, “The integrated unit of the pastoral home is as one. Those things which affect the minister affect the family. That which impacts the family will have ramifications for the minister and ministry.”¹¹⁶ David Larsen speaks to the pressures on the clergy marriage and family that often comes with the ministry.

The pressure to be a model family and to have a model marriage seems to be a sore point with an increasingly large group of clergy and spouses....In no profession is the spouse so deeply involved as in the ministry. This offers immense opportunity, but it also inflicts a heavy burden. The recurring complaint and the gnawing frustration for pastor, spouse and family appears to be that they must ever take second-place to the church and the needs of the people in the church.¹¹⁷

Dr. Dennis Rainey, executive director of Family Life writes that ministry can be a “mistress.” Should there come a time that ministry becomes a “mistress,” it contributes to many areas of unhealthiness in the marriage.

¹¹⁵ Brain, 100.

¹¹⁶ Irvine, 125.

¹¹⁷ Larsen, 104-105.

Ironically, a mistress that entices those of us in ‘full-time’ Christian service is named ‘ministry.’ We can give our heart, soul, and mind to ministry and come home nearly brain-dead and exhausted. What husband or wife receiving such treatment repeatedly could not help but conclude, *I’m just not that important to this person*. Then comes trouble. Let me say something pointed: *There is no better way for the devil to ruin a ministry, discredit Jesus Christ, and wound the church than to have a pastor or Christian leader’s marriage wrecked.*¹¹⁸

It is important for ministers to seek to have marriages that are stable and healthy and yet the ministry can put undue pressure and stress on their marriages. Non-Christian writer Sue Johnson writes of the need for relational stability in marriage in her important book entitled, *Hold Me Tight*. Although she is not writing of the ministry lifestyle specifically, her words capture well the unpredictable realities of pastoral ministry. Her thoughts pertaining to the way relationships influence how we “heal from trauma” are equally credible for ministry marriages.

When life gets dangerous and unpredictable, we know how much we need the help of others in meeting the challenge fate has delivered. And after the fight, when we are sore or injured, and any façade of rugged self-sufficiency that we have managed to hold on to has crumbled, our need for others who care moves front and center. The quality of our central relationships affects how we face and heal from trauma, and as everything moves in a circle, trauma has an impact on our relationships with the people we love.¹¹⁹

Christians know that they must rely on God’s wisdom for all of life, including the central relationship of marriage. But, rather than rely on the wisdom of God to embrace a spouse, pastors often get their relationships out of order, causing tension in their marriages. Author’s Wilson and Hoffman address the need for proper order in the pastor’s relationship with God and with others.

¹¹⁸ Wayne Grudem and Dennis Rainey, *Pastoral Leadership for Manhood and Womanhood* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2002), 44. Emphasis in the original.

¹¹⁹ Sue Johnson, *Hold Me Tight, Seven Conversations for a Lifetime of Love* (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2008), 234.

For the married minister, the biblical priorities in relationships are intimacy with God first, followed by marital intimacy, followed by intimacy with godly same-gender friendships. Said another way, our covenant relationship with our spouse is a higher priority than our other relational commitments—and our relationship with God is the highest priority of all.¹²⁰

Christian counselor Diane Langberg speaks with wisdom of the ever present conflict which often surfaces between marriage and ministry. She writes,

Many times couples feel as if marriage is in conflict with ministry. The attitude seems to be: “If I really give to my marriage what all these books and counselors say I should, my ministry will suffer. Marriage is important, but my ministry is for God, and he deserves 100 percent.” This type of thinking translates into the resolve that “I will respond to anyone who calls at any time. If I have promised my wife that I will stay home, she will just have to understand that God’s work comes first.”¹²¹

Langberg also stresses that pastors must not operate in their ministries under a misplaced trust. Confidence must be found in God. There is also encouragement that comes from the assurance that the call to the ministry is from God.

Pressure is inevitable in ministry. There are difficulties and disappointments. There are the overwhelming needs of others, questions for which we have no answers. And there are failures as well—both in our families and among our church leaders. If we do not find the confidence that comes from knowing that it is *God* who has placed us where we are, we will be crushed by the demands and responsibilities of leadership. We will buckle under the pressure. If, however, we recognize that our confidence lies in the fact that God has placed us where he has, for the purpose of conforming us to his Son, then we can respond by walking in obedience to him on all fronts. The result is that we can serve as examples to the flock.¹²²

A minister who proceeds in this confidence, having his or her relationships prioritized, must yet take heed. Dr. Candace Benyei is another who sounds the alarm on the pressures of clergy marriages and the resulting divorce rate.

¹²⁰ Michael Todd Wilson and Brad Hoffmann, *Preventing Ministry Failure, a Shepherdcare Guide for Pastors, Ministers and Other Caregivers* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 2007), 49-50.

¹²¹ Langberg, 14-15.

¹²² Ibid., 19. Emphasis in the original.

God is mirrored in relationship, and clergy, as the rest of us, mirror God imperfectly. Marriage is one of our most challenging relationships. It can be the most rewarding, or it can be the most destructive. Married clergy are often expected to model this relationship perfectly, while being closely observed, even though they often begin this journey at a considerable disadvantage. The marital success of clergy, as measured by current divorce rates, is about the same as that of the non-clergy population as a whole.¹²³

Good Communication

Knowing these statistics what further help, along with prioritizing relationships, does the literature offer to build healthy marriages? When the topic of healing hurting marriages comes to the fore, therapists and sages continue to reach for some of the same answers. Secular psychology professor John M. Gottman speaks of the age-old therapeutic shibboleth for addressing failing and weak marriages.

Perhaps the biggest myth of all is that communication—and more specifically, learning to resolve your conflicts—is the royal road to romance and an enduring, happy marriage. Whatever a marriage therapist's theoretical orientation, whether you opt for short-term therapy, long-term therapy, or a three-minute radio consultation with your local Frasier, the message you'll get is pretty uniform: Learn to communicate better.¹²⁴

Although Gottman believes that it is a myth that marriages are saved, "...just by learning to communicate more sensitively..."¹²⁵ he, too, sees a need for proper communication. A general consensus of the literature, whether coming from a Christian or non-Christian perspective, endorses the importance of communication in marriage. Dr. Richard Zeitner, writing from a non-Christian perspective, indicates that communication

¹²³ Candace R. Benyei, *Understanding Clergy Misconduct in Religious Systems, Scapegoating, Family Secrets, and the Abuse of Power* (Binghamton, NY: The Haworth Pastoral Press, 1998), 56-57.

¹²⁴ John M. Gottman and Nan Silver, *The Seven Principles for Making Marriage Work, a Practical Guide from the Country's Foremost Relationship Expert* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 1999), 8-9.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 13.

between partners is essential, but can often be more subconscious than one realizes. He writes,

Although all clinicians and writers in the field of couple and marital therapy likely agree that the quality of communication is fundamental to achieving relationship satisfaction, what actually constitutes that quality and how support or lack of support of the partner is ultimately conveyed might divide psychological experts according to theoretical allegiance. Clinicians oriented in a psychoanalytic direction, for instance, largely believe that communication between two individuals, whether in an intimate partnership such as marriage, parent and child, or therapist and patient, is predominantly unconscious.....And to complicate matters even more, what is ultimately conveyed is determined not just by the one who sends the communication but also by the one receiving it.¹²⁶

Sue Johnson writes an entire book devoted to conversations designed to better our marriages. She delineates her “seven conversations” in this way:

The first four conversations teach you how to limit negative spirals that leave you both disconnected and how to tune in to each other in a way that builds lasting emotional responsiveness. The next two conversations demonstrate how you can promote emotional bonding through forgiving injuries and sexual intimacy. The final conversation shows you how to care for your relationship on a daily basis.¹²⁷

Drs. Les and Leslie Parrott add,

We talk a lot about talking. In nearly every conceivable corner of North America and in several places around the world, Les and I have demonstrated techniques and tools for improving a couple’s communication. And it would be impossible to add up the number of times a couple has come into our counseling office after a communication meltdown and given us the common refrain: “We just don’t communicate.”¹²⁸

Dr. William Doherty also recognizes this generally accepted maxim for a healthy marriage. He writes, “Every marital advice book stresses the importance of taking time to

¹²⁶ Richard M. Zeitner, *Self within Marriage, the Foundation for Lasting Relationships* (New York: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 2012), 116.

¹²⁷ Johnson, 61.

¹²⁸ Les Parrott and Leslie Parrott, *Love Talk* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 2004), 21.

communicate.”¹²⁹ Dr. David L. Smith, professor at Providence Theological Seminary, echoes the significance of communication as it pertains to clergy marriage.

Our parsonages are in trouble. Marriage breakdown among clergy couples is rising at a terrifying rate. Clergy marriage failure is bad news for the people in the pews, because they have traditionally looked on their pastor and his wife as marital models....A pastor and his spouse must learn to communicate with each other.¹³⁰

It is evident in the literature that communication is healthy for marriages. As already stated, the literature reveals the fact that ministry marriages experience great degrees of suffering connected to the ministry. Marriage counselors David and Vera Mace include communication as one way to alleviate the struggles in clergy marriages. “The major [needs are] in the areas of more effective couple communication, the management of positive and negative emotions, and the resolving of conflict.”¹³¹

A Sure Foundation

In addition to good communication, the literature confirmed that for a marriage to be healthy, it must be based on a solid foundation. From a Christian perspective, this would be the word of God in scripture. Christian author and counselor, Dr. Gary Chapman writes, “The lasting answers to marital growth are found in the Bible.”¹³² Pastor’s wife, Carol Arnold, writes honestly of the struggles in her marriage. In the section of her book, “Hints to a Successful Marriage” she writes,

¹²⁹ William J. Doherty, *Take Back Your Marriage, Sticking Together in a World That Pulls Us Apart* (New York: The Guilford Press, 2001), 129-130.

¹³⁰ David L. Smith, "Some Thoughts on the Preserving of Clergy Marriages," *Didaskalia (Otterburne, Man.)* 7, no. 1 (1995): 1-2.

¹³¹ Mace and Mace, 110.

¹³² Gary Chapman, *Covenant Marriage, Building Communication & Intimacy* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2003), 3. Chapman has a helpful discussion on the differences between “contract” and “covenant” marriages, pages 6-24.

Our relationship was founded on the Word of God, and that, more than any other thing, kept us together in our marriage. When we made vows before God to stay together “till death do us part” and to be faithful to one another, we knew it was binding. We knew that to go against God’s laws was sin. It was being obedient to those laws that was the hard part.¹³³

Peter Brain is another Christian author who stresses living lives in marriage and family under the instruction of scripture. He writes,

All married Christians want to honor God by being faithful marriage partners, who through serving their spouses, empower them to grow and develop as Christian disciples. We all know that this is God’s intention for us, and will be the crucible in which our children can learn love, forgiveness and other-person centered living based upon our Lord’s life and teaching.¹³⁴

Although he doesn’t base his foundations on the Bible, secular counselor John Gottman does place an emphasis on the importance of a “spiritual dimension” in the marriage relationship.

Marriage isn’t just about raising kids, splitting chores, and making love. It can also have a spiritual dimension that has to do with creating an inner life together—a culture rich with symbols and rituals, and an appreciation for your roles and goals that link you, that lead you to understand what it means to be a part of the family you have become.¹³⁵

Lifelong Commitment

In his book, *Take Back your Marriage*, published initially in 2001, marriage and family counselor Bill Doherty writes from a secular perspective. Still, he makes the biblical teaching of lifelong commitment a crucial factor for couples wishing to have healthy relationships.

Because everything I say in this book hangs on the value of life long commitment, I will make the case here. For starters, there is no question that most of us still

¹³³ Carol Arnold, *The Liberation of a Resentful Wife* (Chattanooga, TN: Sunny Publishers, 2006), 164.

¹³⁴ Brain, 100.

¹³⁵ Gottman and Silver, 243-244.

desire a lifelong marriage commitment. If you are married, chances are that you pledged to stay married as long as you both shall live, and that you meant it. If you hope to be married some day, chances are that you plan to recite a similar pledge, unless by then the newer version—as long as we both shall love—has taken hold.¹³⁶

Reformed pastor and author, Dr. R.C. Sproul also speaks to the reality that marriage requires commitment for a lifetime when he writes, “Commitment lies at the heart of marriage. In the biblical context, this commitment does not take place privately, in a corner. It is a public matter.”¹³⁷ Staying together over the long haul may not seem to be the thing to do in today’s “fast food” culture, but many years of commitment pays rich dividends for the couple’s lives. Gary Thomas, author and adjunct professor at Western Seminary in Portland, Oregon, writes,

This relatively new phenomenon of being married for six or seven decades can pay rich dividends for our spiritual growth. Marriage helps us to develop the character of God himself as we stick with our spouses through the good times and the bad. Every wedding gives birth to a new history, a new beginning. The spiritual meaning of marriage is found in maintaining that history together.¹³⁸

The Importance of Forgiveness

Along with lifelong commitment, another healthy foundation for marriage found in the literature is forgiveness. This held true in the Christian as well as the non-Christian literature. Writing from a secular perspective, Sue Johnson writes clearly about the importance of forgiveness in a section of her book entitled, *Six Steps to Forgiveness*.

Injuring partners now take ownership of how they inflicted this injury on their lover and express regret and remorse. This cannot take the form of an impersonal or defensive apology. Saying “Look, I’m sorry, okay?” in a cool tone doesn’t signify regret, only dismissal of the partner’s pain. If we want to be believed here,

¹³⁶ Doherty, 4.

¹³⁷ R. C. Sproul, *The Intimate Marriage, a Practical Guide to Building a Great Marriage* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 1975), 153.

¹³⁸ Gary Thomas, *Sacred Marriage* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 2000), 107.

we have to listen to and engage with our lover's pain....We have to show that our lover's pain has an impact on us.¹³⁹

In a chapter entitled, *Solve Your Solvable Problems*, John Gottman lists eleven statements under the heading, "Sorry." Number eleven is "I'm sorry. Please forgive me."¹⁴⁰

Ken Sande writes quite extensively about the need for forgiveness in all relationships. The marriage relationship would be included in his helpful statements.

Christians are the most forgiven people in the world. Therefore, we should be the most forgiving people in the world. As most of us know from experience, however, it is often difficult to forgive others genuinely and completely. We often find ourselves practicing a form of forgiveness that is neither biblical nor healing.¹⁴¹

Christian author and counselor, Dr. Larry Crabb mentions that pride must be moved aside in order to truly forgive. He writes, "When I abandon my commitment to self-protection, seeing in it the rebellious pride that is really there, then I am able to forgive those who have interfered with my goal of self-protection and involve myself with those who may hurt me in the future."¹⁴²

Benefitting from the Struggles

One author has written, "The Bible appears to emphasize that our own suffering brings us spiritual growth and empowerment to help others."¹⁴³ With this in mind, is there a way to think of ministry marriage as actually benefiting from the struggles, conflict, and

¹³⁹ Johnson, 176.

¹⁴⁰ Gottman and Silver, 174.

¹⁴¹ Sande, 204.

¹⁴² Dr. Larry Crabb, *Understanding People, Deep Longings for Relationship* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1987), 150-151.

¹⁴³ Daniel L. Langford, *The Pastor's Family, the Challenges of Family Life and Pastoral Responsibilities* (New York: The Hayworth Pastoral Press, 1998), 102.

suffering that takes place in the life the church? Is it possible that church related conflict and suffering could actually foster true growth and health in ministry marriages?

Gary Thomas seeks to touch on this and other related issues in his book, *Sacred Marriage*. He writes, “This is a book that looks at how we can use the challenges, joys, struggles, and celebrations of marriage to draw closer to God and to grow in Christian character.”¹⁴⁴ In one way, Thomas sees this growth connected to honestly addressing one’s own sinfulness. He explains, “To spiritually benefit from marriage, we have to be honest. We have to look at our disappointments, own up to our ugly attitudes, and confront our selfishness. We also have to rid ourselves of the notion that the difficulties of marriage can be overcome if we simply pray harder or learn a few simple principles.”¹⁴⁵

Although Thomas is primarily writing from the perspective of struggles within the marriage, his counsel is certainly useful for external suffering that one brings into the marriage as well. He recognizes that struggle and trial are a part of people’s lives which, when responded to correctly, can bring about spiritual and emotional maturity. He writes,

Jesus promised us that *everyone* will be seasoned with fire, and every sacrifice will be seasoned with salt (see Mark 9:49, NEW KING JAMES VERSION). The desire for ease, comfort, and stress-free living is an indirect desire to remain an “unseasoned,” immature Christian. Struggle makes us stronger; it builds us up and deepens our faith. But this result is achieved only when we face the struggle head on, not when we run from it.¹⁴⁶

Thomas is very straightforward in acknowledging that healthy marriages take work. His encouragement for young, engaged couples is helpful for all marriages.

¹⁴⁴ Thomas, *Sacred Marriage*, 12.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 13.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., 129. Emphasis in the original.

If there is one thing young engaged couples need to hear, it's that *a good marriage is not something you find, it's something you work for*. It takes struggle. You must crucify your selfishness. You must at times confront, and at other times confess. The practice of forgiveness is essential. This is undeniably hard work! But eventually it pays off. Eventually, it creates a relationship of beauty, trust, and mutual support. It helps when we view our struggles in light of what they provide for us spiritually rather than in light of what they take from us emotionally.¹⁴⁷

An Eternal Perspective

Thomas suggests that one of the keys to dealing with suffering and trials in life is to live with an eternal perspective.

If we live without an eternal perspective, earthly trials become larger than life. Without the hope of heaven or the sense of the importance of a growing character and refinement, there is nothing to prepare for, nothing to look forward to; it is like practicing and practicing, but never getting to actually play a game. Life gets boring, tedious, and tiresome[...] God never promises to remove all our trials this side of heaven—quite the contrary!—but he does promise that there is meaning in each one. Our character is being perfected, our faith is being built, our 'heavenly reward' is being increased.¹⁴⁸

In addition to Thomas, Dan Allender and Tremper Longman III are two authors who also give direction in how to pursue healthy marriages. They are quick to acknowledge the priority of the marriage relationship. "[N]o relationship bears more importance to culture or to the church than marriage."¹⁴⁹ Allender and Longman also speak of the scripturally based groundwork that must go into cultivating a healthy marriage.

Growth in our marriages involves far more than doing something right; it involves an openness to think and pray, to ask and search the Bible for truth about ourselves and our marriages. It is clear that God blesses those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, not those who want to use him as a magician.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 133. Emphasis in the original.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 150-151.

¹⁴⁹ Allender and Longman, *Intimate Allies, Rediscovering God's Design for Marriage and Becoming Soul Mates for Life*, xviii.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., xxi.

Growing Glory

These same authors want their readers to know that there is something gloriously possible for marriages when people approach each other in “radical commitment.” They explain:

Marriage is the soil for growing glory. We must see our spouses in light of what they are meant to become, without turning bitter or complacent about who they are. Marriage requires a radical commitment to love our spouses as they are, while longing for them to become what they are not yet. Every marriage moves either toward enhancing one another’s glory or toward degrading each other.¹⁵¹

Allender states that “The goal of marriage is twofold: To reveal the glory of God and to enhance the glory of one’s spouse.”¹⁵² To do this, these authors suggest that people must seek to understand God’s purpose for marriage. “A marriage is no better than its purpose. And if the purpose is to live out the purposes of God, there will be a growing passion not only for God but also for one another.”¹⁵³

Marital Roles

Given the fact that men and women are different, part of the honest work involves addressing the biblical roles each person has within the marriage relationship. Dr. Bryan Chapell, former president and chancellor of Covenant Theological Seminary, looks at this issue in his book entitled, *Each for the Other*. Dr. Chapell touches directly on how marriage roles fulfill God’s purposes, beginning with male headship in the home. He writes, “The husband looks past his own rights to consider what is right for his spouse. He refuses to surrender his leadership role in the family but uses his biblical authority to

¹⁵¹ Ibid., 11. Emphasis in the original.

¹⁵² Ibid., 22.

¹⁵³ Ibid., 74.

make sure the family's resources and activities serve the best interests of his wife and children."¹⁵⁴

Dr. Chapell speaks clearly and intentionally to the stereotypes associated with biblical male headship by pointing to Jesus Christ as the perfect example of headship.

The Bible says that as the head of his bride, the church, Christ serves as her Savior (see Eph. 5:23). Jesus gave himself to make the church holy, radiant, and blameless (see 5:25-27). Thus headship involves taking responsibility—even to the point of personal sacrifice—for the well-being of another....The strength of character required to head a home for a lifetime makes masculinity defined only as taking care of self seem childish.¹⁵⁵

Chapell suggests that the role of a wife is God-honoring when that wife embraces the biblical teaching of submission, despite the opposition of many in our culture. He explains,

Despite our culture's aversion to anybody submitting to anybody, we cannot sidestep Paul's encompassing words about wives' submission. He underscores the importance of the responsibility with a compelling expression. Wives are to submit to their husbands "as to the Lord" (Eph. 5:22). This phrasing does not mean that a wife should treat her husband as though he were God. We are not to make idols out of anyone. Rather, the words indicate that a woman's submission is motivated not so much by a husband's deserving it as by love for God's purposes...As a woman submits to her husband, she looks over his shoulder to see the Lord who is saying, "You are ultimately doing this not for him but for me."¹⁵⁶

Evangelical Christian author, Carol Arnold, writes very openly about her first encounter with the biblical teaching of submission.

I remember the first time I read the verse that a wife was to be in submission to her husband. I couldn't believe it! And I certainly did not like it. I understood the concept in Ephesians 5:21 "Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ." But I was disturbed by the very next two verses, "Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the

¹⁵⁴ Bryan Chapell and Kathy Chapell, *Each for the Other, Marriage as It's Meant to Be* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2006), 25.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., 29.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., 93-94.

church.” The idea that my husband was to rule over me was offensive and unacceptable.¹⁵⁷

Arnold notes that her study of scripture eventually gave her a completely different perspective on this controversial issue of submission and God’s roles for husband and wife. She sums up a portion of this biblical teaching in her own words.

The first marriage God created was a union of two lovers who wanted what was best for the other. The man ruled, the woman submitted. It was a ruling love on the man’s part. It was a loving submission on the part of the wife. Because of our fallen, sinful, and distorted world, we cannot see how this relationship brings harmony and perfect unity. But when a wife submits to her husband, she is following God’s order and is meeting her husband’s need for authority.¹⁵⁸

Though Allender and Longman see Ephesians 5 as Paul teaching “mutual submission” in marriage,¹⁵⁹ they believe there are numerous other passages that teach the headship and authority of the husband and the submission of the wife.

But why are wives called to submit to their husbands more directly and more often than husbands are commanded to submit to their wives? Partly the answer is because the husband is the head of the household, and as unpopular as that concept is in our contemporary and authority-less society, it is still true and important. In any kind of organization—and a family is a social organization—someone must assume leadership. In the family, according to the Bible, that someone is the husband.¹⁶⁰

A Healthy Sex Life

Another foundational aspect of marriage that the literature advocates is a healthy sex life. Sue Johnson makes this number six in her seven conversations. She writes,

¹⁵⁷ Arnold, 104-105.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., 105.

¹⁵⁹ Allender and Longman, *Intimate Allies, Rediscovering God's Design for Marriage and Becoming Soul Mates for Life*, 178-179. “We do not know why the focus is as it is; perhaps in the particular occasions represented by the letters, the women needed a special reminder. But Ephesians reminds us that the overarching command is for mutual submission. Husband and wife need to submit to one another. Remember from earlier discussions that submission is yielding one’s individual will for the good of another.”

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., 193.

When partners are emotionally accessible, responsible, and engaged, sex becomes intimate play, a safe adventure. Secure partners feel free and confident to surrender to sensation in each other's arms, explore and fulfill their sexual needs, and share their deepest joys, longings, and vulnerabilities. Then, lovemaking is truly making love.¹⁶¹

Without that intimate security, sex becomes a risky business. Secular psychologist John Gottman revisits the necessity of healthy communication as it relates to sex.

No other area of a couple's life offers more potential for embarrassment, hurt, and rejection than sex. No wonder couples find it such a challenge to communicate about the topic clearly [...] Learn to talk to each other about sex in a way that lets you both feel safe. That means learning the right way to ask for what you want, and the appropriate way to react to your spouse's requests.¹⁶²

Joyful sexual fulfillment with minimal risk requires not only good communication, but dedication. William Doherty heartily endorses the regularity of sex in marriage. He cautions that life responsibilities and aging may play a part in diminishing the sex life of some couples.

What do I mean by the marriage needing sex? For sex to be the love bond it can be in marriage, we have to make it a regular ritual in our relationship. Like all rituals, we hope and expect it to give us joy.....It's easy for most couples to have regular sexual relations when they are young and energetic. It's harder when energies sag and life responsibilities mount. That's when it takes commitment to the relationship to keep sex a regular ritual. In consumer marriage, all it takes is for one spouse to not "feel like it" very often for the couple's sexual life to go on the shelf.¹⁶³

Gary Thomas is a Christian author that speaks very candidly about the importance of sex in marriage as a reflection of our relationship to God. He writes,

If sex is going to turn us toward God and each other, it is vital that we examine it with Christian understanding. Christian spirituality serves us in at least three ways here: It teaches us the goodness of sex while reminding us that there are things

¹⁶¹ Johnson, 186.

¹⁶² Gottman and Silver, 200-201.

¹⁶³ Doherty, 141.

that are more important than sex. It allows us to experience pleasure without making pleasure the idol of our existence. It teaches us that sex can certainly season our lives but also reminds us that sex will never fully nourish our souls. To begin to view sex in this positive sense, as a mirror of our desire and passion for God, the institution of marriage becomes all-important.¹⁶⁴

An echo of “man’s chief end”¹⁶⁵ keeps reverberating throughout the literature regarding this all important marriage relationship. This literature review has examined ways to build a healthier marriage and has seen much corroboration between secular and Christian authors. It has also broached the subject of how conflict in the church can strengthen a minister’s marriage. As the researcher continues to explore the connection between conflict in pastoral ministry and marriage, this chapter will now look at the third and final category.

Systems Theory

System theory comes from the perspective that the family and marriage relationships, as well as the local church, function as systems. This theory also teaches that each system that people are a part of is affected by every other system that those people are a part of. Systems theory does address the connectedness between church and family, but none of the literature researched deals directly with the purpose for this dissertation, i.e., pursuing health in ministry marriages while leading through interpersonal conflict in the local church. At this point, the researcher will seek to gain some clarity from the literature on systems theory.

Dr. Roberta Gilbert, in her recent book entitled, *Extraordinary Leadership*, gives readers a brief look at the development of systems theory through her following of the

¹⁶⁴ Thomas, *Sacred Marriage*, 200-201.

¹⁶⁵ *The Westminster Confession of Faith*, (Lawrenceville, GA: Christian Education and Publications, 2005, 2007), 355. Question/Answer #1 of the Westminster Shorter Catechism.

work of Dr. Murray Bowen. Bowen taught a different understanding of humanity and its problems than the commonly accepted teaching in his day. According to Gilbert, “[Bowen] saw that the existing study of the human, which then was based on what people thought and subjective interpretations of what clients said on the couch, was neither objective nor subject to replication.”¹⁶⁶

In Respect to Leadership

Bowen’s theory began to develop along the lines of thinking that, “...the family and not the individual, was the proper unit of study...”¹⁶⁷ How each member of the family interacts with the other members of the family system has a lot to say about leadership within that system. According to Gilbert, Bowen theory has much to say about leadership, and certainly about leadership within the clergy as well as within the family. She writes,

At a feeling level, most of us may be unsure that we know much about difficult family relationships. By any standard, they are complex. We have all botched them often. At any given time, they may not feel completely satisfying. Yet, it is in those family relationships that all the principles, and much of the learning, for extraordinary leadership reside. So if one can begin to understand the family, one can understand any human system. That complex organism, the organization, can begin to make sense and one can find a way to conduct oneself according to observed and tested principles *that work toward better functioning of both the self and the organization.*¹⁶⁸

Gilbert also declares that systems theory has much to say about leadership within the congregation during times of turbulence and unrest.

Bowen family systems theory is a most useful set of ideas for those in a leadership position. *The theory gives us a view of something about which most of*

¹⁶⁶ Gilbert, xi.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., xiv. Emphasis in the original.

us learned nothing at all in our training—emotional systems and how they work. Clergy people constantly reiterate that their education in no way addresses or prepares them for the intensity and turbulence of the emotional side of the congregations they serve....The ideas contained in the theory help us understand high and low level functioning in leadership and in life in general....They show us how to conduct ourselves in relationships in ways that are useful rather than destructive to them.¹⁶⁹

This review will now look in more detail at how the literature elucidates the basics of systems theory.

Interrelated Parts

“*System theory*,” Steinke has noted, “is a way of conceptualizing reality. It organizes our thinking from a specific vantage point. System thinking considers the *interrelatedness* of the parts. Instead of seeing isolated, unrelated parts, we look at the whole.”¹⁷⁰ Evangelical authors, Creech, Herrington, and Taylor write of the connectedness of the system and how each individual’s behavior affects others within the system.

We can observe human wired-togetherness in a family, workplace, or church. When anxiety rises, we become rather predictable. Our thinking becomes less clear and more reactive. Some of us withdraw; others engage in conflict. We begin to place or accept blame in an effort to avoid taking responsibility for making personal changes. We begin to see ourselves as the victim of others’ actions. We assign motives to others behavior or we take it personally.... In a living system, whenever a problem is chronic, just about everyone has a part to play in keeping it going.¹⁷¹

These authors make the comparison of systems theory within congregations using the Apostle Paul’s language of the body. “Our congregations are living systems.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., xvi. Emphasis in the original.

¹⁷⁰ Steinke, 30. Emphasis in the original.

¹⁷¹ Herrington, Creech, and Taylor, 31.

We are emotionally wired together with our brothers and sisters in the family of God (Romans 12:3-21).”¹⁷²

Pastoral counselor and former Presbyterian minister Ronald Richardson also speaks to the interconnectedness in the church system and how church leaders need to gain a new perspective. He writes,

One of the keys to functioning in a healthy manner as a church is for the leaders to look at the church as a system rather than as a collection of isolated people. Every church is more than a collection of individual members. People in the church, as in any group, are intricately interconnected. They exist in a system that is much bigger and more powerful than the individual members. Each person both influences and is influenced by everyone else.¹⁷³

Although systems theory asserts that each person “influences and is influenced by everyone else,” it is important to note that not everyone in the system has the same role, nor do they carry equal influence.

Each person does not affect, and is not affected by, others to an equal extent. Some members carry more weight or are more influential than others [...] Change in one member in a congregation can affect the whole. Most often the change in that one member has been preceded by changes in others. The system is the total of all members and their different actions and reactions.¹⁷⁴

Connection Between Systems

Richardson also makes a direct connection between how other systems affect things at home. “And this church system is just one of many systems that we all belong to and that affect each other. A bad day at the office (the work system) can lead to a bad

¹⁷² Ibid., 33. These authors also touch on Paul’s teaching of the body in 1 Cor. 12:12-13. (Pg. 29)

On page 110 the authors write, “Rather than demanding that the system revolve around us and our needs and preferences, we are able to follow Paul’s admonition to ‘look not only to your own interests but also to the interests of others’ (Philippians 2:4), realizing that they too are valuable parts of the whole.”

¹⁷³ Ronald W. Richardson, *Creating a Healthier Church, Family Systems Theory, Leadership, and Congregational Life* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1996), 26.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., 28.

night at home (the family system).”¹⁷⁵ In his book on systems theory and marriage counseling, entitled *Couples in Conflict*, Richardson makes an interesting analogy about the interconnectedness of systems. “My favorite image to describe a system is a hanging mobile. Each piece connects with the other pieces in a delicate balance. The movement of any one piece affects all the others.”¹⁷⁶

Writing from a non-Christian perspective, Jewish Rabbi Edwin Friedman speaks clearly to his belief that understanding the interconnectedness of family systems is crucial in dealing with any unhealthy issues that are inevitable in the various systems that make up people’s lives.

It is the thesis of this book that all clergymen and clergywomen, irrespective of faith, are simultaneously involved in three distinct families whose emotional forces interlock: the families within the congregation, our congregations, and our own. Because the emotional process in all of these systems is identical, unresolved issues in any one of them can produce symptoms in the others, and increased understanding of any one creates more effective functioning in all three. This integrated perspective of our personal and professional life turns crisis into opportunity and moves in the direction of lessening our stress.¹⁷⁷

Emotional Maturity

Just as in some of the leadership literature, the literature researched on systems theory also touts the importance of emotional maturity and its advantage over conflict and tension in any system. “The greater the level of emotional maturity in a system, the better equipped it is to handle a spike in the level of anxiety when one comes. The higher

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., 29.

¹⁷⁶ Ronald W. Richardson, *Couples in Conflict, a Family Systems Approach to Marriage Counseling* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2010), 15.

¹⁷⁷ Edwin H. Friedman, *Generation to Generation, Family Process in Church and Synagogue* (New York: The Guilford Press, 1985), 1.

the level of emotional maturity, the lower the level of constant and chronic anxiety.”¹⁷⁸

One writer uses the language of “emotional intelligence.” He defines emotional intelligence as, “*the ability to manage one’s own emotions proactively and respond to the emotions of others appropriately.*”¹⁷⁹

Dr. Roberta Gilbert describes emotional maturity in the following way.

“[Emotional maturity is] the ability of the individual to manage the emotional part of the self in an adaptive way. In a more mature person, long term goals and benefits will be given priority over short term ones when they conflict.”¹⁸⁰ In an earlier, but no less important work, Dr. Gilbert writes,

The more emotionally mature individual finds it easier to manage the individuality/togetherness forces. This person is a more emotionally complete self with less need for attachment to another person. Life is comfortable for this person, whether he or she is in relationship or alone. The more emotionally mature, or more highly differentiated, person has a greater amount of self with which to negotiate the problems of life, including those of relationship.¹⁸¹

Richardson focuses on the emotional maturity needed in the pastoral ministry and indicates how little has actually been written in this important area.

Many books have been written on the practice of ministry. However, very few of these are written from a consistent theoretical point of view [...] Even fewer of these books focus on the person of the pastor and how the pastor’s own emotional development and experience affect the pastor’s ministry [...] Experience teaches us, through some unfortunate but dramatic pastoral examples in recent years, that it is not just biblical or theological knowledge or level of piety or amount of

¹⁷⁸ Herrington, Creech, and Taylor, 33.

¹⁷⁹ Dr. Robert W. Burns, *Pastors Summit, Sustaining Fruitful Ministry* (St. Louis, MO: Covenant Theological Seminary, 2010), 25. Emphasis in the original.

¹⁸⁰ Gilbert, 189.

¹⁸¹ Roberta M. Gilbert, *Extraordinary Relationships, a New Way of Thinking About Human Interactions* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1992), 14.

prayer or depth of devotion or particular pastoral skills that lead to a successful ministry. Success also has to do with a pastor's level of emotional maturity.¹⁸²

Pete Scazzero contends that, "It is not possible for a Christian to be spiritually mature while remaining emotionally immature."¹⁸³ Failing to account for emotional maturity will be detrimental to pastors as they seek to lead within the congregational system. "Pastoral stress results from two common misapprehensions regarding the congregation as an emotional system. The first is to overlook its systemic nature; the second is to overlook its emotional nature."¹⁸⁴

Anxiety Induced Conflict

Whether in the church or home system, when members lack spiritual and emotional maturity, the literature suggests that anxiety will often be followed by conflict. Herrington writes, "Conflict is perhaps the most obvious of the symptoms in a living system. Conflict emerges during time of anxiety when togetherness forces combine with all-or-nothing thinking. People begin to insist on their way as the only way. As others disagree, the level of anxiety rises, and the conflict spirals upward."¹⁸⁵

The literature is also quick to note that one must not only deal with the conflict that arises, it is critical that one addresses the anxiety that lies beneath the conflict.

When it comes to dealing with a family or an organization, we often get stuck in a "medical model." Our cultural paradigm says that there is an individual or group of people in whom the problem resides. We diagnose the person or group as the problem and attempt to change them. Or we focus on the symptom (conflict) and

¹⁸² Ronald W. Richardson, *Becoming a Healthier Pastor, Family Systems Theory and the Pastor's Own Family*, ed. Howard Stone, Creative Pastoral Care and Counseling Series (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2005), 2.

¹⁸³ Scazzero and Bird, 52.

¹⁸⁴ Pappas, 108.

¹⁸⁵ Herrington, Creech, and Taylor, 58.

require all hands to receive special conflict management training, learning new techniques to communicate their feelings to each other. All of this is to ignore the nature of the system, whose anxiety produces the symptom in the first place.¹⁸⁶

This is particularly relevant to pastors. Peter Steinke gives an example of how destructive it can be within the church if those who suffer ongoing anxiety (called chronic anxiety) are not properly shepherded.

It is the chronically anxious individuals in the church family who are apt to conduct a “search and destroy mission.” They will not hesitate to impose their wills on others. They make hostages of their gifts, attendance, and participation. They employ their stewardship as brinkmanship. Their ultimate threat is to run away from home—transferring or terminating their membership if an action is not rescinded, a person is not removed, or a demand is not satisfied. These tactics are effective in church families that place a premium on peace and harmony. They will exchange integrity for tranquility. They cannot free themselves from the bondage of others.¹⁸⁷

Pappas adds, “Anxiety and its management is the force behind the observable patterns of family and congregational functioning.”¹⁸⁸

Much of the literature addresses the various problems threatening clergy families. These problems certainly can, and often do, impede the health of clergy marriages. As Friedman says,

Much has been written in recent years about the increasing number of problems in clergy families. The emphasis tends to be on the isolation, the “fish bowl” environment, the high expectations, the work load, the frequent moving that increases instability, and all of this compounded by the difficulty of developing lasting relationships or having friends one can really trust.¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁶ Ibid.

¹⁸⁷ Steinke, 25.

¹⁸⁸ Pappas, 108.

¹⁸⁹ Friedman, 277.

Leading through Healthy Change

How then, may it be possible for the interpersonal conflict in churches to be leveraged in such a way as to be a contributing factor to producing healthy clergy marriages? According to the literature, one important key may lie in the individual choices that leaders make and how those choices affect a positive and healthy change in the church and the home. Roberta Gilbert writes,

It only takes one to change a relationship pattern. One person, seeing the emotional process and thinking systems, beginning to focus on the contribution of self to the pattern and changing that, can dissolve the whole pattern. Because both people in the relationship contribute to the pattern and because they are part of an emotional system, if one changes, the pattern will change.¹⁹⁰

Rabbi Edwin Friedman suggests that the one person that can have an important effect on the system as a whole is the leader. The leader, in order to make a lasting impact on the system, must understand and practice self-differentiation. Friedman explains.

The basic concept of leadership through self-differentiation is this: If a leader will take primary responsibility for his or her own position as “head” and work to define his or her own goals and self, while *staying in touch* with the rest of the organism, there is more than a reasonable chance that the body will follow. There may be initial resistance but, if the leader can stay in touch with the resisters, the body will usually go along.¹⁹¹

Roberta Gilbert would describe this as a high level leader. “*High level leaders are high on the scale of differentiation of self.*”¹⁹² The contrast of this would be what Dr. Gilbert describes as a low level leader. “Low level leaders are low on the scale of

¹⁹⁰ Gilbert, *Extraordinary Leadership, Thinking Systems, Making a Difference*, 15.

¹⁹¹ Friedman, 229.

¹⁹² Gilbert, *Extraordinary Leadership, Thinking Systems, Making a Difference*, 93. Emphasis in the original.

differentiation of self. That means they are anxious, intense people, because low levels on the scale carry with them a higher ambient level of anxiety.”¹⁹³

Herrington, et al., bring this concept of differentiation of self and emotional maturity to the scriptures to further the explanation.

The emotional and spiritual maturity that we are calling differentiation of self does not happen by accident. It is not enough to want to be mature or to learn a way of appearing mature to others. True maturity comes from pursuing “training in godliness” (1 Timothy 4:7). This is the role of spiritual discipline in our lives.¹⁹⁴

Calmness and a Listening Ear

Along with self-differentiation, the literature gives some other helpful systems theory principles that can be used in the church as well as in the home. One of the primary issues spoken of has to do with how one deals with anxiety in the system. One important aspect is that people are to respond to anxiety with genuine calm. “The leader’s ability to calm himself or herself in the face of anxiety increases the likelihood of a well-thought-out, well-differentiated response that reflects beliefs and values.”¹⁹⁵ One writer speaks of this aspect of calmness in leadership by the term less anxious presence. “The leader’s main job, through his or her way of being in the congregation, is to create an emotional atmosphere in which greater calmness exists—to be a less anxious presence.”¹⁹⁶

¹⁹³ Ibid., 193.

¹⁹⁴ Herrington, Creech, and Taylor, 134.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., 69.

¹⁹⁶ Richardson, *Creating a Healthier Church, Family Systems Theory, Leadership, and Congregational Life*, 173.

Dr. Roberta Gilbert addresses the issues of anxiety and calm as it pertains to consulting. “The first goal in consulting is anxiety reduction. If people are intensely anxious, their thinking becomes unreliable....How do we calm anxiety? It doesn’t happen by telling people to be calm...The most important way to lower the emotional intensity in the consulting room is *for the consultant to be calm.*”¹⁹⁷

Another aspect connected to calmness is going to great lengths to listen well with the goal of trying to honestly understand the issues that arise in any system.

“Understanding people is more important than trying to do something to people, to ‘fix’ them in some way....Systems tend to get stuck when their members think they already know one another and, in particular, what motivates others...”¹⁹⁸ In this same vein, Dr. Roberta Gilbert speaks of those who have little time to listen to others. She addresses this in a category known as “overfunctioning.” She writes, “Overfunctioning speakers can adopt a know-it-all attitude, telling people what to do instead of defining self. The know-it-all is arrogant; demanding by his or her attitude that the audience accept what is being said, ‘Because I said so.’”¹⁹⁹

Psychologist, Dr. Daniel Goleman, although not speaking from the perspective of systems theory, nonetheless recognizes the importance of listening. Addressing listening in marriage, Goleman writes, “Listening is a skill that keeps couples together. Even in the heat of an argument, when both are seized by emotional hijackings, one or the other, and

¹⁹⁷ Gilbert, *Extraordinary Leadership, Thinking Systems, Making a Difference*, 143. Emphasis in the original.

¹⁹⁸ Richardson, *Creating a Healthier Church, Family Systems Theory, Leadership, and Congregational Life*, 175.

¹⁹⁹ Gilbert, *Extraordinary Leadership, Thinking Systems, Making a Difference*, 115.

sometimes both, can manage to listen past the anger, and hear and respond to a partner's reparative gesture."²⁰⁰

Clear Goals

Another important aspect that systems theory addresses is that leaders need to have clear goals based on solid principles. "As a leader, you need an ability to act on the basis of your principled beliefs in a way that is consistent with your goals."²⁰¹ Goals, rightly articulated, may serve to better the relationships in all of a person's systems. Gilbert explains, "It is probably safe to assume that a perfect relationship has never existed. So while they are elusive, ideals nevertheless are useful. Experience....has underscored the usefulness of clear thinking about the best that is theoretically possible. Without an idea of goals, progress is more difficult."²⁰²

From a Christian perspective, the literature points to Jesus as example for what the right goal should be for those in Christian leadership and pastoral ministry. According to Herrington, Creech, and Taylor, "For Jesus, 'the right thing' was determined by his understanding of what the Father wanted from him....He lived his life with a clear sense of mission: he was about his Father's business (Luke 2:49)...Jesus had aligned himself with the Father's plan and purpose; the redemptive mission of the Kingdom had become his mission."²⁰³

²⁰⁰ Daniel Goleman, *Emotional Intelligence, Why It Can Matter More Than IQ* (New York: Bantam Deli, 2006), 145.

²⁰¹ Richardson, *Creating a Healthier Church, Family Systems Theory, Leadership, and Congregational Life*, 180.

²⁰² Gilbert, *Extraordinary Leadership, Thinking Systems, Making a Difference*, 79.

²⁰³ Herrington, Creech, and Taylor, 18-19.

Christian author Peter Scazzero, speaking of churches that are emotionally healthy, agrees that spiritually mature leaders must have a goal of being committed followers of Jesus.

In emotionally healthy churches, people intentionally follow the model of Jesus. They focus on loving well, recognizing the indispensable mark of spiritual maturity is not about recognition, numbers, spiritual gifts, or biblical knowledge. The essence of genuine spiritual life is to love—God, ourselves, and other people.²⁰⁴

In brief summary, the literature pertaining to systems theory supports and builds upon the qualities of an effective leader discussed earlier. It gives vital counsel to pastors who must lead both in the church and at home by further defining the vantage point from which he might lead. As one considers the pastor and his family, how they are affected by conflict in the church, and how their marriage may be strengthened thereby- systems theory may provide a critical connection.

²⁰⁴ Scazzero and Bird, 180.

CHAPTER THREE: PROJECT METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to investigate how pastors pursue health in their marriages as they lead through conflict in the local church. In order to gain some answers to this problem, the following research questions were used:

1. In what ways has the health of your marriage been challenged during times of church conflict?
2. In what ways have you sought to separate your marriage from your ministry for the purpose of pursuing health in your marriage?
3. In what ways has the pastor's ability to lead effectively during times of conflict in the church played a positive role in producing health in your marriage?

Design of the Study

This study assumed that ongoing learning and growing would take place in the context of ministry life and experience. The research design of this study followed a qualitative approach. Sharan B. Merriam, professor of adult and continuing education at the University of Georgia, in her book entitled, *Qualitative Research and Case Study Applications in Education*, defines the key philosophical assumption of qualitative method as, "based on the view that reality is constructed by individuals interacting with their social worlds."²⁰⁵ Therefore, a qualitative study not only allowed for an in-depth study of relevant literature, but helped us to better understand the point of view of pastors and their wives from their own personal experiences.

²⁰⁵ Sharan B. Merriam, *Qualitative Research and Case Study Applications in Education* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1998), 6.

In light of this, the type of study used is known as “case study.” According to Merriam, “A case study design is employed to gain an in-depth understanding of the situation and meaning for those involved. The interest is in process rather than outcomes, in context rather than a specific variable, in discovery rather than confirmation.”²⁰⁶ That qualitative research, versus quantitative research, is focused on process is a primary reason why this type of research is so important for projects such as this. What is ultimately discovered in research of this nature will not rely on numbers and statistics, but—in this case—how pastors and their wives richly describe and then seek to personally evaluate the nature of church conflict on their marriages from personal experience. In addition to this, qualitative research is inclusive also of how researchers are able to document and then describe what they have learned from, not only the literature, but also from those being interviewed.

With this in mind, there is a need to recognize the responsibility of the researcher in qualitative study method. “In a qualitative study the investigator is the primary instrument for gathering and analyzing data and, as such, can respond to the situation by maximizing opportunities for collecting and producing meaningful information.”²⁰⁷ For a better understanding of the type of research that was used for this project, it should be helpful to summarize Merriam’s five key characteristics of qualitative research.

First, it is important to note that qualitative research is “*interested in understanding the meaning people have constructed*, that is, how they make sense of

²⁰⁶ Ibid., 19.

²⁰⁷ Ibid., 21.

their world and the experiences they have in the world.”²⁰⁸ Secondly, “*the researcher is the primary instrument for data collection and analysis*. Data are mediated through this human instrument, the researcher, rather than through some inanimate inventory, questionnaire, or computer.”²⁰⁹

Another important aspect of qualitative research is that, at some point, it gets the researcher out of the library and into the living room or office of others to get their perspective. Merriam writes, “A third characteristic of qualitative research is that *it usually involves fieldwork*. The researcher must physically go to the people, setting, site, institution (the field) in order to observe behavior in its natural setting.”²¹⁰

It is interesting to note that there are many differences between qualitative and quantitative research. This is one reason why the next area in the qualitative research paradigm is important. Merriam explains one obvious contrast between the two types of research in this way.

Fourth, qualitative research *primarily employs an inductive research strategy*. That is, this type of research builds abstractions, concepts, hypotheses, or theories rather than tests existing theory. Often qualitative studies are undertaken because there is a lack of theory, or existing theory fails to adequately explain a phenomenon. There are thus no hypotheses to be deduced from theory to guide the investigation. Qualitative researchers build toward theory from observations and intuitive understandings gained in the field. In contrast to deductive researchers who ‘hope to find data to match a theory, inductive researchers hope to find a theory that explains their data’ (Goetz and LeCompte, 1984, p. 4).²¹¹

The fifth and final key characteristic of qualitative research focuses on process. Merriam explains,

²⁰⁸ Ibid., 6. Emphasis in the original.

²⁰⁹ Ibid., 7. Emphasis in the original.

²¹⁰ Ibid. Emphasis in the original.

²¹¹ Ibid. Emphasis in the original.

[S]ince qualitative research focuses on process, meaning, and understanding, *the product of a qualitative study is richly descriptive*. Words and pictures rather than numbers are used to convey what the researcher has learned about a phenomenon. There are likely to be researcher descriptions of the context, the players involved, and the activities of interest. In addition, data in the form of participants' own words, direct quotations from documents, excerpts of videotapes, and so on, are likely to be included to support the findings of this study.²¹²

Participant Criteria

The researcher interviewed three Presbyterian Church in America pastors and their spouses. The choice of the PCA denomination was very intentional for a number of reasons. For example, the nature of Presbyterian polity will play a distinct role in the nature of the pastor's leadership. Given the fact that a Presbyterian Teaching Elder²¹³ is only one of a plurality of other elders will mean, at the very minimum, that he should not have to bear the burden of conflict in the church alone. In addition to that, the PCA is the denomination that the researcher ministers in and knows best. For the researcher, this was not merely a project to be completed, but rather a desire to learn and to benefit from the situations and experiences of others. The researcher's own knowledge and experience in the PCA has been beneficial, it is believed, in the process of interviewing the participants as well as in analyzing the data collected.

Each of the pastors interviewed were required to have a minimum of five years of experience in the pastoral ministry. As stated earlier, much church conflict comes during this timeframe and, according to statistics already cited,²¹⁴ most of the pastors who leave the ministry do so by or before their fifth year in ministry. For this reason, it was crucial

²¹² Ibid., 8. Emphasis in the original.

²¹³ Morton H. Smith, *Commentary on the Book of Church Order of the Presbyterian Church in America*, Sixth ed. (Taylors, SC: Presbyterian Press, 2007). See chapters 8 and 12 for a description of Teaching Elders and Ruling Elders and a definition of their respective responsibilities in the church.

²¹⁴ See footnote #9.

to interview pastors who have gone through this length of time in ministry at a minimum so that they were able to share their experiences.

In addition to this, all of the men interviewed were either senior or solo pastors at the present time or had been senior or solo pastors at some time in their ministry in the PCA. Although Presbyterian polity is very helpful in that, ideally, the pastor does not face church conflict alone, it is also true that in many situations, the pastor is the person who is seen as the lead in casting vision and directing change. For at least these reasons, the senior or solo pastor will usually have had much experience in addressing interpersonal conflict in the church.

The pastor's age also played a role in the selection process. Merely from the standpoint of life and ministry experience—as well as how these experiences are processed—the researcher determined that it was important that each pastor be not less than forty years of age. From this perspective the pastor will, presumably, have not only had many church experiences, but processed those experiences from the perspective of someone who hopefully has the wisdom of longevity in life along with his theological and pastoral acumen.²¹⁵

Along with the criteria chosen for the length of time in the pastorate, it was important to interview couples who had been married for a minimum of five years. Again, it is important for this project to seek to discover ways in which the pastor and his spouse had worked through the difficulties connected to conflict in the church and how these had affected their marriage.

²¹⁵ The researcher readily concedes that longevity in life does not necessarily translate to the proper wisdom needed, by grace, to pastor a church and participate in marriage in ways that are honorable and pleasing to God.

Data Collection

Data collection is, without any doubt, very important to a research project. In a qualitative research project, the process of data collection will include interviews. This is important for a number of reasons, but primarily because the interviewee is addressing events in life that have happened in the past. “Interviewing is necessary when we cannot observe behavior, feelings, or how people interpret the world around them. It is also necessary to interview when we are interested in past events that are impossible to replicate.”²¹⁶

As part of the preparation, a questionnaire was sent out so that information could be collected from each of the pastors. This information sought and received was as follows:

1. Age:
2. What is the name of the present church you are serving?
 - a. What is your ministry position/title? (e.g., Senior Pastor, Solo, etc.)
 - b. How long have you served in this current position?
 - c. Have you served in any other position in this church?
 - d. List all previous churches you have served in and your position/title and years served.
3. How many years have you been married?
4. Does your wife work outside the home?
5. Number of children and their ages.

In addition to this, each of the participants was sent information to help to prepare them for the interviews. This information included the problem and purpose statement along with an introduction to information pertaining to the significance of the study. Lastly, each couple was sent a copy of the research questions along with possible interview questions. This information was meant to help them as they were processing their experiences as related to the study and how they believed that these experiences

²¹⁶ Merriam, 72.

have affected their lives in both positive and negative ways. The information sent out is as follows:

Interview Protocol

RQ. #1. In what ways has the health of your marriage been challenged during times of interpersonal conflict in the church?

a. In what ways has conflict in the church had obvious *negative* effects on your marriage?

Are/were there specific areas of sanctification that you can readily recognize your resistance to, which may have prolonged these negative effects?

b. How have you been intentional in addressing this negativity?

c. How has interpersonal conflict in the church challenged your marriage in a *positive* direction?

d. How have you been intentional in building on this positive direction? Describe specific instances when you recognized a biblical responsibility to follow, and chose to, by grace, and it made a difference?

RQ. #2. In what ways have you sought to separate your marriage from your ministry for the purpose of pursuing health in your marriage?

a. In what ways have you intentionally sought to keep interpersonal conflict in the church from spilling over into your marriage?

Examples may include but are not limited to: Guarded personal time and time management; personal spiritual development; vacations; prayer together, etc.

b. At times when you were unable to keep the interpersonal conflict from coming home, what were the results?

c. In what ways would you describe your emotional health?

1). During times of conflict.

2). Now.

According to Pete Scazzero, in his book, *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality*, examples of emotional health may include but are not limited to:²¹⁷

- *Naming, recognizing, and managing our own feelings.
- *Initiating and maintaining close and meaningful relationships.
- *Identifying with and having compassion for others.
- *Being aware of how our past affects our present.
- *Developing the capacity to express our thoughts and feelings clearly, both verbally and non-verbally.
- *Accurately self-assessing our strengths, limits, and weaknesses and freely sharing them with others.
- *Learning the capacity to resolve conflict maturely and negotiate solutions that consider the perspectives of others.
- * Distinguishing and appropriately expressing our sexuality and sensuality.
- *Grieving well.

d. In what ways has your emotional health contributed to the stability and health of your marriage?

e. How important is communication in your marriage? Explain.

f. Do you and your spouse regularly practice forgiveness with each other?

g. Describe how you see your role as husband to your wife?

*Pastor to your wife?

²¹⁷ Peter Scazzero, *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality, Unleash a Revolution in Your Life in Christ* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2006), 45. This is a partial list from Scazzero's book.

*Wife to your husband/pastor?

h. Wives, do you see yourself as a confidant to your husband? Husbands, is your wife your closest personal confidant?

i. Describe/Define a biblically healthy marriage. Do you believe that you have a biblically healthy marriage?

RQ. #3. In what ways has the pastor's ability to lead effectively during times of interpersonal conflict played a positive role in producing health in your marriage?

a. Describe your leadership style.

b. In what ways has your leadership style in the church had a positive impact on your marriage?

c. How would you describe your ability to manage unhealthy conflict?

d. How did you see conflict addressed in your home when you were growing up?

e. In what ways has your parents handling of conflict helped or hindered you in your marriage?

f. How has Presbyterian polity been a help/hindrane in times of leading through interpersonal conflict in the church?

In the interview process the semi-structured interview protocol was used. This is important for a number of reasons including the fact that there is a built in flexibility to the interview while not being entirely unstructured. Merriam explains,

In this type of interview either all of the questions are more flexibly worded, or the interview is a mix of more or less structured questions.[...] But the largest part of the interview is guided by a list of questions or issues to be explored, and neither the exact wording nor the order of the questions is determined ahead of time. This format allows the researcher to respond to the situation at hand, to the emerging worldview of the respondent, and to new ideas on the topic.²¹⁸

²¹⁸ Merriam, 74.

The interviews were conducted either in the pastor's home or in his office at the church. Each of the interviews was conducted by interviewing the pastor's wife first and then the pastor. Neither of the spouses was present for the one-on-one interviews of the other spouse. Each of the one on one interviews lasted approximately forty-five minutes. After this, the pastor and spouse were brought together to be interviewed for another thirty-five to forty minutes. The interviews were recorded in order to make it possible to transcribe them at a later time. After each set of interviews, a follow up e-mail was sent to the couple thanking them again for their participation.

Data Analysis

The importance of putting in the diligent effort to seek to properly analyze the data collected cannot be overstated. "Data analysis is the process of making sense out of the data. And making sense out of the data involves consolidating, reducing, and interpreting what people have said and what the researcher has seen and read—it is the process of making meaning."²¹⁹

After the interviews were transcribed, the researcher immediately began to do some preliminary data analysis. The data was analyzed by using the constant comparative method of analysis.

Basically, the constant comparative method involves comparing one segment of data with another to determine similarities and differences (for example, one quote about returning to school as an adult with another quote by the same or another participant). Data are grouped together on a similar dimension. The dimension is tentatively given a name; it then becomes a category. The overall object of this analysis is to seek patterns in the data.²²⁰

²¹⁹ Ibid., 178.

²²⁰ Ibid., 18.

The margins of each transcribed page were used to write down thoughts and observations which helped in early development of themes and patterns. After reading and taking notes on each interview, the researcher began the process of comparing one interview with the others as a continuation of looking for patterns and themes in the interviews. As themes began to emerge, the researcher noted them in the margins for later inspection.

To do this effectively, it was necessary for the researcher to go over the transcripts numerous times. It is not always readily apparent what the categories should be. “Devising categories is largely an intuitive process, but it is also systematic and informed by the study’s purpose, the investigators orientation and knowledge, and the meanings made explicit by the participants themselves.”²²¹ The end result of data analysis is straightforward. Merriam states this succinctly and to the point when she writes, “In summary, data analysis is a process of making sense out of the data.”²²²

Researcher Position

In a qualitative study, the researcher serves as the primary instrument for data collection and analysis. Although there are certainly positive aspects of this, researchers can also bring their own limitations to the process. “[T]he investigator as human instrument is limited by being human—that is, mistakes are made, opportunities are missed, personal biases interfere. Human instruments are as fallible as any other research instrument.”²²³

²²¹ Ibid., 179.

²²² Ibid., 192.

²²³ Ibid., 20.

The researcher's position is one of being an insider by virtue of being a PCA pastor. And like those who have been interviewed, the researcher has also experienced struggles and conflict in the local church. It is then possible that researcher bias could enter into the process of analysis, not only because of the struggles, but primarily because of a biblical worldview. It is believed by the researcher that scripture does, at least in principle, teach that conflict and pain in the local church does not need to cause marriages to be unhealthy. But rather, there is every reason to hope that marriages will grow and flourish as pastors and their wives respond, by grace, to the suffering experienced in a way that is honoring and pleasing to God.

Limitations of the Study

Due to limited resources and time constraints, only three ministers and their spouses were interviewed for this study. In addition to this, each of the ministers was from the same denomination. The interview analysis, then, is not necessarily applicable to all times, cultures, and situations. In an interview process of this limited scope, there will be many areas of concern that will not be addressed in depth. In addition, there are already stated limitations on the literature available. For the researcher, this is both a negative as well as a positive reality. Negative, of course, because there are not large pools of previous research to benefit from. Because this is true, there is also a positive aspect of the study because of the hope that this project will prove to fill a void in the research in this area of pastoral life with the hope that it will be a benefit the church.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to investigate how pastors pursue health in their marriages as they lead through conflict in the local church. In order to gain some answers to this problem, the following research questions were used to guide the study:

1. In what ways has the health of your marriage been challenged during times of church conflict?
2. In what ways have you sought to separate your marriage from your ministry for the purpose of pursuing health in your marriage?
3. In what ways has the pastor's ability to lead effectively during times of conflict in the church played a positive role in producing health in your marriage?

Introduction to Research Participants

As mentioned already, each of the pastors chosen to be interviewed for this project have been in ministry for a minimum of five years. Each is married and has been married for a minimum of five years as well. The average length of the marriages of the participants in this study is eighteen years. In addition, none of the pastors who participated in this project are less than forty years old. The average age of the pastors who participated in the interviews for this study is fifty years old.

In the course of the research for this project, six people were interviewed: three pastors and their wives. Each participant was interviewed individually and then each couple was interviewed together for a total of nine interviews. In order to protect the identities of the research participants, each couple will be identified with a pseudonym beginning with the first three letters of the English alphabet.

Couple one is Andy and Arlene Anderson. Andy and Arlene have been married for fifteen years and have five children. Couple two is Bob and Bonnie Brown. Bob and Bonnie have been married for twenty-four years and have two children. Couple three is Charlie and Carol Cunningham. The Cunninghams have been married for fifteen years and have three children.

The major themes addressed in this research are the themes of marriage, ministry, and interpersonal conflict in the church, as well as how each of these is interrelated in the lives of pastors and their wives. This section will be structured according to the research questions noted above.

Marital Challenges

RQ. #1 In what ways has the health of your marriage been challenged during times of interpersonal conflict in the church?

The Challenge to See Marriage from God's Perspective

All of the couples who participated in this project were married before entering the ministry, and while each couple experienced differences in learning to deal with how interpersonal conflict in the church has affected their marriages, each found seeing marriage from God's perspective absolutely imperative. They recognized that ministry marriages are unique in certain ways, but affirmed that marriages in general will need to be ever moving toward and aligning with God's plan if they are to remain genuinely healthy.

An important aspect of the data is in how each participant defined a healthy marriage. Beginning with the wives, Bonnie Brown described a healthy marriage using practical phrases like "mutually supportive," which she described as "side by side,

pressing toward the same work....” The work spoken of was connected to the ministry of her husband Bob, but also the family. Bonnie further described health in the marriage in terms of a biblical foundation which included being “full of forgiveness, informed by scripture, and fueled by prayer.”

Carol Cunningham also described a healthy marriage in its relation to the scriptures. She spoke of the marriage being “Christ-centered” and then she went on to talk about aspects of headship and submission. There was never any sense in which the submission of the wife deprived her of being her own person and using her gifts to contribute to the marriage. She articulated with certainty that a wife should have personal input into the decisions of the marriage. Carol went on to name some practices of a healthy marriage as guided by scripture, including praying together and worshiping together.

Arlene Anderson’s view of a healthy marriage was dependent upon a biblical foundation as well. She noted that the couple must be, “dependent on the Lord” in everyday life. She also noted the freedom that should be a part of any healthy marriage, which allows for speaking and living completely without fear.

The pastors gave their respective views on a healthy marriage as well. Unlike Arlene’s view, which was broadly stated, her husband Andy was more detailed in his view of marriage. Andy said that “[a] biblically healthy marriage reflects the relationship of God with his people.” He went on to note Ephesians 5 as the scripture passage that he looks to, to define a healthy marriage. He emphasized the roles of the husband and wife in the marriage from that passage, which he said spoke of the husband “sacrificing for [his] wife and caring for her and she’s submitting to [him], but not in a worldly sense, but

in a biblical sense.” He added some very practical out-workings of those concepts by noting the importance of respect and putting her needs ahead of his own.

Bob Brown’s view of a healthy marriage focused on his increasing awareness of his own depravity. He explained this in the context of how God ministers his grace through the marriage partner. He went on to say that a healthy marriage includes deep sharing as well as learning to better communicate with one another.

Lastly, Charlie Cunningham describes a healthy marriage as one in which intimacy is being developed, in his words, by “building love for one another.” For him, this intimacy would include building trust as you grow in your knowledge of one another through the life events you experience together. Charlie also speaks of how the marriage relationship must be “rooted in Christ” so that each is growing in the faith.

In addressing the first research question, the couples interacted with the idea of being challenged in their marriages during times of interpersonal conflict in the church from both a negative as well as a positive perspective. Over the course of the interviews, the couples shared that living in marriage apart from a scriptural perspective would be an aberration and would always ultimately bring problems. In other words, their goal is to live in marriage according to God’s plan for marriage. The negative challenges that the couples had faced were connected to times in which there were temptations to stray from the healthy plan for marriage given in the scriptures.

Bonnie spoke to this reality in her life when she recounted times in which she had placed unfair expectations on her husband Bob. For example, she recalled times early in their marriage in which she had expected him to be available to her emotionally as soon as he arrived home from work, which she now sees as a very unrealistic expectation. She

noted another instance in which she admitted to becoming angry because Bob wasn't home as soon as she expected him to be. In later reflection upon the incident she realized that, at the time, she was not really concerned about what was happening or the reason that he might have been delayed, just that he was not where he was supposed to be at the appointed time and had not even bothered to call.

When he did arrive at home, rather than waiting to see what had happened, Bonnie admitted that she had “unleashed on him for not having contacted me, for having just expected that I would wait on him indefinitely and [I] was very demanding...” Bonnie noted that she had caused pain to her husband and potential damage to their marriage in these incidents. She saw the need for repentance as well as the need to stop placing unrealistic expectations on Bob. Bonnie sums up these incidents that she spoke of in their marriage as follows:

Often times it would happen that I would build up that anger, but the experience of going through that and really learning [that] there are two perspectives here, there are two people here. We are working together with what's happened in both of our lives when we come back together at the end of the day. And to learn to stay my heart to recognize, I don't know what's happening and I have no right to have my husband on a time schedule that he shows up here or there. I don't even want him on that.

Carol reflects on times in which her marriage was challenged in a negative way by stresses within the church that could have had the potential to cause problems in her marriage to Charlie. She explained, “If I'm kind of down on my game, if you want, if I'm not in the best place spiritually, or if I'm really tired, you know, that could definitely spark an argument for sure, because then I'm reacting to his stress and dealing with that at home.” Carol expressed intentionality about desiring not to allow any stressful situations to cause a negative reaction between her and Charlie.

As has already been noted, each of these couples speaks of their desire to have a marriage patterned after God's plan given in his word. One of the biblical elements of marriage that came up over the course of the interviews is the biblical teaching of male headship and leadership in the home. In fact, every one of these couples mentioned this element as being very important for the sake of a healthy marriage. Bonnie notes that understanding and affirming biblical roles in this way is an ongoing source of grace in her life:

Recognizing that Bob is the leader of our home and the leader of our union together, that he holds that position that is a God-given position and accepting that as a good grace to me, that the Lord has provided me with a leader, that I can follow him, I can trust him. I can, even when I disagree with him, I can take the risk that God actually knows what he's doing in making Bob our leader within our home.

Bonnie goes on to articulate that her role as a submissive wife does not mean passivity or lack of freedom to express her disagreements, if there are any. She describes a peace that comes to her in knowing that this is what the Lord has ordained.

Carol also affirms male headship in the home. This headship is not to be authoritarian in an unbiblical way, but it is a real authority. Each spouse is contributing to the decisions of the family, but as Carol notes, "...when there are differences, the wife should submit to the guidance and headship of her husband." Carol also notes how her godly submission to Charlie has grown over the years and that this has had a very positive and healthy influence for good in their marriage and certainly at times of stress in their marriage. She goes on to say,

As far as my role as a wife, I feel like that's one of the chief things I can do, is not to ignore things or not share or work through conflict but to rightly say things and work through things [while] using a gentle tone. "A harsh word stirs up anger, but a gentle word turns away wrath.".... [B]ecause, when stresses come, if I respond

in harshness or lack of submissiveness, in even the attitude of it, that can just bring you apart.

In summary, we have seen that these couples are committed to living in their marriages in accordance with biblical principles and precepts as a very important first principle for a healthy marriage. They have clearly articulated that any time that there was a temptation to live in marriage apart from the teaching of the scriptures it had a negative result in their marriage.

The Challenge to Faithfully Navigate the Interrelatedness of Marriage and Ministry

In the lives of the couples who participated in this research project, many of the challenges they have faced were related to the interpersonal tensions and conflicts that took place in the life of their church, which were then brought into the pastor's home. Each couple has noted differing challenges to the health of their marriage related to understanding the interrelationship between marriage and ministry from God's perspective.

Arlene mentions times in which the negative effects of interpersonal conflict in the church has caused stress in her marriage to the extent of feeling "emotionally distant" and sometimes "irritated or aggravated." Yet, in spite of that, she shared that she has grown personally by seeking to act in a godly way toward those who have been in conflict with her husband, the pastor. She notes that the conflict has "actually made me reach out to that person a little more and greet them, smile at them, ask them a question, when normally I wouldn't. If there hadn't been any [conflict], I wouldn't have felt the need to pursue them." Arlene notes that these situations of tension or conflict have had a positive effect on her which ultimately relates positively to her marriage to Andy. She

mentions that it has caused her to do acts of service and kindness that she would not have normally done.

Arlene's husband Andy has noted that over time their marriage has continued to grow in a positive direction certainly connected to the times that he has been able to come home and just talk about some hurtful thing that someone has said to him. From initially being moody and brooding over the situation, it was an important help to him to have Arlene's compassionate and sympathetic ear.

Carol also affirms that what might have been a very negative situation of conflict in the church turned out to be something positive for her and Charlie. She notes an incident in which there was a lot of stress connected to a committee that she and Charlie were serving on. They were both being treated in a very negative way, but they knew that they had each other and Carol notes that the conflict actually "brought us together."

Carol spoke of another situation in which some in the church were causing real problems for Charlie and being very outspoken against him as well as very divisive. She notes how easily it could have been for this to be a very negative thing in their marriage because of the stress. She explained, "He would come home and, you know there are choices between how you respond to things, when they happen at home. Like when the kids are disobeying or we are not seeing eye to eye on some, whatever, and so that could make things way more intense than they need to be." Carol notes that the fact that they were "committed to trying to take care of each other" kept this particular situation from being negative in their marriage and enabled it to be a source of growth.

Bob spoke candidly of the times when he and Bonnie faced challenges that turned out to have a positive effect on their marriage. "When Bonnie and I were first married,

six months into that, we were in our church and already dealing with these kinds of things. There were a lot of times when she was a life line for me. [She would] help me think and kind of reassure me and I needed that.”

Bob spoke of other times when he has looked to Bonnie to give him honest perspective about negative comments that others in the church have made about his ministry. He speaks very highly of being able to trust her feedback which has contributed to positive growth and health in their marriage over the years. He explained how, “...in a fairly objective way, Bonnie is not given to flattery, so I kind of feel like she’s telling me the truth when she’s being supportive and encouraging.... It has happened many times and would carry me through and would kind of be mostly what I needed in the midst of conflict so that I could weather.”

On the other hand, Bonnie notes the reality of having grown at times, when the health of her marriage was challenged, even by her own negative responses to Bob. She spoke of having received him into their home with “anger and frustration” when in hindsight she recognized that she should have handled things differently. She elaborated.

To recognize that the damage has been done and the pain has been caused and to repent and to talk through, both my process and his as we were coming in and talk through that experience... that was where to go at that point, but that’s an example of failure on my part to recognize how much the stress that’s outside could impact him, and how my being prepared to receive him at the end of the day no matter whatever else was happening.

Bonnie affirms that despite the difficulties of ministry, there has been more positive and healthy growth in their lives and marriage rather than lingering negative effects. She explains,

I think that if I would characterize it overall over the length of our marriage that it has been more positive than it has negative, by far, but the struggles in the church can be really significant and really pressure-filled. But the safety of our marriage,

the safety of home becomes that much more beautiful, that much more precious to us.... But when there is conflict and pressure, there's a whole lot of counting on each other and it's a beautiful thing when that happens, to be able to lean on each other, to be able to count on each other for that safety.

Charlie notes the sanctifying effect in marriage when seeking to respond

biblically in the face of interpersonal conflict in the church:

[T]hat's the great thing about marriage, because, in the positive way, if she's handling something and I can see it, I can say, "She's really handling this right biblically, and I'm not." She helped draw me in that direction and vice versa. She's getting frustrated and wondering about this response to this, I could say, "You know God is sovereign over all of this, we can trust him. God's not asleep at the wheel".... And so I think that we really, really grew together in trusting the providence of God in all of that.

To summarize what has been noted pertaining to the first research question, the couples interviewed have shown that they have been challenged in both negative as well as positive ways in their marriages during times of interpersonal conflict in the church. The overall picture from these couples would be in agreement with Bonnie that there has been more positive than negative. They also have noted the importance of seeking to build marriages that desire to be faithful to the scriptures.

The second research question seeks to investigate ways in which the couples have been intentional in making life adjustments that would address interpersonal tension and conflict potentially brought into the marriage by the pastor.

Limited Separation of Marriage and Ministry

R.Q. #2 In what ways have you sought to separate your marriage from your ministry for the purpose of pursuing health in your marriage?

Over the course of the interviews it became apparent that these couples, in their marriages and ministry situations, recognized their need for rest, after dealing with day to day pressures. They realized that without rest and separation these pressures would

deplete all of their energy, which could enable tension to build within the marriage. The couples spoke openly of ways in which this has been addressed in their marriages.

Guarded Marriage and Family Time

Each of the three couples spoke of the need to take a break from the day to day of ministry. Every couple interviewed spoke highly of having one day off during the week for the couples to just spend time together. Charlie spoke specifically about the need to have Monday as his day off: “One thing I did....is that I shifted my day off from Friday to Monday.... I highly recommend that to anyone, because I was losing Friday. If I’m not spending time with Carol or we’re just getting little nuggets here and there,....spending time together....helps all of it; just being able to spend time, to be able to appreciate one another.”

Bonnie also noted the importance of that one day off for Bob each week for them to just be together as a couple. She elaborated,

I would say probably the most consistent and helpful thing that we did going through the worst of that conflict was to get away, it was to step out, and it wasn’t like we turned our back on the church and didn’t talk about the church during those times, but it was protected space. We weren’t available by phone, it was predictable. I knew when Monday rolled around, unless somebody died, we were going to be able to be together to talk through those things and also to play, and to just enjoy being together and to check in on those emotions, “How are you doing? How did that feel?” Just time that wasn’t driven so much by the ministry.

The interviews revealed another aspect of getting a break from ministry for the purposes of pursuing health in the marriage. The couples put a priority on time spent together as families, including taking time to go on vacation. Although vacations were spoken of very highly by all, Arlene admitted that they do not often take the time to get away. She observed,

That's probably one area, there's probably more, but that's probably one area that we need to take better care of. And this vacation that we're getting ready to do only came because I told a friend of mine, "We need to go on vacation together—our families—we just need to do it!" Because they have a lot going on....we just met one Saturday morning for coffee and said, "Let's do it!"

Andy also notes that the Andersons love doing things together as a family, including "running to gymnastics or softball....but we tend to be homebodies."

Healthy Communication

Another issue that came to light in these interviews is the need for ongoing communication, which includes the communication between the pastor and spouse as well as communication between each of the spouses in other relationships that serve to bring health to the marriage as well as the church. Each of the participants in these interviews talked about the need for healthy communication in the marriage and expressed concern about knowing when and when not to speak about certain church issues that could potentially cause stress within the marriage if discussed.

As far as the wives are concerned, each of them appreciated the need for their husbands to keep confidences in the ministry. And yet, they were open and willing to be a listening ear and confidante for their husband at any time that it was needed and asked for. The pastors agreed that it is often helpful when the wife has less information about all that may be going on in the church, which can be healthy for her personally as well as relationally within the church. Charlie spoke specifically about the need to keep Carol uninformed at times:

Carol would probably tell you, a lot of things go on in the church and she'll be the last to hear. We kind of joke about that from time to time but that's the reality. I try not to bring session meetings, issues within the church into the home in that sense. Of course....she's my confidante. And so, there's that balance on what I talk to her about and get her feedback and she's eager to help me, but then I have to be very careful about how far that goes. And so one way [of doing that] is to

have the principle in mind, that what goes on at session as a rule [we don't] talk about it. Or if there's something particularly a matter that shouldn't be talked about, I would just say, "You don't want to know."

Andy spoke candidly about the differences of communication between a husband and wife in ministry as compared with the communication between a couple who are in some other type of vocation, as well as the need to be guarded in his communication for the ongoing health of his marriage and family. He elaborates on this:

There is a difference between having an office place conflict and coming home, and having a church conflict and coming home. If I worked at an office and had conflict, my wife and my children aren't going to know any of the people I have conflict with and if they do it's going to be very superficial. But...when there's conflict at church that's a whole new spin on it.... I don't want to color what my wife or my children think about a certain person by saying too much or by bad-mouthing them. So, it tends to make me a little more guarded about how much I share about conflict I'm having at church.

Andy's wife Arlene notes that, although she doesn't desire to know everything that's going on in the life of the church, if there is some type of conflict, she feels the need for open communication if she is going to be able to be a helper to Andy. She explains,

If Andy comes home and says, "This happened today," and explains the scenario,...I can be pretty understanding.... I can talk him through it [and] ask questions, if he's at the point where he wants to download, great. If not, that's great too. I don't feel like I always have to be in it, but at the same time, I feel like there are times where he can tell me what's going on and I'm good with that, and he's very open.... I find it easier to know what's going on and what's bothering him, than not to know. Just to know, "I've dealt with a big thing," that doesn't tell me anything. I can't help, I can't be understanding. I can't be anything if I don't know what it is.

Bob spoke of his need to share most things with Bonnie, even, occasionally, difficult things that may be going on in the life of the church. Yet, at the same time, he speaks of being very cautious about sharing certain issues that might burden his wife with negative information, shared unnecessarily:

I still share most things with Bonnie because I need that just in order to think. She is, I think, more ready to show me where I'm missing something instead of feeling bad for me, so it's a little more objective. But I'm also more cautious than I used to be about that very thing. If I'm telling her this, is she going to be able to unload it or is she going to have this stick in her. That restrains me more than it used to I think. But I still have to talk to her. So I think the danger's still there.

Each of the couples spoke of the need to have healthy relationships and healthy communication outside of the marriage. This type of relationship has the potential to enable a healthier marriage and, in turn, a healthier church. Carol notes how early in his ministry Charlie didn't have as many people to talk with, but "as he has developed more friends with other pastors and things in the area, that was really helpful."

Charlie noted the blessing of having input from other pastors within the Presbytery and even within the larger denomination. The need for healthy communication in times of stress and conflict makes having relationships with other godly men, and particularly other pastors, a necessity for Charlie. There were difficult times in the ministry that Charlie spoke of, where having communication with someone other than Carol was crucial to keep all of the issues of a difficult situation from coming into his marriage. "I needed to talk. I needed godly input. I needed guidance....We're certainly the body of Christ and I need to lean on the gifts of others. I need that, so that was a big help. If [other pastors] hadn't been there, it would have put more pressure on, certainly Carol, because of the fact that I would probably have gone more to her."

Carol speaks cogently about the need for couples to communicate in ways to protect their children from negative information. "[Charlie and I] make a point when we are talking about things that we need to talk about of doing that by ourselves, not with [our children] around because they don't...need the stress of that on them." Carol also speaks of relationships with other women that she has outside the home ("friends from

school, other moms”) who can be an outlet for her when she needs to have someone to talk with. She admits that this has been a very positive and healthy thing in her marriage. “It helps my demeanor at home.”

Andy elaborates on this issue further by addressing the fact that he has often had others to communicate with so that he didn’t bring negativity from the church into the home. “I always try to have one, two other men in my life that are not other members of the church, other friends. And so, sometimes I’m able to talk with a friend that’s not a part of my church and just kind of vent a little bit and not always vent to my wife.”

Another issue revealed over the course of the interviews that is directly connected to the issue of intentional separation of marriage and ministry is in the area of seeking personal spiritual growth and emotional maturity.

Pursuing Spiritual Growth and Emotional Maturity²²⁴

Although the couples recognize the need for worship and the means of grace in the life of the church for ongoing growth and spiritual maturity, each of them addressed areas that they are pursuing individually and as married couples in order that neither the marriage nor the ministry will suffer any more than necessary. Each of the couples spoke of the need for praying together regularly throughout the week. This discipline is very crucial for many reasons, including conversing with God, but also for protecting against any unaddressed tension or bitterness that might be building in the marriage.

In addition to the need for pursuing spiritual growth, each of the couples interviewed were open in speaking about their need for ongoing growth and understanding of their emotional maturity. We will look at aspects of their spiritual growth and emotional maturity in this section.

²²⁴See page 74 from Peter Scazzero’s list connected to our emotional health.

Across the board, a daily Bible reading and devotional time was important to the couples. Charlie spoke of using the daily scripture readings in *Tabletalk* magazine as a help to him in his personal spiritual walk. He also notes the importance of being nourished daily by what he is preparing for his Sunday sermon. The importance of prayer is a lifeline for his spiritual development and he spoke of the way in which he tries to divide his prayer time daily:

I find the need and desire to pray for different things each day.... First of all, you divide the church into parts across six days and try to pray for the families each day rotating through....I [also] try to pray for missions one day,...local efforts, maybe you're praying one day for the worship service, another day for the leaders in the Presbytery, other pastors, things like that.

In addition to areas of personal Bible study and prayer for spiritual maturity, Carol speaks of involvement in other things that she feels has helped to balance her emotionally, such as substitute teaching at the public school. In response to an inquiry about influences in the past that have impacted her life, Carol spoke frankly about what she learned from observing her parents and how they dealt with stress and conflict. Although she and Charlie do not deal with stress and conflict in the same ways her parents did, she notes that learning from their example has been helpful in dealing with occasional stress in her marriage to Charlie.

Carol spoke of the need to “keep really short accounts” in her marriage to Charlie. She notes that there were times earlier in their marriage that she could be mad at Charlie for a long time. “I was one of those, [who] could go sit on the couch for an hour and give him the cold shoulder and all that jazz. And now it’s like, okay, we can’t stand this for barely a couple of minutes to be mad at each other.”

Charlie also speaks to this issue of emotional health and maturity and how emotions interrelate with the stresses in their lives. He explains,

I get physically sick from stress.... I realized the need to kind of pace things, to stretch them out a little bit.... I think emotionally I've matured, but I'm much more aware of that aspect to the ministry as a solo or senior pastor...than I was as an assistant.... I joke that the first present that you need to give someone that takes on a solo pastorate is a jug of Tums.

Arlene speaks candidly about growing in her emotional maturity. "I still have my times of being pretty insecure or being just sad for no really great reason, but I think that, now I'm able to put my finger on it a little better...." Arlene also speaks to what she learned from her mother in dealing with stress and conflict when she was growing up.

She elaborated on this issue:

My mom,...she just kind of got mad and would just be quiet and you'd kind of be on her bad side for a day or two and it lasted a long time. She would just walk out of the room, go into another room, slam the door and just stay there, and here was this kid that, you know, from four up to eighteen, I'm still the kid, not really knowing what to do with it, how to handle it, what to do.

Arlene has committed to dealing with stress and anger issues in her family in a different way entirely. "I've had a lot of conversations with my children.... I probably talk until they're done hearing me about half way through and they're like, 'When is she going to be quiet?' My mom would raise her voice a lot, I do raise my voice occasionally, but it takes a lot,...it takes a lot for me to get to that point."

Andy speaks very candidly of times in the life of the church that were very draining emotionally and how these times of discouragement were something that affected his marriage. He explains,

There was a season here where it just seems like all this conflict had been bubbling underneath the surface of the church for years and years and it all just kind of burst out into the open... I mean it was really concentrated for a couple of months but it really lasted for over a year and it just weighed on me. I think for a lot of the time I was just discouraged and down. I think now we've gotten to a point, not where we don't have conflict but where the general tone of the church has gotten much more positive. [...] I don't feel the weight of so much baggage

right now. So all of that to say, I do feel pretty emotionally healthy right now. I feel like my wife and I are close.

Bob speaks of growing up with a father who was ill and always on the edge which created tension in the family. The things that he learned from his dad, in this regard, were not positive, but he knows that he clearly has grown in his own emotional maturity despite that negative influence. Bob relates how his dad was “dismissive toward my mother [and it was] not easy for her to express her opinions and be received with respect [by my dad]. He would laugh her off and that being a childhood memory, that’s pretty strong.”

Bob notes that this experience has not negatively influenced the way that he treats Bonnie in their marriage. He explains, “I have a high respect for [Bonnie] and my regard for her is stronger than that influence. I know it’s there. I know I have a pretty strong sense of ‘I know what’s best.’ But I’ve had enough time with Bonnie to find out how often she’s right and that plays pretty strong in my thinking.” Bob goes on to say that,

[T]he big thing about emotional health is that you know how you feel and you can describe it. I’m getting better at that, but usually I need coaching from my wife on it.... I know it’s important; it’s not something I dismiss anymore. I really do feel strongly that God has made us rational, willing, and emotional beings and that all of those are a reflection of Him. I don’t treat that lightly, I just know that I’ve had to work really hard to even understand how I feel.

Bonnie spoke very openly and honestly about times in the past, early in their marriage, where she felt that she could handle all the difficult issues that came into their lives and how she has seen her own emotional growth since that time. She shares this experience:

I just had this confidence in myself, emotional confidence in myself and a sense of “I can respond to these things in healthy ways.” And looking back on it now, it was fairly immature. As time has gone on, to recognize it’s not so much my training and know-how and myself, it really is the Lord’s faithfulness. It really is

responding faithfully when I don't know what to do, which is a lot of the time, and that has become a more emotionally healthy situation.

With regard to spiritual and emotional maturity, Bonnie spoke of the need for ongoing forgiveness in a healthy marriage as well as just simply having a mindset that the marriage is for "as long as life endures." She articulates the importance of remembering this truth, especially when times of conflict arise in the marriage.

Across the board, the pastors indicated that even though sometimes it feels personal, they have learned to step back from conflict in a healthy way. Andy recounts the need to somehow separate himself from the hurtful statements inflicted on him: "We've had to grow, to learn to differentiate. And we've had to realize that what so-and-so is saying, doing, doesn't necessarily mean I am that. And we've had to figure out how to work through that process sometimes." Part of that process for Andy was in understanding how to look to Jesus to be his strength. "I've had to force myself to learn how to deal with it, with conflict better. To realize that it's not something that belongs on my shoulders, it belongs on Christ's shoulders."

Charlie found that stepping back from the conflict situation not only gave him a better perspective, but allowed him to view others more objectively. "But I felt like over time, and by God's grace, I didn't define that elder by that conflict. [...] Once I step back from it, I'm able to engage more, on the edges, try not to go to the heart of the issue right out of the gate, but just kind of talk in a more personal way, and one on one, I think we were able to work through that."

Bob also notes times early in his ministry when he failed to distinguish between the conflict and his personal feelings:

I knew it was my job to step into [the conflict] but there were a lot of times that it almost froze me, where I was so driven by a desire for things to go well and for me to be accepted, that facing that conflict with, I would say, creativity and thoughtfulness was very hard for me. I would almost find myself going through the motions of what I needed to do, but having a real hard time of owning it, and pulling it in and thinking objectively other than “poor me” or “why do I have to go through this?” It was not, in my mind, (I think I’ve learned some things about this,) an opportunity for ministry so much as a hurdle to get over.

Bob goes on to talk about what he has learned from those experiences: “[I have learned] to become a little bit more emotionally aware... And that really has become easier for me over the years to say, ‘I am the Lord’s minister in this conflict.’ If it’s a conflict between me and someone in the church, they may be right and I want to hear them. ‘This isn’t an attack on me, this is a question of ministry,’ is an easier thing to get to than it used to be.”

In this section, the participants sought to share ways in which they have occasionally separated marriage from ministry tensions, pressures, and conflicts for the purpose of pursuing health in their marriages. All of the couples spoke to the fact that total separation is not possible or really even desired. Bonnie stated is this way:

Conflict is not the enemy and the people who are involved are not the enemy and this sense that “we somehow have to keep this outside of our marriage,” I don’t think it’s true. But being able to see it and trust the Lord that he’s doing something with it, and to not see it as something to be avoided or to freak out because it’s happened, to know that it’s coming and receive it with some calm, some trust, it’s not an aberration in our experience.

Effective Leadership

RQ. #3 In what ways has the pastor’s ability to lead effectively during times of interpersonal conflict played a positive role in producing health in your marriage?

In this section, the participants speak of effective leadership as it connects to positive growth and development toward healthy marriages. What came to light in the interviews is that leadership is something that is happening all of the time, not merely in

times of tension and conflict. The pastors found as they were able to address the tensions within the church in a healthy, God-honoring way it produced positive results in their marriages, not least, because of reduced stress and tension.

Shepherd Leadership

Two of the pastors described themselves directly in terms of a “shepherd leader” and each of the men felt strongly about building solid relationships within the leadership team and among the members of the church. The general consensus seemed to be that this type of leadership was, not only biblical, but most effective in keeping conflict at a minimum, which is ultimately helpful in keeping excessive stress and tension from coming into the home of the pastor.

Bob spoke of his style of leadership as “encouraging collaboration, brainstorming, a sense of sharing in the ministry, working to train folks to try to pull out of them ideas.... [T]his was a pretty common approach.” In spite of this, Bob spoke of being somewhat naïve early on in his ministry as to leading through conflict situations. “I think from early in my life and ministry I tried to deflect conflict, to be reasonable, to talk it out, to [do] as much as I could to deflect from myself a sense of fault. It was hard for me to hear of my failings, and so I think I had a Pollyanna approach. I just assumed that people were speaking and thinking the best.” At the time these issues of conflict were presenting themselves Bob mentions that he often felt “numb, because it was so hard.”

Bob speaks candidly of having learned to be a better leader from this experience in ways that are healthy for him and ultimately for his marriage. He describes a change of direction in his thinking, much of it learned from Bonnie, which looks at the issues of conflict as an opportunity for ministry. He elaborated, “It still affects me, but it is much

more my experience that I go into these things feeling like, ‘I really want to minister to you in some way, I want to hear you but I also need to try to deal with things where I disagree, and name those things and reasons why, so that the right thing comes out of it for the church’.”

Charlie speaks directly of his leadership being one of shepherding and building relationships. “I think shepherding shapes my leadership. And what I mean by that is leadership for me is very labor intensive, very hands on, relational....When I say labor, people intensive, it’s a team building sort of thing, and the thing that is driven very strongly by what, I hope is godly, God-honoring relationships.”

Both Charlie and Andy spoke of not being a leader that thrives on “consensus building.” Andy says it this way: “I tend to be more of a servant leader type.... I used to think that you were either that or you were a consensus leader, because I’m not exactly a consensus leader either.” Andy goes on to note that his leadership is relational and this comes to the forefront, particularly in times of conflict.

He explains, “I care about the person with whom [I] have conflict.... So that’s kind of what’s going through my mind... I’m hoping to navigate our relationship as we come to decisions.” Andy also admits that he is always hoping for closure in any conflict situation but that it does not always happen in the life of the church. He shares candidly, “I love closure. If there is an idol in my life it’s closure. And that’s true with conflict, too. I just cannot wait to get to the closure point in conflict. I do not like staying in the mode of conflict with anyone,....unfortunately in church, oftentimes in conflict, there is no closure.”

As a part of shepherd leadership, the pastors noted the importance of leading others through biblical steps of conflict resolution. Charlie found it beneficial to teach a class related to conflict resolution. It was helpful to their marriage that Carol shared in the teaching of this class. Charlie shared, “[Y]ou’ve got relational problems throughout the church. So we tried to teach on [resolving conflict] and we taught together.... And as we taught it, of course, we’re revisiting it, thinking through it. And it’s making me think, ‘Am I doing this? Am I biblically approaching conflict?’” Andy Anderson also noted that there are biblical steps that are needed when responding to and seeking to resolve conflict.

Shared Leadership

Another area of leadership that came out during the interview process was the importance of shared leadership. Each of the pastors spoke of the impact of Presbyterian polity and elder leadership. The consensus seemed to be that, as in all conflict situations, how the conflict is handled will tend to have an impact on the pastor’s marriage. Each pastor spoke of how Presbyterian government has been helpful in their ministry and in their lives.

Charlie spoke of the two-office view of Presbyterian government in which “the elders work essentially as one and that we share the shepherding responsibility.” He spoke of an issue of conflict that he faced in the church in which having the elders as part of shared leadership was crucial. Speaking of this instance he notes, “I felt very supported in the midst of [the conflict].” Charlie also spoke of the benefits of Presbyterian polity pertaining to having other seasoned pastors to share things with, particularly during difficult times.

Bob agrees and speaks of the importance of shared leadership: “I would not have survived [the conflict] without my elders being so supportive of me. I think that they were scared and confused, too. And yet, to a man they were personally and before the church supportive.” Bob goes on to describe how the elders were concerned, not only for him, but for his family as well:

I’m just so thankful for how they have been concerned that we’re doing all right, that our kids are doing all right, that they have our backs. They can’t fully understand all the things that we’re dealing with, but they care. That’s been more than enough for us. I feel like the multiplicity of friends who are partners in the ministry has perhaps been the most important thing in helping us feel stabilized and not thrown to the wind.

Andy spoke cogently about how his leadership has improved as a result of leadership that is shared with the other elders. He explains,

In the process of growing as a leader and as a pastor and going through several of these conflict situations in these churches, I have been able to look back and see how I’ve grown in my leadership simply because I have other elders to walk through it with me.... I’m never on an island in conflict. And I’ve got the protection of a multiplicity of counselors.

Although all of the pastors who were interviewed for this project had good working relationships with the other elders in the church, only Bob noted that he had close confidante relationships with his elders. He speaks of being able to talk to one of his elders and the elder’s wife “about anything.” He noted that one of the elders was like a father to him. “I didn’t always understand it, but he would just work on me about things I needed to change very, very gently and like a father. It was only over time that I began to realize how helpful he was to me.”

Pastoral Leadership and Care toward a Healthy Marriage

Another issue that came out during the interview process was how the pastors’ wives felt about their husband as the pastor-leader and how that has impacted their

marriage relationship. Carol notes that Charlie's pastoral leadership has been a blessing in her life:

I don't feel like I'm at all lacking for that pastoring in my life. I feel like I can always talk with him. I can talk with him during the day. I feel really blessed to be able to have, not just the personal counsel on things, but even just from the pulpit, I don't view myself as lacking from the pulpit or personally. In fact, I feel like I probably have it better than anybody else.

Bonnie spoke to this issue in great depth and no amount of paraphrasing would be helpful. She shares, in her own words, both the brokenness of an imperfect husband/pastor-leader and the benefit and blessing of what this has meant in their marriage.

In the beginning of our marriage, I saw those two things [Bob as husband and Bob as my pastor] as being different, like he has this capacity as my pastor that means he is my teacher, he's my spiritual leader and guide, ecclesiastical authority. He's all those things and of course he remains all those things. Like, here's my confidante, here's the person who knows about me more than anybody else, and the person I know more about than these other people do. And so I felt the tension of—"Okay, so you preach these things, many of them you do, not all of them, and some of them you do the opposite."

Bonnie goes on to share how Bob as the pastor presents God's truth from the pulpit which is "very strong and unwavering." However, there's also the private man who is broken and still wrestling with many issues in his life as all broken people will do. She went on to say,

Because he's a sinner and because this truth is infallible, there's going to be a difference. But to watch him struggle with that actually deepens my experience as hearing him as my pastor, because I know the integrity of the fight.... And a sinful man I know very well is wrestling through those things to live that out and so I don't feel the disconnect.... I feel that my husband makes a wonderful pastor and my pastor makes a wonderful husband.

Arlene was very clear in her support of Andy's leadership and believes that his leadership has contributed greatly to health and stability in the church and in their home.

In spite of this truth, she also speaks very frankly of times when she has felt less than challenged on a given Sunday morning by Andy's preaching. She observes,

I would say there are weeks that I walk away going, "Did I learn anything? Was I challenged?" And I think it's from [Andy's calm leadership style which makes his preaching] not really in your face and challenging. I would say I need a little bit more of that on Sunday mornings, of in your face and challenging, and I don't feel like I get that. I feel like I understand the passage, but I'm not personally challenged as much as I should be.

Andy notes that as far as his preaching ministry to his wife and children, he feels that he does not spend enough time processing with them about how they receive this means of grace in their life on any particular Sunday and that this is an area of his pastoral and family leadership that he may need to work on. He speaks directly to this issue of being both a husband and pastor to his wife:

A few years ago...I would have thought, "I don't need to be the pastor of my wife, I'm just her husband." Until there was this one time, when I don't even remember exactly what I said, but I said something to [Arlene] and she looked at me and made the comment that she appreciated feeling like I was treating her like I was her pastor at that moment. You know, that she needed that. And it was the first time that I realized that there was another side to this relationship I haven't considered before, because my wife doesn't have a pastor outside of the house that will just come and say, "How are you doing? How can I pray for you?"...The more I can stop whatever I'm busy with and make her feel that she's important enough that I am stopping my stuff and just pay attention to her and talk and listen...the more she feels cared for.

Shared Ministry

Another aspect that was drawn from these interviews is that the pastor's leadership in the home and the church is directly connected to how his spouse feels about her role in the ministry that they both share. Although their roles are obviously different, if she has a positive feeling about her place in the ministry with her husband, the obvious overflow is positive for their marriage.

Carol addresses this idea of how properly participating in the ministries of the church will have a positive and healthy influence on the marriage. She notes that the pastor's wife is a member of the body of Christ and that she should not be expected to do more than she's supposed to do. She notes the "fine line" in using her gifts versus being pressured to, "do more than anybody should be doing, or to be someone she's not." Carol mentions how thankful she is that she and Charlie are in the ministry together and what a blessing it is in their life. "And that's one thing, I really, really do, I love, I love that we're in the ministry. It's who we are, it's what we do. I love it. The Lord's called us to it." Each of the couples that were interviewed for this project was, overall, very thankful for the ministry that they shared.

Andy notes the positive benefit of Arlene's involvement in using her gifts at the church:

...[I]t gives us more of a sense of shared ministry. I think this year we both have greater ownership over just what we're doing in the church together. She's got more ownership because she's directly involved, but I think it helps me be more, feeling more ownership in a sense that I feel more committed as a family to the things our church is committed to... And so, it makes me care more and that's a great benefit.

This section reflects that effective leadership is connected to leading in ways in which the spouse knows that she has a place of participation in the church to such a degree that it results in a genuine experience of shared ministry. The propensity for discouragement for both spouses is very real and so a sense of shared ministry seems to play an important role in their overall well-being. The general tenor of the interviews suggests that ministry truly is to be shared and that it is crucial that the pastor/husband lead in ways in which this becomes a part of their shared life together.

Summary

In summary, during these interviews, it was clearly spoken and acknowledged that there will always be conflict in the church, and the potential is always there for that conflict, at some level, to come into the home. It was interesting to note that each of these couples realized that, even in the conflict, the Lord is at work for good. Bonnie gives a wonderful testimony to the truth of God's work in conflict in ministry and marriage with these words:

I think that being motivated to make a problem stop or come out okay at the end of a problem is kind of a crazy maker. ...[T]o imagine that because there is conflict in the church you are going to be able to maneuver and respond in exactly the right way and thereby save yourself, save your husband, save the ministry by doing all these particular right things is a false hope. And that the Lord teaches so much in those conflicts, that [in] accepting them...not imagining that you're going to somehow skate by them, [because] they're coming. People don't get by in ministry without that kind of conflict, so it's coming. But when it comes, it isn't necessarily an enemy and it can draw you together and it does make you stronger and it is part of the way the Lord leads his church. And so, even in the middle of that conflict, recognizing that there is a lot to be treasured in that conflict both for the sake of ministry and for your marriage.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this study was to investigate how pastors pursue health in their marriages as they lead through conflict in the local church. This study assumes that ongoing learning and growing will take place in the context of ministry life and experience. In order to gain some answers to this problem, the following research questions were used:

1. In what ways has the health of your marriage been challenged during times of church conflict?
2. In what ways have you sought to separate your marriage from your ministry for the purpose of pursuing health in your marriage?
3. In what ways has the pastor's ability to lead effectively during times of conflict in the church played a positive role in producing health in your marriage?

The research design of this study has followed a qualitative approach. Sharan B. Merriam, professor of adult and continuing education at the University of Georgia, in her book entitled *Qualitative Research and Case Study Applications in Education*, defines the key philosophical assumption of qualitative method as: "based on the view that reality is constructed by individuals interacting with their social worlds."²²⁵ Therefore, a qualitative study not only allows for an in-depth study of relevant literature, but also helps us to better understand the point of view of pastors and their wives from their own personal experience. This chapter attempts to bring the interview findings of chapter

²²⁵ Merriam, 6.

four together with the literature review of chapter two in order to draw relevant conclusions and make recommendations for further study.

Summary of Findings

It is important to note that marriage and ministry should not be seen in conflict with one another, but rather, should work together for the glory of God. Pastor and author Peter Brain reminds us that the connection between church leadership and healthy marriages is a biblical issue.

The words of Paul to Timothy remind us of the close connection between marriage, family, and ministry. “Therefore an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach... He must manage his own household well...for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God’s church?” (1 Tim. 3:2-5).²²⁶

Throughout our study, it has been attested that pastors will face conflict in the ministry. Catholic professor Dean R. Hoge addresses the importance of understanding how conflict affects the pastoral ministry. “One of the two main reasons why ministers left parish ministry was the stress of dealing with conflict... Our research agrees with all earlier studies in finding that conflict distresses many Protestant ministers and ultimately drives some of them away.”²²⁷ With this in mind, the following will include a look at the data with the research questions as a guide.

R Q 1. In what ways has the health of your marriage been challenged during times of church conflict?

²²⁶ Brain, 100.

²²⁷ Hoge and Wenger, 76.

Marriage from a Biblical Perspective

One of the clear findings of this research is the importance that pastors and their wives should view marriage from a biblical perspective. Although healthy marriage was described in a variety of ways during the interviews, each couple sought to define a healthy marriage along biblical lines. Andy Anderson spoke specifically about the biblical roles of husband and wife regarding the need to be “sacrificing for my wife and caring for her and she’s submitting to me, but not in a worldly sense, but in a biblical sense.” Andy referenced Ephesians 5 as a passage of scripture that defines a biblically healthy marriage.

The importance of a biblically healthy marriage was also affirmed in the literature. Christian author and counselor Dr. Gary Chapman writes, “The lasting answers to marital growth are found in the Bible.”²²⁸ The important topic of the biblical roles of a husband and wife was spoken of by Dr. Bryan Chapell, former chancellor of Covenant Theological Seminary in his helpful book entitled, *Each for the Other*: “The husband looks past his own rights to consider what is right for his spouse. He refuses to surrender his leadership role in the family but uses his biblical authority to make sure the family’s resources and activities serve the best interests of his wife and children.”²²⁹ Chapell suggests that the role of a wife is very important, as well as God-honoring, when she embraces the biblical teaching of submission despite the opposition of many in our culture. He writes,

Despite our culture’s aversion to anybody submitting to anybody, we cannot sidestep Paul’s encompassing words about wives’ submission. He underscores the

²²⁸ Chapman, 3.

²²⁹ Chapell and Chapell, *Each for the Other, Marriage as It's Meant to Be*, 25.

importance of the responsibility with a compelling expression. Wives are to submit to their husbands “as to the Lord” (Eph. 5:22)... As a woman submits to her husband, she looks over his shoulder to see the Lord who is saying, “You are ultimately doing this not for him but for me.”²³⁰

I am convinced that a biblical understanding of the roles of the husband and wife in marriage—although not always easy to embrace or live—is an important aspect of any marriage, and certainly the marriage of a minister. If pastors were consistently seeking to love their wives in light of the teaching in Ephesians 5, there would most likely be less conflict in the home which would be essential to their ministry and vice versa. The literature, as well as the interviews, affirms the importance of a biblically healthy marriage which includes a proper understanding of the spouses’ respective roles.

During the interview process, Carol Cunningham noted how she has grown in her understanding and practice of godly submission to her husband. This development has had a very positive and healthy influence for good in their marriage, particularly in times of stress. She explains,

As far as my role as a wife, I feel like that’s one of the chief things I can do, is not to ignore things or not share or work through conflict but to rightly say things and work through things [while] using a gentle tone. “A harsh word stirs up anger, but a gentle word turns away wrath”.... Because when stresses come, if I respond in harshness or lack of submissiveness, in even the attitude of it, that can just bring you apart.

Responding to Conflict in a Healthy Way Equates to Positive Growth

By now, it may seem obvious that responding to conflict in a healthy way is an area that I believe every Christian, at some point, will struggle with. Sooner or later, everyone wants to lash out at those who have caused them hurt and pain. In the lives of the couples who participated in this project, many of the challenges they faced centered

²³⁰ Ibid., 93-94.

on the interpersonal tensions and conflicts that took place in the life of the local church and were subsequently brought home by their pastor/husband.

The couples sought to respond in a healthy way to the conflict. Arlene Anderson notes that situations of conflict “actually made me reach out to that person a little more and greet them, smile at them, ask them a question, when normally I wouldn’t. If there hadn’t been any [conflict], I wouldn’t have felt the need to pursue them.” Arlene noted that these situations of tension or conflict—positively responded to—have had a maturing effect on her personally which relates to the health of her marriage to Andy.

In my literature review, one author has written, “The Bible appears to emphasize that our own suffering brings us spiritual growth and empowerment to help others.”²³¹ Christian author, Gary Thomas, writes, “[W]e can use the challenges, joys, struggles, and celebrations of marriage to draw closer to God and to grow in Christian character.”²³² The fact that suffering and trials are used by God to be an important part of our growth in godliness is very evidently taught in scripture.²³³ Commenting on the need for a proper response to our suffering and trials, New Testament commentator John Stott writes, “....[I]f suffering leads to glory in the end, it leads to maturity meanwhile. Suffering can be productive, if we respond to it positively, and not with anger or bitterness.”²³⁴

It is important for pastors and their wives to be very intentional to respond in a God-honoring way to any conflict that comes into their lives and into the church.

²³¹ Langford, 102.

²³² Thomas, *Sacred Marriage*, 12.

²³³ James 1:2-4; 1 Peter 1:6-7; Romans 5:3-5; Matthew 5:10-12 are passages that were reviewed in the literature.

²³⁴ Stott, 141.

Responding in grace and seeking peace with one another is not new to most Christians and yet we all struggle with it to some degree. It is hard not to take criticism and attacks personally. Pastors in particular must be those who seek to minister grace in every situation. One author has written, “When even one person in a conflict is faithfully breathing out this kind of grace, others will often receive God’s grace through us. As they do, they are less likely to be defensive and more inclined to listen to our concerns.”²³⁵

In summary, in this section we reflected on the need to have marriages that follow God’s standards. If we are responding to the inevitable conflict and suffering which comes our way, by grace, we will grow in our spiritual maturity and that growth will be evident in both our marriages as well as our ministry.

RQ 2. In what ways have you sought to separate your marriage from your ministry for the purpose of pursuing health in your marriage?

Guarded Marriage and Family Time

Much of the literature emphasized that pastors must take time for their families if they are to experience a healthy home life as well as a healthy ministry. Christian counselor Diane Langberg writes of the ever-present conflict which often surfaces between marriage and ministry. She writes,

Many times couples feel as if marriage is in conflict with ministry. The attitude seems to be: “If I really give to my marriage what all these books and counselors say I should, my ministry will suffer. Marriage is important, but my ministry is for God, and he deserves 100 percent.” This type of thinking translates into the resolve that “I will respond to anyone who calls at any time. If I have promised my wife that I will stay home, she will just have to understand that God’s work comes first.”²³⁶

²³⁵ Sande, 170.

²³⁶ Langberg, 14-15.

A high percentage of the literature addressed the issue that many families of pastors feel that they are neglected by the pastor/husband/father. One author writes, “The recurring complaint and the gnawing frustration for pastor, spouse, and family appears to be that they must ever take second-place to the church and the needs of the people in the church.”²³⁷ In spite of the fact that the literature spoke of this profusely, the interviews seemed to put almost no emphasis on this aspect of the pastorate.

Carol stated it this way: “I don’t feel like I’m at all lacking for pastoring in my life. I feel like I can always talk with him. I can talk during the day.... In fact, I feel like I probably have it better than anybody else.”

I believe that problems will arise if neglect occurs over a long period of time. I personally find it easy to get in my study and spend long hours preparing sermons, Bible studies, etc. In my own situation, my wife and daughter go with me on all my visits to members of the congregation so there is less chance of feeling neglected and cut off from my time. I also try to take one day off per week to spend exclusively with my family, but even that can be hard to do. Along with time spent with spouse and family, another need that was addressed in the literature as well as the interviews is the need for healthy communication.

Healthy Communication

Although communication may seem like an area that everyone would understand, it seems that many married couples often struggle in this aspect of their relationship. Dr. David L. Smith, professor at Providence Theological Seminary speaks with passion regarding the significance of communication as it pertains to clergy marriages: “Our

²³⁷ Larsen, 104-105.

parsonages are in trouble. Marriage breakdown among clergy couples is rising at a terrifying rate. Clergy marriage failure is bad news for the people in the pews, because they have traditionally looked on their pastor and his wife as marital models...²³⁸ It is imperative that a pastor and his spouse learn to communicate with each other.

Each of the couples interviewed talked about the need for healthy communication in marriage. A part of healthy communication for ministry couples is knowing when and when not to discuss certain issues going on in the church. Charlie spoke specifically about the need to keep Carol uninformed at times: "Carol would probably tell you, a lot of things go in the church and she'll be the last to hear."

Andy spoke very candidly about the differences of communication between husband and wife in ministry as compared with communication between spouses in other vocations:

There is a difference between having an office place conflict and coming home, and having a church conflict and coming home. If I worked at an office and had conflict, my wife and my children aren't going to know any of the people I have conflict with and if they do, it's going to be very superficial. But...when there's conflict at church that's a whole new spin on it... I don't want to color what my wife or my children think about a certain person by saying too much or by bad-mouthing them. So it tends to make me a little more guarded about how much I share about conflict I'm having at church.

I am convinced that there is an inevitable link between the wife's role as supporter/encourager/confidante and her ability to foundationally undergird her husband's ministry and leadership. Her support and encouragement has the potential to strengthen her pastor/husband and give him courage in his pastoral leadership. Their relationship is inevitably strengthened as well as he consistently finds value in her input and genuine support.

²³⁸ Smith, "Some Thoughts on the Preserving of Clergy Marriages," 1-2.

In addition to healthy communication within the marriage, there was much said about healthy communication outside of the marriage. Appropriate relationships for communication outside of the marriage have a very real potential to build health inside the marriage as well as inside the church. Carol notes how early in his ministry, Charlie didn't have as many people to talk with, but "as he has developed more friends with other pastors and things in the area that was really helpful."

As a husband, I am very prone to share things with my wife as long as it doesn't break any confidences. It is important that we keep the lines of communication open and I am thankful that this has been a blessing in our marriage. As a pastor, I am very careful not to share anything negative pertaining to the church that has the potential to influence how my wife would feel about someone within the church. It is very important not to place unnecessary baggage on her in this way.

Pursuing Spiritual Growth and Emotional Maturity

Each of the couples interviewed recognized the need for weekly worship and the means of grace in the life of the church for the purpose of growing in their spiritual and emotional maturity.²³⁹ In addition to this, they spoke of the means of spiritual growth that they are pursuing individually and as couples so that neither the marriage nor the ministry will unduly suffer. The couples spoke very openly about regularly praying together throughout the week. Each of the couples participates in daily Bible reading and family devotional time.

Arlene spoke about growth over time in her emotional maturity: "I still have my times of being pretty insecure or being just sad for no really great reason, but I think that,

²³⁹ Burns, 25. Burns described emotional intelligence as, "*the ability to manage one's own emotions proactively and respond to the emotions of others appropriately.*"

now I'm able to put my finger on it a little better..." It is very important that we are seeking to grow emotionally as well as spiritually. Arlene's husband Andy spoke of times of conflict in the church where he became very emotionally drained and how this was very discouraging and negatively affected his marriage. He notes,

There was a season here where it just seems like all this conflict had been bubbling underneath the surface of the church for years and years and it all just kind of burst out into the open.... I think for a lot of the time I was just discouraged and down. I think now we've gotten to a point, not where we don't have conflict but where the general tone of the church has gotten more positive....I don't feel the weight of so much baggage right now. So all of that to say, I do feel pretty emotionally healthy right now. I feel like my wife and I are very close.

The literature spoke very directly to the issues of emotional and spiritual health. Christian author Peter Scazzero, speaking of churches that are emotionally healthy, states that spiritually mature pastors and leaders must have a goal of being committed followers of Jesus. He writes, "In emotionally healthy churches, people intentionally follow the model of Jesus. They focus on loving well, recognizing the indispensable mark of spiritual maturity is not about recognition, numbers, spiritual gifts, or biblical knowledge. The essence of genuine spiritual life is to love—God, ourselves, and other people."²⁴⁰

In summary of this section, we have seen that there is a need to be intentional, as far as is reasonable, to separate marriage from the tensions that arise in ministry for the purpose of pursuing health in marriage. Even though there is a need for this intentionality, total separation is not possible or really even desired. As Bonnie Brown stated,

Conflict is not the enemy and the people who are involved are not the enemy and this sense that "we somehow have to keep this outside of our marriage," I don't think it's true. But being able to see it and trust the Lord that he's doing

²⁴⁰ Scazzero and Bird, *The Emotionally Healthy Church, a Strategy for Discipleship That Actually Changes Lives*, 180.

something with it, and to not see it as something to be avoided or to freak out because it's happened. To know that it's coming and receive it with some calm, some trust, it's not an aberration in our experience.

RQ 3. In what ways has the pastor's ability to lead effectively during times of interpersonal conflict played a positive role in producing health in your marriage?

This final research question seeks to address how the pastor's ability to lead through conflict in the church can enable positive growth and help develop healthy marriages. The pastors found that as they were able to address the tensions within the church in a healthy, God-honoring way, positive results in their marriages were produced, not least because of reduced stress and tension. The literature spoke very openly on the dangers of leading, particularly when people are asked to change. One author writes,

“[Leaders] appear dangerous to people when you question their values, beliefs, or habits of a lifetime...The hope of leadership lies in the capacity to deliver disturbing news and raise difficult questions in a way that people can absorb, prodding them to take up the message rather than ignore it or kill the messenger.”²⁴¹

It was also clear from the literature that there is an interconnection between the home and the church that we ignore at our peril. This insight is particularly crucial for a pastor and his wife to understand and embrace, as much as is possible. One writer speaks of this interconnectedness in the language of systems: “And this church system is just one of many systems that we all belong to and that affect each other. A bad day at the office (the work system) can lead to a bad night at home (the family system).”²⁴²

²⁴¹ Heifetz and Linsky, *Leadership on the Line, Staying Alive through the Dangers of Leading*, 12.

²⁴² Richardson, *Creating a Healthier Church, Family Systems Theory, Leadership, and Congregational Life*, 29.

As I have researched this area of effective leadership for pastors, it has been interesting to note the importance of Paul's language regarding the body in the New Testament. I concur with the thinking that it is an axiomatic truth that, because we are a "body" each part affects the other parts, for good or ill. The literature on systems theory spoke of this interconnection of parts. One author on systems theory writes,

We can observe human wired-togetherness in a family, workplace, or church. When anxiety rises, we become rather predictable. Our thinking becomes less clear and more reactive. Some of us withdraw; others engage in conflict. We begin to place or accept blame in an effort to avoid taking responsibility for making personal changes. We begin to see ourselves as the victim of others' actions. We assign motives to others behavior or we take it personally.... In a living system, whenever a problem is chronic, just about everyone has a part to play in keeping it going.²⁴³

This dissertation has sought to take the truth of the interconnectedness of the systems of the church and the home/family and tried to ascertain ways in which leadership through inevitable church conflict can be leveraged in such a way as to produce positive growth and health in the pastor's marriage.

Shepherd Leadership

A shepherd leader, according to the interviews, is not only biblical, but seemingly the most effective in leading in the church and conflict management. Charlie spoke directly of his leadership being patterned after the shepherd which is inclusive of relationship building. He explained, "I think shepherding shapes my leadership. And what I mean by that is leadership for me is very labor intensive, very hands on, relational....it's a team building sort of thing. And the thing that is driven very strongly by what, I hope is godly, God-honoring relationships."

²⁴³ Herrington, Creech, and Taylor, 31.

Andy speaks of how shepherd leadership is a caring leadership, even toward those whom we are in conflict with. He elaborates, “I care about the person with whom [I] have conflict,...so that’s kind of what’s going through my mind... I’m hoping to navigate our relationship as we come to decisions.” Although the literature that I investigated did not deal with the specific category of shepherd leadership, the importance of calmly and intelligently leading people through the changes that inevitably will take place was given as a very important aspect of leadership. One author writes,

Getting people in a community or organization to address a deeply felt issue is difficult and risky. If people have avoided a problem for a long time, it should not be surprising that they try to silence you when you push them to face it. Both your survival and your success depend on your skill at reaching a true understanding of the varying perspectives among the factions. Learn from them their stakes and fears. As social workers, “Start where people are at.”²⁴⁴

Shared Leadership

Another area of effective leadership that came out during the research and interview process was the importance of shared leadership. The pastors interviewed for this project were all Presbyterian Church in America pastors who were accustomed to shared leadership with other elders. Each of the pastors spoke of how Presbyterian polity had been helpful in their ministry and in their lives.

Charlie spoke of an issue of conflict that he faced in the church in which having elders as part of shared leadership was crucial. Speaking of the support of other elders he noted, “I felt very supported in the midst of [the conflict].” Bob Brown also spoke very cogently of the importance of shared leadership in ministry: “I would not have survived [the conflict] without my elders being so supportive of me. I think that they were scared

²⁴⁴ Heifetz and Linsky, *Leadership on the Line, Staying Alive through the Dangers of Leading*, 62-63.

and confused too. And yet, to a man they were personally and before the church supportive.”

Andy noted how his leadership has improved because of shared leadership:

In the process of growing as a leader and as a pastor and going through several of these conflict situations in these churches, I have been able to look back and see how I’ve grown in my leadership simply because I have other elders to walk through it with me... I’m never on an island in conflict. And I’ve got the protection of a multiplicity of counselors.

The importance of shared leadership in ministry was also apparent in the literature. It’s interesting to note that even non-Christian authors affirmed this truth. One author writes,

Partners provide protection, and they create alliances for you with factions other than your own. They strengthen both you and your initiatives. With partners, you are not simply relying on the logical power of your arguments and evidence, you are building political power as well [...] Finding the right partners can be tough.... Moreover, developing trust takes the time and perseverance to move productively through conflicts. But without working together, your efforts incur greater risk.²⁴⁵

Trinity Evangelical Divinity School professor, David Larsen writes, “Christian ministry is always seen as shared ministry in the New Testament.”²⁴⁶ It is my view that shared leadership is vital, particularly when the pastor is under fire and going through conflict. There is an absolute need for spiritually and emotionally mature leaders to stand together against the onslaught of the enemy of our souls. Conflict may be inevitable, but succumbing to negativity and conflict is not.

Pastoral Leadership and Care toward a Healthy Marriage

Another issue that came to the forefront during the interview process was the impact of the husband’s leadership and pastoral care of his wife and its bearing on their

²⁴⁵ Ibid., 78.

²⁴⁶ Larsen, 115.

marriage relationship. Bonnie in particular spoke of the benefit and blessing of the leadership and care of her imperfect husband/pastor and her perspective of Bob as both her husband and her pastor. She shares her perspective as it has developed and grown over the course of a long marriage:

[As I consider] Bob as [my] husband and Bob as my pastor, in the beginning of our marriage, I saw those two things as being different. Like he has this capacity as my pastor, that means he is my teacher, he's my spiritual leader and guide, ecclesiastical authority. He's all those things and of course he remains all those things. Like, here's my confidante, here's the person who knows about me more than anybody else. And the person I know more about than these other people do. And so I felt the tension of—okay, so you preach these things, many of them you do, not all of them, and some of them you do the opposite.... Because he's a sinner and because this truth is infallible there's going to be a difference. But to watch him struggle with that actually deepens my experience as hearing him as my pastor, because I know the integrity of the fight.... And a sinful man I know very well is wrestling through those things to live that out and so I don't feel the disconnect.... I feel that my husband makes a wonderful pastor and my pastor makes a wonderful husband.

Arlene was very clear in her support of Andy's leadership and care and believes that this has contributed greatly to health and stability in the church and in their marriage.

Andy speaks of his personal growth as husband/pastor:

A few years ago...I would have thought, "I don't need to be the pastor of my wife, I'm just her husband." Until there was this one time, when I don't even remember exactly what I said, but I said something to [Arlene] and she looked at me and made the comment that she appreciated feeling like I was treating her like I was her pastor at that moment.... The more I can stop whatever I'm busy with and make her feel that she's important enough that I am stopping my stuff and just pay attention to her and talk and listen,...the more she feels cared for.

The literature connected care and commitment ultimately with growth in character. Nothing lasting is ever gained over the short term. Marriage will require long-term trust and lasting commitment. Reformed pastor and author Dr. R.C. Sproul writes of the reality that marriage requires commitment for a lifetime: "Commitment lies at the

heart of marriage. In the biblical context, this commitment does not take place privately, in a corner. It is a public matter.”²⁴⁷

Gary Thomas, adjunct professor at Western Seminary in Portland, Oregon also spoke to this important aspect of care and personal character building that connects to long-term commitment:

This relatively new phenomenon of being married for six or seven decades can pay rich dividends for our spiritual growth. Marriage helps us to develop the character of God himself as we stick with our spouses through the good times and the bad. Every wedding gives birth to a new history, a new beginning. The spiritual meaning of marriage is found in maintaining that history together.²⁴⁸

Shared Ministry

Another aspect that was discovered in this project, particularly from the interviews, is that the pastor’s leadership in the home and the church is interconnected with how his spouse feels about her role in the ministry that they both share. Carol related that her participation in the ministries of the church has a positive and healthy influence on their marriage. She noted that the pastor’s wife is a member of the body of Christ. She also mentions the “fine line” in using her gifts versus being pressured to “do more than anybody should be doing, or to be someone she’s not.” Carol expresses how thankful she is to be in ministry with her husband: “And that’s one thing, I really, really do, I love, I love that we’re in the ministry. It’s who we are, it’s what we do. I love it. The Lord’s called us to it.” Each of the couples spoke of being thankful for the ministry that they shared.

In summary, it was surprising to discover the difference between the literature and the interviews with respect to those who believe that marriage and ministry are generally

²⁴⁷ Sproul, 153.

²⁴⁸ Thomas, *Sacred Marriage*, 107.

found to be in conflict with one another. For example, in the literature, Dr. Dennis Rainey, executive director of the ministry known as Family Life calls our attention to the idea of ministry being a “mistress” that competes with the marriage of ministers. He writes,

Ironically, a mistress that entices those of us in “full-time” Christian service is named “ministry.” We can give our heart, soul, and mind to ministry and come home nearly brain-dead and exhausted. What husband or wife receiving such treatment repeatedly could not help but conclude, *I’m just not that important to this person*. Then comes trouble. Let me say something pointed: *There is no better way for the devil to ruin a ministry, discredit Jesus Christ, and wound the church than to have a pastor or Christian leader’s marriage wrecked.*²⁴⁹

This testimony of conflict between marriage and ministry was pervasive in the literature. Author Peter Brain writes of the difficulties that inevitably exist between marriage and ministry: “Busy married pastors find themselves with the dual task of building a marriage and a ministry. This creates a tension between two challenges. Not only do pastors and their spouses want their marriages to be stable, joyful and growing, but the church and community, not to mention God himself, have similar expectations.”²⁵⁰

In contrast, the interviews, overall, gave a completely different picture. All of the couples interviewed seemed to agree that marriage and ministry should not be seen in conflict with one another, rather, they felt that the issues in the church that have the potential to produce conflict can, and often do, turn out to be a blessing and a source of growth and health in marriage. Bonnie spoke of the blessings that have taken place in her marriage to Bob despite the inevitable times of conflict in the church. She notes one example of those blessings below:

²⁴⁹ Grudem and Rainey, *Pastoral Leadership for Manhood and Womanhood*, 44. Emphasis in the original.

²⁵⁰ Brain, 100.

I think that if I would characterize it overall, over the length of our marriage that it has been more positive than negative, by far, but the struggles in the church can be really significant and really pressure-filled. But the safety of our marriage, the safety of home becomes that much more beautiful, that much more precious to us... But when there is conflict and pressure, there's a whole lot of counting on each other and it's a beautiful thing when that happens, to be able to lean on each other, to be able to count on each other for that safety.

As I began this section with a summary of my findings, I mentioned that marriage and ministry should not be seen in conflict with one another, rather, they should work together for the glory of God. Although this statement may seem simplistic, I believe that it is not an oversimplification. To say that marriage and ministry, in God's perfect plan, are not meant to be in conflict with one another also acknowledges that there are many issues that work together in marriage and ministry which can be seen as a beautiful tapestry of biblical truths.

I believe that learning more about leadership and conflict resolution is very important. Growing in our understanding and experience of marriage cannot be overstated. Learning more about systems theory and how it addresses the interrelationship between marriage and ministry can be a helpful benefit. Still, no matter how adept we become in leadership principles, marriage skills, and growth through our understanding systems theory, we will continue to struggle if we, as pastors, believe that our ministry is more important than our marriage, and vice versa. Our marriage as well as our ministry is from God. God has called pastors as well as their wives to his church to serve in ministry.

Our roles are different, but because pastors and their wives are one in marriage, we must see our marriage and ministry in a different light—not as a competition, but as a complement. They complement each other because both are gifts from God. The ministry of a pastor and their spouse should be seen and embraced as a shared experience.

Understanding the truth that marriage and ministry are not in conflict with one another may go a long way in helping pastors pursue health in their marriages as they lead through conflict in the local church.

Recommendations for Further Research and Practice

It is critical to this dissertation to recognize that many factors come in to play when considering the interconnectedness of marriage and ministry. To think that a complete list of how-tos could be gathered that would somehow fix all the potential problems (so called) would be a disservice to the research as a whole and would not be helpful in the end. The issues that ministers face are complex and multifaceted and require much prayer and ongoing study. There is still much to be learned about the interrelationship between ministry marriages and pastoral leadership.

The research clearly revealed that many ministry marriages are in real trouble. Much of the literature notes the strain in ministry marriages but offers little more than surface solutions to the problem. I would suggest that more could be done to study the importance of shared ministry between husband and wife and how this aspect of ministry, properly understood, could have a powerful impact on the health of the marriage relationship as well as a positive impact on pastoral leadership and ministry.

Another aspect that may need further research is whether or not the Master of Divinity coursework in most seminaries needs more emphasis on the study of leadership.²⁵¹ I believe that I received a first rate seminary education at Covenant Theological Seminary, including some very valuable teaching on ministry leadership. But, it was only in the Doctor of Ministry program that I was more deeply exposed to the

²⁵¹ See particularly the helpful work of Dr. Bob Burns of Covenant Theological Seminary in *Pastors Summit*. Leadership and Management is number five of the five themes of pastoral fruitfulness.

need to better understand leadership as an important aspect of pastoral ministry. I realized that although what I had learned about leadership at Covenant Seminary had been very helpful, I discovered that I still have much to learn about various aspects of leadership.

As Ford states in the literature, healthy change is necessary for healthy churches: “Unhealthy churches resist change and fear or deny the future, while healthy churches embrace change, even when it is painful.”²⁵² As pastors seek to lead through change, many in the church resist and conflict becomes inevitable. And the reality that there are those in the church who will seek to make change difficult is the overt testimony of the literature. One author writes,

The people you are asking to make changes experience your initiative as a threat to something they value. What they value might be some deeply held belief about right and wrong or about the way the world works or should work. Or it may be nothing deeper than the desire to maintain what is stable, predictable, and familiar in their lives. Resistance to change stems from a fear of losing something important.²⁵³

Another aspect that I recommend for further research and practice is to encourage seminaries to develop programs and coursework that deal very practically with the issues that ministry marriages face. If a seminary student was already married, both the husband and the wife would need to be required to take these classes together. Only those in the ministry themselves could truly imagine the difficulties and pressures that ministers, their wives, and families face. Larsen writes, “The pressure to be a model family and to have a model marriage seems to be a sore point with an increasingly large group of clergy and

²⁵² Ford, 33.

²⁵³ Heifetz, Grashow, and Linsky, *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership, Tools and Tactics for Changing Your Organization and the World*, 96.

spouses.... In no profession is the spouse so deeply involved as in the ministry. This offers immense opportunity, but it also inflicts a heavy burden.²⁵⁴

Although seminary studies on leadership are important, as well as studies designed to teach ministers and their wives practical aspects of ministry and marriage, I realize that to require such studies would mean that some other part of the curriculum may have to be left out. Still, there may be no more important aspect of ministry practice needed than these. Ministry marriages truly need help. What better place than at the level of the seminary where there are many pastors and their spouses who could teach and model in this critical area.

²⁵⁴Larsen, 104-105.

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