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THE DANCE BETWEEN VULNERABILITY AND TRUST IN PULPIT LEADERSHIP

By

CLAY SMITH

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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Abstract

Church culture is significantly formed through communication, specifically communication in sermons. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to explore how pastors use vulnerability in sermons to build the congregation's trust in their leadership.

This study utilized a qualitative design with semi-structured interviews with six Reformed pastors with the primary preaching responsibility in their churches in the southeastern United States. Analysis of the literature and interview data examined how pastors assess the use of vulnerability in their sermons, how pastors perceive the relationship between preaching and trust, and how pastors determine the limits of vulnerability in their sermons to build trust in leadership.

Findings from the study include the critical nature of a gospel-saturated culture for the vulnerability to build trust, the value of understanding the negotiation of interests through preaching to build trust, the necessary match of the public and private communication from the senior leadership, and the clearly communicated intent of redemptive purpose of vulnerability to build trust.

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The six pastors who invited me into their lives and ministries have my utmost respect and thanks as we dance atop that high wire of vulnerability and trust in our leadership. I further wish to thank my brothers and sisters of Central Presbyterian Church in Clayton, Missouri, and Rivermont Evangelical Presbyterian Church, Lynchburg, VA, for bearing with me through these years of inquiry and experimentation. Most of all, I thank my ever-loving Father for using a fool such as I to offer the riches of his mercy to a world of poverty.

Chapter One

Introduction to the Study

How much self-disclosure is too much? How much transparency is too much? How do these questions apply to pastors? Pastors are frail, broken, sinful persons just like all Christians. Yet, can pastors genuinely live as frail and authentic human beings and at the same time build trust in their leadership? How can their communication from the pulpit promote trust in their leadership?

Any leader must realize the simple truth that functioning as a leader is not about oneself. Rather, leadership is an essentially relational enterprise,[1] which involves creating and maintaining organizational culture. In fact, numerous authors teach that leadership takes place in the context of a living system.[2] The church is no different in that it is made up of interconnected individuals who influence and are influenced by each other.[3] This web of interconnectedness creates the context of a relationally organized family, forming a culture with beliefs, commitments, and practices particular to that family.

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[1] James M. Kouzes and Barry Z. Posner, *The Truth About Leadership: The No-fads, Heart-of-the-Matter Facts You Need to Know*, 1st ed. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2010), 63.

[2] Jim Herrington, Robert Creech, and Trisha L. Taylor, *The Leader's Journey: Accepting the Call to Personal and Congregational Transformation*, 1st ed. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2003), 30. Martin Linsky and Ronald A. Heifetz, *Leadership on the Line: Staying Alive Through the Dangers of Leading*, 1st ed. (Boston: Harvard Business Press, 2002); Edwin H. Friedman, *A Failure of Nerve: Leadership in the Age of the Quick Fix*, ed. Margaret M. Treadwell and Edward W. Beal (New York: Seabury Books, 2007).

[3] Ronald W. Richardson, *Creating a Healthier Church* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), 26.

Understanding this relational context helps pastors lead more effectively. Kouzes and Posner suggest that it is folly for leaders to believe they can lead alone. In fact, they reduce the idea of organizational leadership to a simple statement, "leadership is a relationship."[4] Given the volume of what these authors have written on the subject, it is clear that they are not being simplistic in their statement. Instead, they view relationship as a critical foundation of any leadership enterprise.

The means of tending to the relational aspect of organizational life and culture are varied. Leaders unite an organization around a shared vision and mission.[5] They envision the future, conduct experiments, enable others to act, and encourage the heart.[6] Leaders engage in the inherently dangerous and complex endeavor of shaping organizational systems in a genuine manner that reflects the realities of that system.[7]

Yet, experts repeatedly return to a simple truth that lies at the heart of the relational life and culture of any organization: credibility. Considering the role of credibility as a foundation for leadership,[8] Kouzes and Posner studied which characteristics are most admired in organizational leaders. Honesty was consistently at the top of the list, from the start of their research project in 1987

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[4] James M. Kouzes and Barry Z. Posner, *The Leadership Challenge,* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2008), 24.

[5] Kouzes and Posner, *The Truth About Leadership*, 66.

[6] Kouzes and Posner, *The Leadership Challenge*.

[7] Linsky and Heifetz, *Leadership on the Line*.

[8] Kouzes and Posner, *The Truth About Leadership*, 21.

through their latest study in 2007.[9] No one enjoys being duped or manipulated, especially in areas that are as important and crucial to one's identity as life-goals and vocation. These findings led the authors to conclude that an absolute bedrock commitment to credibility must be a foundation for any organizational leader.

Stephen Covey agrees with connecting the credibility of the leader to trust within the organization.[10] This idea of credibility, in Covey's estimation, not only involves honesty – telling the truth and ensuring correct impressions – but also the ideas of congruence, humility, and courage. Congruent leaders act in accord with their values and beliefs. Their inner values drive their external and visible behavior.[11] By "humility," Covey means caring more about principle than about being right, that is, submitting one's self to the organizational good.[12] "He defines "courage" as the inner strength to do what is good even at a high cost.[13] He suggests that tending to these forms of credibility increases trust in the leader throughout the organization.

Not only must leaders be personally credible, but their communication must be credible as well. Leadership communication expert Deborah Barret writes, "Without effective communication, a leader is not effective."[14] Good communication

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[9] Kouzes and Posner, *The Leadership Challenge*, 30.

[10] Stephen M.R. Covey, *The SPEED of Trust: The One Thing That Changes Everything* (New York: Free Press, 2008), 45.

[11] Ibid., 62.

[12] Ibid., 64.

[13] Ibid., 65.

[14] Deborah Barrett, *Leadership Communication*, 3rd ed. (Boston: McGraw-Hill/Irwin, 2009), 3.

connects mission and action, as well as establishing and maintaining trust for the benefit of the overall organizational mission. The outward manifestation of ethos in the way a leader communicates has a bearing upon their being received as trustworthy.[15]

University of Houston Professor of Social Work Brené Brown has spent her career researching vulnerability and shame. In her most recent work, compiling the principles that she has developed through these years of study, Brown defines vulnerability as "uncertainty, risk and emotional exposure."[16] By her definition, the lack of vulnerability is not really an option; in other words, vulnerability is experienced by all human beings simply by virtue of being alive. However, vulnerability is not equal to living as an open-book, sharing one's deepest, darkest secrets indiscriminately. Rather, Brown's research has found that wise vulnerability involves sharing those risks and feelings with those who have a sufficient depth of relationship to support the level of disclosure.[17] There is a bit of a dance to the relationship between vulnerability and trust within a system of relationship.[18] She continues, "We need to feel trust to be vulnerable and we need to be vulnerable in order to trust."[19]

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[15] Ibid., 11.

[16] Brene Brown, *Daring Greatly: How the Courage to Be Vulnerable Transforms the Way We Live, Love, Parent, and Lead* (New York: Gotham, 2012), 34.

[17] Ibid., 45.

[18] Patrick M. Lencioni, *The Advantage: Why Organizational Health Trumps Everything Else In Business*, 1st ed. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2012), 27–37.

[19] Brown, *Daring Greatly*, 47.

Within leadership science, Kouzes and Posner argue a somewhat frightening proposition: the leader needs to be the one to trust first.[20] In the chicken and egg scenario Brown discusses above, these two leadership experts suggest that the leader risk vulnerability in order to build trust within an organizational culture. Brown essentially agrees by considering trust to be something that is built over time through small actions that in summation provide the relationship capital for significant trust.[21]

If the above is true, what place is there for vulnerability in leadership communication? Peter Fuda and Richard Badham published in *Harvard Business Review* their findings from doctoral research on creating and sustaining change throughout organizations. Their conclusions were grouped into metaphors for four prevailing successful strategies to navigate such change. One such metaphor is the snowball.[22] Their research suggests that a leader's vulnerability and asking for the help of others within the organization provides a context for others within the organization to have courage to do the same. In fact, they suggest that a consistent practice of vulnerability by a leader can provide a snowball effect throughout the entire organization that is impossible to stop. Perhaps even more tellingly, the same authors found that organizational leaders consistently use a strategy to protect themselves from deficiencies – both perceived and real – in the minds of others

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[20] Kouzes and Posner, *The Truth About Leadership*, 79.

[21] Brown, *Daring Greatly*, 53.

[22] "Fire, Snowball, Mask, Movie: How Leaders Spark and Sustain Change," *Harvard Business Review*, accessed December 6, 2012, http://hbr.org/2011/11/fire-snowball-mask-movie-how-leaders-spark-and-sustain-change/ar/1.

throughout the organization. Their choice of metaphor for this strategic choice is the "mask." Research indicated that the use of the mask undermines "both trust and effectiveness."[23] Yet, the question remains: How vulnerable must leaders be in order to develop trust in themselves as leaders, as well as developing the capacity for trust within their organizational cultures?

Statement of Problem

Honesty, integrity, and credibility are critical components of leadership communication. Yet, how might these apply within a church setting? Many churches seek to thrive based on a model of strength and success rather than the upside-down nature of God's kingdom, which includes embracing personal weakness and vulnerability so that Christ's strength is magnified.[24] Having pastors communicate vulnerably in their sermons increases anxiety throughout the congregational systems of churches that are built on strength and success. In significant ways, church culture is formed through communication, specifically sermons, from the leadership.

Pastors are broken and sinful individuals, just like the rest of the church membership. They are "wounded agents of healing," Herrick proposes.[25] As leaders of God's people, pastors seek to point the congregation away from themselves and toward Christ as the ultimate leader. However, many congregations have

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[23] Ibid.

[24] "Fire, Snowball, Mask, Movie: How Leaders Spark and Sustain Change," *Harvard Business Review*, accessed December 6, 2012, http://hbr.org/2011/11/fire-snowball-mask-movie-how-leaders-spark-and-sustain-change/ar/1.

[25] Vanessa Herrick, *Jesus Wept: Reflections on Vulnerability in Leadership* (London: Darton Longman and Todd, 1998), 91.

expectations of pastors that disallow honesty from the pulpit. Vulnerability and transparency seem risky to both pastor and congregation.

Some authors express theological concerns regarding vulnerability as part of the pastor's preaching. Zack Eswine, a former homiletics professor at Covenant Seminary and now a full-time senior pastor, suggests that through the annals of history, personal vulnerability and self-reference in the pulpit have been suspect.[26] He explains that those who have shown vulnerability in the pulpit have potentially contributed to suspicion around this practice by over-sharing, especially in a culture of the "shock-preacher." Giving principles of vulnerable communication in general, Brené Brown advises that sufficient emotional and relational connection must be established with the hearer such that the relationship can bear the emotional weight of the story.[27] The shock preacher, however, is one who, ignoring this wisdom, is a completely open book in the pulpit, with very little boundary guiding what they share. When this sort of over-sharing occurs, Brown calls it "floodlighting," calling to mind an image of a light far too bright and far too concentrated that is cast upon the hearer of the story.[28] For example, pastors may floodlight by sharing in great detail some past temptation without the relational context to support significant disclosure while maintaining respect for pastors. Communicators floodlight as a shield against the potential emotional pain of vulnerability, seeking to soothe the

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[26] Zack Eswine, *Preaching to a Post-Everything World: Crafting Biblical Sermons That Connect with Our Culture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2008), 87.

[27] Brown, *Daring Greatly*, 159.

[28] Ibid.

pain of a potential rejection or test the status of loyalty existing in the relationship. Yet, the strategy actually promotes disconnection between speaker and audience.[29]

Another strategy resulting in the same disconnection is the "smash and grab," a scenario described by Brown where a communicator smashes in with inappropriate vulnerability in order to somehow gain some advantage over the hearer, albeit a manipulated advantage.[30] One may press through social boundaries in order to grab attention or accolade, for example.

Additionally, pastors communicating vulnerably in their sermons invite anxiety into congregational systems, both within congregations as well as in pastors. What must a pastor do with that anxiety? The pastor is called to lead the congregation through it. Leadership through anxiety is much easier said than done; however, effective leadership is demonstrated by pastors engaging their own anxiety in order to alleviate anxiety within the congregation. This kind of leadership requires reflective capacity and maturity, writes Herrington et al.: "Effective leadership comes from someone with enough emotional maturity to … remain connected with those who differ with the leader or the majority, and to remain a calm presence when the anxiety rises."[31]

However, the most pressing issue does not seem to be whether or not pastors are vulnerable. By virtue of their limitations as human beings, pastors are

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[29] Ibid.

[30] Brown, *Daring Greatly,* 163.

[31] Herrington, Creech, and Taylor, *The Leader's Journey*, 46.

vulnerable and dependent.[32] Rather, the issue seems to be whether pastors openly embrace and acknowledge vulnerabilities. They can choose to acknowledge and live vulnerably before others or not. Herrick and Mann suggest that while pastors are called to live vulnerably before those they lead, they are not called to the same level of vulnerability with every person.[33] Wisdom and judgment must come into play to determine exactly how far pastors should go when being vulnerable before their congregations. Disclosing too much runs the risk of actually destroying the trust pastors seeks to build in their leadership. The problem, then, is to discern the relationship between vulnerability and trust.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to explore how pastors use vulnerability in sermons to build the congregation's trust in their leadership. In order to examine this issue, the following research questions guided interviews with six pastors who were purposely sampled according to criteria listed below.

Research Questions

1. How do pastors assess vulnerability in their sermons?
    a. What benefits do they find?
    b. What risks do they find?
2. How do pastors perceive the relationship between their preaching and the congregation's trust in their leadership?

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[32] Linsky and Heifetz, *Leadership on the Line*, 100.

[33] Herrick, *Jesus Wept*, 36.

3. How do pastors discern the limits of vulnerability in their sermons to build the congregation's trust in their leadership?

Significance of the Study

The significance of the study is to offer guidance to pastors in discerning the limits of vulnerability in their preaching such that they not only protect their leadership from damage, but also build the congregation's trust in their leadership. Research suggests that navigating the limits of vulnerability is significantly challenging. Often pastors either determine not to allow themselves to be personally vulnerable in their sermons either because of a theological conviction or more often out of concern to protect the authority and integrity of the office of pastor.

Also, this study seeks to discern what factors pastors must observe with careful attention as they go about being authentic human beings within the pulpit as a means of more clearly establishing leadership for the congregation. Pastors need help, guidance, and research to navigate the minefield of organizational trust that goes deeper than their own personal intuition to provide clarity for the way forward.

In studying these factors observed by pastors, the emotional significance of the impact of vulnerability upon pastors and others is considered. The researcher seeks to understand the way pastors and others process the emotional risk of vulnerability to themselves as persons as well as to the church as an organization.

Further, this study seeks to understand what steps can be taken within organizational culture to grow toward vulnerable leadership. Some pastors refuse vulnerability from a desire for self-protection or as a failure to understand the

emotional context of their organizational systems. The growth required belongs both to pastors and congregations in an emotional system.

One additional significance of this study is the exploration of how vulnerability contributes to the shaping of the culture and system of the church as an organization. This consideration involves the congregation as well as the pastor's family.

Definition of Key Terms

Vulnerability—the willingness to appear exactly as you are, choosing to open one's self to pain and harm, whether emotional or physical, by disclosure of the true self. Vulnerability is intentionally relating to others, wholeheartedly aware of the uncertainty, risk, and emotional exposure.[34]

Trust—a relational connection that provides assurance. Trust is formed by the character and reliability of the trustee to intentionally focus on and maximize the benefit of the trustor.

Floodlighting—the vulnerable disclosure of information that is too intimate for the context of the existing relationship. The result of floodlighting is disconnection and erosion of trust.[35]

Smash and grab—the vulnerable disclosure of information wherein the one disclosing seeks to gain some advantage over those who hear. For example, leaders

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[34] Brown, *Daring Greatly*, 34.

[35] Ibid., 160.

may disclose something that they fear will cause rejection. In the disclosure, they seek to grab control of the situation.[36]

Learning community—a committed group that provides a safe environment for processing information as well as offering feedback.

Adaptive challenge—an organizational challenge that requires the organization to be stretched beyond existing capabilities in order to meet the challenge. Adaptive challenges, Linsky and Heifetz suggest, most often involve new "attitudes, values and behaviors."[37]

Technical challenge—an organizational challenge that requires no additional learning by the organization to meet.[38]

[36] Ibid., 163.

[37] Linsky and Heifetz, *Leadership on the Line*, 13.

[38] Ibid.

Chapter Two

Literature Review

The purpose of this study was to explore how pastors use vulnerability in sermons to build the congregation's trust in their leadership. In this chapter, the researcher will provide a survey of literature organized by the following categories: biblical/theological, the role of vulnerability in leadership, building organizational trust, and leadership communication.

Biblical/Theological Literature

When considering personal vulnerability in preaching, one must consider the Apostle Paul's words: "What we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake."[39] To some, the first clause of this verse may preclude the possibility of self-reference or personal testimony in a sermon. According to the apostle, it is Jesus who is to be the focal point of any sermon, not any pastor's life. Yet, Paul teaches that the pastor is the servant or instrument of God's redemptive work. Earlier in this same chapter, Paul speaks more clearly to the pastor as servant: "We would commend ourselves to everyone's conscience in the sight of God."[40] It is not the pastor's life that is offered as the instrument of salvation; on the contrary, the pastor's life is used as a herald to call

[39] 2 Corinthians 4:5.

[40] 2 Corinthians 4:2.

others' attention to God's power to redeem. The pastor's story of God's work becomes a pathway through which others may see the redemptive work of Jesus.

Leaders in the biblical record experience a wide range of emotions, including those that communicate vulnerability. The power of Christ working through a vulnerable person is presented by Paul in the book of 2 Corinthians. In this letter, in which he is forced to again defend his apostolic credibility, we find Paul acknowledging things that many pastors fear to admit from the pulpit. For example, he admits to fear and despair due to such inordinate pressure.[41] In addition, in chapter two Paul confesses being distracted from his ministry of proclaiming the gospel even though God had opened a door for that proclamation.[42]

Later, Paul writes of the epitome of vulnerability in 2 Corinthians 12:8-10—his treatise on weakness as strength. Paul's boast was not in his capacity or training; rather, the genuine power behind his ministry, he suggests, was to glory in something other than his ability. In shining the light of glory away from his own capacity, Paul opened himself up to ridicule and judgment, which, in fact, he received throughout his ministry. Yet, the strength that motivated his service was that through his inability and weakness—revealed rather than concealed—the power of Christ would be clearly seen at work. Peter Scazzero, noted pastor and author, suggests it is the theology of brokenness and weakness that is one of the most important biblical pathways to spiritual authority in a church.[43]

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[41] 2 Corinthians 1:8-9.

[42] 2 Corinthians 2:12-13.

[43] Scazzero, *The Emotionally Healthy Church*, 112.

Readers also find similar emotional language of vulnerability in the Psalms where the corporate worship of Israel communicated fear, doubt, sin, weakness, and desperation. The Psalms are rife with raw confession of emotion and vulnerability, including the sense of risk, uncertainty, and emotional exposure.

A number of authors suggest that a leader's own personal grasp of grace, that is, God's unmerited favor toward them, provides the context for operating from this weakness as strength. Experiencing grace personally and embracing a personal identity as one who has received God's kindness equips a leader not to project themselves as omni-competent, but rather as a flawed servant of God.[44] Dan Allender, counselor, former seminary president, and clinical psychologist, proposes that the biblical model of leadership requires acknowledging one's status as a redeemed sinner and a recipient of grace, which is a real demonstration of the gospel that leaders must project through their leadership.[45] Scotty Smith, the founding pastor of Christ Community Church of Franklin, TN, agrees, citing the work of grace in the personal lives of several historical leaders, including Augustine, Luther, and John Wesley, that fueled their ministry in the kingdom of God.[46]

The same principle is applied to therapeutic-group leadership by Christian psychologists Hook and Hook in proposing that successful group leaders must wrestle with the story of brokenness and grace in their own lives as a means of

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[44] Dan B. Allender, *Leading with a Limp: Take Full Advantage of Your Most Powerful Weakness* (Colorado Springs, CO: WaterBrook Press, 2008), 54.

[45] Ibid., 56.

[46] Scotty Smith, *Objects of His Affection: Coming Alive to the Compelling Love of God* (West Monroe, LA: Howard Publishing, 2005), 41–63.

relating to and providing a trusting context for the work of their ministry. They claim that grace enables others to receive vulnerability with less suspicion and more trust.[47]

In contrast to the standards of rhetoric of the day which measured the credibility of a speaker based on honor and success,[48] Paul views the historical event of the crucifixion as the lens through which his own credibility is established in what one theologian has called "reverse-ethos."[49] It is the gospel message, with the ironies of the crucified and suffering king that interestingly provides the context for authenticating Paul's message and him as the messenger.[50] The weaknesses and vulnerabilities of Paul as a preacher simply confirm his authority by living a cruciform life, following after the crucified Lord.[51]

As in Paul's day, the life of a contemporary preacher must exalt that same gospel in contrast to the self-promotion tendency of the flesh. In fact, vulnerably revealing how the gospel is at work in the preacher's life follows after Paul's own example to undermine the perceived credibility of the rhetor based on honor and

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[47] Jan Paul Hook and Joshua N. Hook, "The Healing Cycle: A Christian Model for Group Therapy," *Journal of Psychology and Christianity* 29, no. 4 (Winter 2010): 310. See also: Scazzero, *The Emotionally Healthy Church*; Jim Herrington, Robert Creech, and Trisha L. Taylor, *The Leader's Journey: Accepting the Call to Personal and Congregational Transformation*, 1st ed. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2003); Bryan Chapell, *Holiness by Grace: Delighting in the Joy that Is Our Strength* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2003).

[48] Andre Resner Jr, *Preacher and Cross: Person and Message in Theology and Rhetoric*, First Edition (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1999), 105.

[49] Ibid., 130.

[50] Ibid.

[51] Darin Latham, "The Trauma of Transparency : 'Should I Let Them See Me?'," *Eastern Journal of Practical Theology* 7 (Fall 1993): 11.

success. Rather, the central theological question is to discern what exalts the redeemer and portrays the preacher as one of the redeemed.[52] In so doing, preachers begin to reshape the ways in which their credibility is developed and grown—away from the standards of self-promotion and honor to a fellow sufferer within whom Christ is at work.[53]

Shame lies at the heart of much unwillingness to be vulnerable. Edward Welch, noted biblical counselor, defines shame in this way: "[Y]ou are disgraced because you acted less than human, you were treated as if you are less than human, or you were associated with something less than human. And there are witnesses."[54] Brené Brown agrees, viewing shame through the lens of believing that there is "something wrong with us" and that humans are "bad, flawed, and not good enough."[55] Shame lies at the heart of human feelings of unworthiness, and one dare not reveal the truth about oneself.[56] It is shame that pronounces that unbearably painful feeling of being unworthy of love and therefore having no place to genuinely belong.[57]

Some seek to address this theological problem through proving value via accomplishment, trucking the freight of self-worth in how their work, their lives, or

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[52] Resner, *Preacher and Cross*, 178.

[53] Ibid., 180.

[54] Edward T. Welch, *Shame Interrupted: How God Lifts the Pain of Worthlessness and Rejection* (Greensboro, NC: New Growth Press, 2012), 2.

[55] Brené Brown, *Daring Greatly: How the Courage to Be Vulnerable Transforms the Way We Live, Love, Parent, and Lead* (New York: Gotham, 2012), 61.

[56] Welch, *Shame Interrupted*, 104.

[57] Brown, *Daring Greatly*, 69.

in this case, their ministry, is received.[58] Whenever they are feeling condemned or contaminated, very often people must find ways to prove their innocence, at least in relative comparison to the people around them. This strategy, however, does not work in Welch's mind, because achievement fails to provide an enduring answer.[59] Although going about it in different ways, both Brown and Welch suggest that gaining a sense of worthiness is the key to one's ability to be vulnerable and share openly of one's life.[60]

Although shame makes people feel unpresentable, Welch proposes that one must ask, "Before whom are we unpresentable?" Leaders may be concerned for their presentation before other people; however, it is their presentation before God that Welch suggests is the primary problem.[61] Or, it may be that shame is first and foremost a theological problem. The antidote to hiding before God and before others rests in a focus upon God's character and one's connection to him. An individual's worth is dependent upon God's view of him or her rather than on any intrinsic worth of their own.[62] Connection and belonging that combats shame comes through the truth that by faith believers are connected to someone much more highly honored, the Lord Jesus, the true king of glory.[63] Without embracing the theology of

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[58] Ibid., 63.

[59] Welch, *Shame Interrupted*, 60.

[60] Brown, *Daring Greatly*, 61, 131; Welch, *Shame Interrupted*, 104, 149.

[61] Welch, *Shame Interrupted*, 48.

[62] Ibid., 61.

[63] Ibid., 110.

God's grace and the mercy he offers, a leader may be unwilling to move toward others in offering mercy.[64]

Additionally, the incarnation of Christ provides a background to understanding vulnerability in leadership, especially in consideration of the manner Christian people are to live together in community.[65] The humility called for reflects the vulnerability of Jesus, who laid aside a privileged status to open himself up to pain. The incarnation was a self-emptying act, and through it, Jesus loved his people sacrificially. Jesus did not lay aside his divinity in his incarnation; rather, he took on flesh, taking upon himself the limitations of humanity in his fully-human life. This action was not forced; on the contrary, Jesus knowingly placed himself at risk in order to benefit his people and willingly endured scorn, pain, and attack (physical, emotional, and psychological) in love for those who were his enemies. It is this choice of risking woundedness that is reflected in leadership that is genuinely vulnerable.

Vulnerability also reflects a status of dependence. In his baptism, Jesus demonstrated the vulnerability of a life dependent upon the Holy Spirit. He, by the Spirit's leading, placed himself at risk before the leaders of the day,[66] and faced the consequences of speaking out.[67] He lived a life of humility and, as scripture records, he challenged his followers to live in the same way: "He who exalts himself will be

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[64] Ibid., 148.

[65] Philippians 2:1-11

[66] Luke 5

[67] Luke 4

humbled; he who humbles himself will be exalted."[68] In the sense that Jesus was a true Israelite, he embodied the life of vulnerable dependence which all Christians are called to embrace as God's children.

Jesus's life revealed again and again the cost of the emotional exposure of his heart for the outcast, which often placed him at odds with religious authorities. For example, in Luke 7, Jesus invited scorn by allowing a prostitute to wash his feet with her hair. At the same time, Jesus criticized Simon for his poor hospitality. In these two actions, recorded back to back, Jesus opened himself up to critique and criticism by revealing his heart, in allowing a prostitute to minister to him and then later in criticizing a respectable man.[69]

Jesus speaks to authority and lordship in ways distinct from the leadership structures of the world. Authority, power, and lordship according to Jesus are for the purposes of service and marked by humility.[70] It is in relationship to power that Christian leadership finds its clarion distinction: power through weakness. This distinction is clearly seen in the person and work of Jesus who suffered a criminal's death in service of his people. In Jesus, the power of God is on display with the fullness of God dwelling in him.[71] Yet, not only is the power of God revealed in the work of Jesus, but also in the crucifixion of the one through whom all was made and

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[68] Herrick, *Jesus Wept*, 17.

[69] Ibid., 39.

[70] Mark 10:42-44.

[71] Colossians 1:15-20.

the wisdom of God was revealed.[72] In part, this wisdom manifests the power and strength of God that is found in humility, i.e., the humility of a horrid crucifixion. Yet this weakness sets on display for the world the profound power of God to defeat sin and death, to bring life to a dead creation and dead hearts, and to usher in a kingdom in which authority is used for the life of others. John Stott noted this concept of the clash of symbols of power and weakness together in Revelation 4-7. In Stott's representation, God's throne (symbol of power) is occupied by a lamb who was slain (symbol of weakness).[73]

It is in this last sense that pastors follow after Jesus' use of authority to serve, manifesting God's power through personal weakness. For example, Paul did not avoid honesty about his fear, but rather disclosed it.[74] He was physically challenged and frail.[75] His emotions were filled with fear and even trembling;[76] it is only through his self-reporting that these inner dynamics of Paul's psyche are made known.

Surveying the work of the Apostle Paul and the Psalms, the biblical literature has provided an understanding that demonstrates his power through vulnerable people, magnifying his strength through human weakness. Further, the model of Jesus' incarnation reveals a life of vulnerable dependence as a model for Christian

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[72] 1 Corinthians 1:23-25.

[73] John Stott, *Basic Christian Leadership: Biblical Models of Church, Gospel and Ministry* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2006), 51.

[74] 1 Corinthians 2:3.

[75] 2 Corinthians 12:7.

[76] 1 Corinthians 2:3-4.

living. We have seen in the theological literature the power of grace and empathy to combat shame. In the next section, the role of vulnerability in leadership will be surveyed from broader literature.

The Role of Vulnerability in Leadership

Vulnerable leadership is best understood as an organizational value, not simply a facet of one person's—or one leader's-- personality. Organizational culture experts and authors Bennis, Goleman, and O'Toole propose that organizations by design often disallow vulnerability in leadership. In fact, they at times systemically build a lack of transparency into the very fabric of organizational culture.[77] While their research found this diagnostic a true facet of contemporary organizations, they, by way of contrast, suggest the effectiveness of organizational mission rests on a discipline of transparency as an intentional component of organizational culture.[78]

Vulnerability, Harvard researchers Linsky and Heifetz agree, is a key component in creating an environment in which things are accomplished by a team. In order to build trust, leaders must not erect a system in which they purport to be omni-competent, or the ones who always must decide. Rather, admitting weakness and inability dignifies the team who understands their value to the genuine work of adaptive change.[79] A culture of candor and transparency rests upon the free flow of information, including information that may be difficult for leaders to hear. Genuine

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[77] Warren Bennis, Daniel Goleman, and James O'Toole, *Transparency: How Leaders Create a Culture of Candor*, 1st ed. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2008), 2.

[78] Ibid., 4.

[79] Martin Linsky and Ronald A. Heifetz, *Leadership on the Line: Staying Alive Through the Dangers of Leading*, 1st ed. (Boston: Harvard Business Press, 2002).

leadership calls for managers and leaders to set the example for both offering and receiving candid information, even when disappointing their constituency.[80]

The Leader's Individual Vulnerability

Leadership researchers Joiner and Josephs affirm a culture of transparency by valuing learning throughout the organization. This value of learning begins with the leader. Through learning how to process and leverage conflict within the leader's own person, such a self-managing leader is equipped to catalyze a similar situation organizationally.[81] Therefore, the leader and those in the organization are in process learning together.

The practice of vulnerability on the part of the leader occurs in another discipline as well. For example, in psychotherapy, Hook and Hook propose a distinct methodology of group therapy practice that involves self-disclosure of the group leader as a means of leading the entire group toward healing and trust. Although they recognize the risk involved with leader disclosure in a group setting, their research suggests increased group member sharing often follows purposeful self-disclosure by the group leader.[82] However, this practice follows the establishment of an environment of grace and safety in the group ethos.[83]

By demonstrating a willingness to reveal vulnerabilities, leaders dignify the work of teammates. Additionally, the context is created for emotional connection

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[80] Bennis, Goleman, and O'Toole, *Transparency*, 42.

[81] William B. Joiner and Stephen A. Josephs, *Leadership Agility: Five Levels of Mastery for Anticipating and Initiating Change*, 1st ed. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2006), 152.

[82] Hook and Hook, "The Healing Cycle," 312.

[83] Ibid., 310–311.

not only to the mission, but also to the leader as one modeling the way forward in the mission. Daniel Goleman, a pioneering researcher in the field of emotional intelligence and organizational health, uses the metaphor of wings. He suggests that great leadership is essentially emotional, saying, "No creature can fly with just one wing. Gifted leadership occurs where heart and head—feeling and thought—meet. These are the two wings that allow a leader to soar."[84] He continues by adding that "great leaders motivate and inspire passion in others."[85] Denning, who also researches emotion and organizational life, agrees and asserts that the idea is false that a leader can be effective by appealing to reason isolated from emotion. Feeling and reason are intertwined in the way people make their way through the world.[86] Navigating this match of head and heart requires what is called emotional intelligence. Emotional intelligence (EQ) involves both personal and social competence.[87]

Golemen, Boyatzis, and McKee propose that the foundational pathway of leadership is emotional. They claim a critical principle to this emotional task is that organizationally, feelings are "caught."[88] The better leaders are at expressing their emotions, the greater will be the reach of these emotions throughout the

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[84] Daniel Goleman, Richard E. Boyatzis, and Annie McKee, *Primal Leadership: Learning to Lead with Emotional Intelligence* (Boston: Harvard Business Press, 2004), 26.

[85] Ibid., 5.

[86] Stephen Denning, *The Secret Language of Leadership: How Leaders Inspire Action Through Narrative*, 1st ed. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2007), 242.

[87] Goleman, Boyatzis, and McKee, *Primal Leadership*, 39.

[88] Ibid., 7.

organization.[89] Therefore, these authors suggest, the leader's own self-management—the process of recognizing what one is feeling and managing those feelings versus being managed by them-- is critical to organizational leadership.[90] It is, in part, self-management that enables vulnerability on the part of the leader. Goleman et al claim transparency of feelings allows "the sense that a leader can be trusted."[91] Homileticians Avery and Gobbel found a similar dynamic in studying the response to the preached word in one Lutheran church in Pennsylvania. Their study indicated that the response to the sermon was governed far more by the emotional and relational connection between the pastor and the congregation than by what the pastor actually said. In fact, 83 percent of respondents indicated that their interpersonal relationship with the pastor was more critical than the theological expertise of the pastor in determining whether the pastor was preaching the word of God.[92] One may disagree with the respondents' assertion of the priority of the relational over the theological; however, it is clear from these findings that emotional connection is vital in a congregation's development of trust for their leader.

However, engaging vulnerability as an aspect of leadership is not simply a technique to utilize. The living reality of leadership in the church is exercised in

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[89] Ibid., 11.

[90] Ibid., 45.

[91] Ibid., 47.

[92] William O. Avery and A. Roger Gobbel, "The Word of God and the Words of the Preacher," in *A Reader on Preaching: Making Connections,* eds. David Day, Jeff Astley, and Leslie J. Francis, Explorations in Practical, Pastoral and Empirical Theology (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Pub Ltd, 2005), 272.

community, before the people God has called leaders to serve. Living as a vulnerable leader involves, to some degree, removing masks and being known as the person one truly is.[93] Yet, what guides leaders to determine what they are to disclose, which tender places of life for them to unmask? Herrick and Mann propose that, although there are no hard and fast rules readily available as a guide, a living dependence on the ever-present resource of the Holy Spirit mediated through a life of meditation and prayer provides contours of disclosure. It is, at least in part, through contemplative prayer, posit Herrick and Mann, that such wisdom may be developed.[94] They propose the degree of disclosure is partially a function of the leader's relationship with God.[95] For in becoming vulnerable to God, one finds it easier to be vulnerable with other people, too.[96]

One further factor to account for in the degree of disclosure beyond a pastor's relationship with God is the existing relationship with the community. Herrick and Mann suggest that outside of a context of trust and mutual love, disclosure carries significant risk and also may ultimately be destructive.[97] Leaders must not only ask how they feel about the disclosure, but must also examine the disclosure and resulting vulnerability from the perspective of those receiving it.[98] This question

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[93] Herrick, *Jesus Wept*, 36.

[94] Ibid., 39. Herrick and Mann speak to this issue from the Anglican tradition. Other Christian traditions may understand the benefits and practice of contemplative prayer differently.

[95] Ibid., 40.

[96] Ibid., 183.

[97] Ibid., 40.

[98] Ibid., 43.

intersects with the definition of trust offered by acclaimed marriage and trust researcher John Gottman. In his view, trust is essentially the development of understanding that actions are rooted in concern for the best interest of others.[99] It is incumbent on leaders, Herrick and Mann posit, to grasp the relational realities of the organization, discerning the depth of relationships that exist by calculating the level of vulnerability demonstrated. It is the existing love and trust in relationships that provide a context for working through whatever pain or disequilibrium that will be experienced by leaders' disclosures.[100] They label this dynamic to watch as the "circle of intimacy" that either exists or is being built within the community.[101]

Organizational Vulnerability

When attempting to shape the organizational culture and capacities, leaders must view the challenges as adaptive rather than technical. Technical solutions offer programs or projects to address an issue. They rely on technique and call for no additional learning beyond the capacities already available to an organization. An adaptive challenge, however, calls for an organization to be stretched to embody new "attitudes, values, and behaviors," propose Linsky and Heifetz.[102] These new capacities engage experimentation and organization-wide adaptability to successfully thrive through an adaptive challenge.[103]

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[99] John M. Gottman, *The Science of Trust: Emotional Attunement for Couples* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2011), 73-75.

[100] Herrick, *Jesus Wept*, 44.

[101] Ibid., 45.

[102] Linsky and Heifetz, *Leadership on the Line*, 13.

[103] Ibid.

Heifetz, Grashow, and Linsky identify "thriving" as a critical element of adaptive growth, applying the concept of thriving from evolutionary biology to the science and art of leadership. They suggest: "Successful adaptations enable a living system to take the best from its history into the future."[104] Thus, leading a thriving system enables the entire system not only to grow by preserving its best, but also to develop new capacities to meet new challenges and problems. An organization cannot thrive without growth. Further growth and thriving will not happen in an organization established simply on technical leadership. Adaptive challenges are not solved by a leader speaking from on high; rather, adaptive challenges are solved by organizations that have grown to understand their challenges and the people dealing with the problem who see it as their responsibility to find a solution.[105] Leading in such an environment demands that a leader recognize that leadership is essentially emotional versus cognitive or technique driven. [106]

Developing the capacity and vulnerability to lead adaptive challenges requires a leader to grow into a differentiated rather than a fused leader. A fused leader is one whose sense of identity is fused with some other person, organization, or responsibility. By way of contrast, a critical tool in the leader's toolbox is that of differentiation, the "ability to be in charge of self, even when others in the emotional

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[104] Ronald A. Heifetz, Marty Linsky, and Alexander Grashow, *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership: Tools and Tactics for Changing Your Organization and the World*, 1st ed. (Boston: Harvard Business Press, 2009), 14.

[105] Linsky and Heifetz, *Leadership on the Line*, 14.

[106] Friedman, *A Failure of Nerve*; Goleman, Boyatzis, and McKee, *Primal Leadership*; Herrington, Creech, and Taylor, *The Leader's Journey*; Herrick, *Jesus Wept*; Scazzero, *The Emotionally Healthy Church*.

field are actually trying to make us be different from how we are."[107] The events of one's life, at times, have hooks that goad them into certain patterns of reaction not predicated on maturity, but rather based on reacting in pain to anxiety or control by some circumstance, person, or power. In *Primal Leadership,* the authors use the term "emotional hijacking" to describe what happens when negative emotions disrupt workflow by becoming so powerful and ill-considered so as to script a certain response.[108]

The late Rabbi and family-systems psychologist Edwin Friedman agrees with the critical nature of differentiation to any leader's effectiveness. In fact, he labels the emotional presence of a well-differentiated leader as the universal law of healthy leadership. He pointedly writes of the effect of such a leader:

> In any type of organization whatsoever, when a self-directed, imaginative, energetic, or creative member is being consistently frustrated and sabotaged rather than encouraged and supported, what will turn out to be true one hundred percent of the time, regardless of whether the disrupters are supervisors, subordinates, or peers, is that the person at the very top of that institution is a peace-monger. By that I mean a highly anxious risk-avoider, someone who is more concerned with good feelings than with progress, someone whose life revolves around the axis of consensus, a "middler," someone who is so incapable of taking well-defined stands that his "disability" seems to be genetic, someone who functions as if she had been filleted of her backbone, someone who treats conflict or anxiety like mustard gas—one whiff, on goes the emotional gas mask, and he flits. Such leaders are often "nice," if not charming.[109]

Friedman further states that a poorly differentiated leader, a "peace-monger," does not have to be in direct contact with the one being sabotaged for the effect to be felt.

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[107] Ronald W. Richardson, *Creating a Healthier Church* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), 87.

[108] Goleman, Boyatzis, and McKee, *Primal Leadership*, 13.

[109] Friedman, *A Failure of Nerve*, 13–14.

The presence of sabotage is a dynamic of the systemic realities of leadership, forming the institution into an "emotional field."[110]

Leadership is made more effective when a leader is able to detangle from the hooks that goad, and with emotional awareness respond to these challenges as they come. One source on congregational leadership communicates the need for differentiated leadership to lead adaptive challenges with vulnerability in this way: "Effective leadership comes from someone with enough emotional maturity to call a congregation to discern and pursue a shared vision, to remain connected with those who differ with the leader of the majority, and to remain a calm presence when the anxiety rises."[111] Growth in emotional maturity and intelligence provides the leader with the capacity to respond rather than react to difficult challenges. As leaders grow in emotional maturity and the willingness to be vulnerable, then the system grows as a result. Friedman suggests that the presence of a well-differentiated leader is the primary factor that makes healthy organizations different.[112]

What are some effective strategies to develop the emotional maturity necessary to grow toward becoming a differentiated leader? In *Primal Leadership*, the authors report discoveries that aid in developing emotional intelligence among leaders. One of these aids is the value of developing "trusting and supportive relationships that make change possible."[113] Scazzero provides suggestions for how

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[110] Ibid., 15.

[111] Herrington, Creech, and Taylor, *The Leader's Journey*, 46.

[112] Friedman, *A Failure of Nerve*, 19.

[113] Goleman, Boyatzis, and McKee, *Primal Leadership*, 112.

to utilize these relationships, from cultivating a mentor relationship[114] to growing the leadership team in a direction such that honesty, weakness, and self-disclosure become more a part of the normal rhythm of the leadership community.[115] Whatever strategies are chosen, it is valuable for trusted partners to be able to identify and reflect together upon the places where their stories from the past push them into reactivity rather than response.

On the whole, Friedman suggests that effective leadership training does not consist of techniques; on the contrary, effective training is located in forming the leader as an emotionally healthy person.[116] Scazzero agrees in suggesting the health of the organization will ultimately reflect the emotional health of its leaders.[117] Herrick and Mann propose that as leaders develop emotional maturity as persons, they are better able to stand outside the boundaries that organizations construct as professional behavior and risk vulnerability. In this way, leadership is as much about being as it is about functioning as a professional.[118]

Being shaped into a person that God is forming occasionally will call upon leaders to communicate in ways contrary to the normal expectations of professionalism. They may even find themselves following in the footsteps of the incarnation along the way.[119] Additionally, these emotionally differentiated leaders

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[114] Scazzero, *The Emotionally Healthy Church*, 198.

[115] Ibid., 121–123.

[116] Friedman, *A Failure of Nerve*, 21.

[117] Scazzero, *The Emotionally Healthy Church*, 46.

[118] Friedman, *A Failure of Nerve*, 19.

learn how to better handle the sabotage that undoubtedly will come their way from functioning as a defined leader. Presence of healthy leaders strengthens the entire organizational system.[120]

Building Organizational Trust

The willingness of individuals or groups to follow a leader rests on trust that has been developed in that leader. This trust enables an organization to get things done. "Trust," writes Kouzes and Posner, "rules just about everything you do."[121] In fact, the level of trust that constituents place in their leaders ultimately determines how much of the leader's influence they will accept.[122] Yet, business ethics professor James O'Toole posits that trust is "an outcome." It cannot be created; rather, trust follows as a result of leaders creating an environment of candor, predictability, and consistency—in short, trust is developed in leaders who have a clear pane between what they say and how they act.[123]

Demographic factors also may influence the building of trust. Gottman cited social capital research that identified high-trust and low-trust regions both in the U.S. and internationally. For example, the Deep South is a low-trust region, which Gottman associates with income disparity, poorer mental and physical health, and

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[119] Herrick, *Jesus Wept*, 114.

[120] Friedman, *A Failure of Nerve*, 19.

[121] James M. Kouzes and Barry Z. Posner, *The Truth about Leadership: The No-Fads, Heart-of-the-Matter Facts You Need to Know*, 1st ed. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2010), 76.

[122] Ibid., 77.

[123] Bennis, Goleman, and O'Toole, *Transparency*, 62.

lower achievement in child test scores. According to Gottman, interventions to address these factors are "far less effective in low-trust states."[124]

Definition of Trust

What is trust and how is it built? There is not a generally agreed upon definition of trust across disciplines.[125] Yet, the field of the study of trust covers a vast landscape. Trust may be framed cognitively, that is, as a belief or expectation of reliability. Or, trust may be framed behaviorally, by primarily evaluating the interaction of systems or people based on the perception of knowledge or information. Within the behavioral frame, trust is seen more as the willingness to put self at risk.[126] Yamagishi considers trust through the frame of relational extension, emancipating people from closed relationships into the general condition of being able to form new ones. This formation of trust as relational extension comes as a system seeks to grow broadly in social intelligence.[127]

Many have written that trust relies on leaders doing what they say. However, Simons posits that the equation works both ways. Leaders also must walk their talk, having congruence to do what they say and say what they do.[128]

Covey suggests that trust means confidence. The confidence of trust, however, is not simply the confidence of competence. Rather, confidence includes

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[124] Gottman, *The Science of Trust*, 41–42.

[125] Ibid., 44.

[126] Ibid., 46.

[127] Toshio Yamagishi, *Trust: The Evolutionary Game of Mind and Society*, 1st ed. (New York: Springer, 2011), 3.

[128] Tony L Simons, "Behavioral Integrity as a Critical Ingredient for Transformational Leadership," *Journal of Organizational Change Management* 12, no. 2 (1999): 102.

discerning a consistent culture of learning and growing that is built organization-wide. Even if results are unimpressive, an organization continues to grow in trust of its leadership if humility and experimentation have been established as an aspect of organizational culture.[129] The distinguished leadership professor Warren Bennis agrees with Covey by proposing that, without leaders transparently and honestly reflecting reality, constituents do not believe what their leaders say.[130]

Gottman studied the factors couples weighed to judge whether their partner was trustworthy. He proposed that if one evaluated these factors, it would be possible to work backwards into seeing a simple—yet real—pathway for building trust. These factors are honesty, transparency, accountability, ethics, and alliance. Gottman defines transparency as "not remaining hidden" and being "forthcoming" when asked for information. Combined with transparency is alliance, which recognizes that one partner genuinely has the other's interest at heart, and is not operating essentially out of self-interest.[131] These factors take on a slightly different appearance related to building organizational trust in leaders versus trust in couples, the immediate subject of Gottman's research.

One significant challenge in building trust through vulnerability lies in the terror of real relational connectedness. Herrick and Mann label the conflicted nature of humanity that both craves and is terrified by the prospect of genuine community, where men and women know and are known by others:

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[129] Stephen M.R. Covey, *The Speed of Trust: The One Thing that Changes Everything* (New York: Free Press, 2008), 117.

[130] Bennis, Goleman, and O'Toole, *Transparency*, viii.

[131] Gottman, *The Science of Trust*, 336.

> [T]he post-modern self is characterized by a loss of confidence and a loss of trust, not only in other people, but in formerly accepted frameworks of reality and rationality. He is no longer sure of his identity. In his isolation, disorientation and insecurity, reality becomes what he creates it to be (a personal construct) and he lives with the constant threat of violence and conflict from "them"—whoever "they" may be. He reacts to and copes with this threat and his loss of identity by taking on and discarding a pastiche-personality of masks and images.[132]

Not only is terror of being exposed before others a challenge. As relational beings, the dynamics of the leader's own family system may cause the leader to question the strategy of using vulnerability to build trust. In everyone's family of origin, there are unwritten rules regarding the practices and behavior that are discussed as well as those which are not. Often, clear weaknesses are off limits for discussion in the family. Bennis, Goleman, and Biederman suggest that leaders, without substantial maturity, may import these unwritten rules into their organizational cultures.[133] As a result, leaders may find ways to make excuses for underperforming employees or perpetuate maladapted relationships in the workplace, all in similar fashion to the dysfunction of their families of origin.[134] These factors can dominate organizational culture if not examined and intentionally challenged by leaders modeling transparency.[135]

One further frame defining trust comes by asking the question: "Are you there for me?" This lens on trust not only seeks to measure whether a person is

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[132] Herrick, *Jesus Wept*, 46.

[133] Bennis, Goleman, and O'Toole, *Transparency*, 34.

[134] Ibid., 37.

[135] Ibid., 42.

reliable, but goes deeper from the reliability of one's word to the reliability of one's actions. Any number of scenarios can be envisioned in which the above question applies, from "Are you there to help when I struggle?" to "Can I count on you to be on time?"[136] Gottman concludes that a seed of erosion of trust lies in "the unavailability or unresponsiveness (or turning against) of a partner when the other is in need of understanding, comfort or love—that is, not 'being there' for our partner when he or she needs it."[137]

Utilizing the behavioral rather than cognitive lens on trust, Gottman essentially proposes that trust ultimately seeks congruence between word and action. One must not only say that the other's interests are taken into account, but also actions must demonstrate that the other's interests matter. Gottman simply proposes that "trust means that our partner, perhaps in considering his or her own interests, is also considering our interests in the way he or she acts."[138]

Building Trust

How might a leader go about building trust considering Friedman proposed "sabotage comes with the territory of leading"[139] and flows from the ever–shifting emotional processes within any organization? Literature suggests intentionality toward building trust is critical in establishing a context for interpersonal and organizational trust.

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[136] Gottman, *The Science of Trust*, 49.

[137] Ibid., 344.

[138] Ibid., 76.

[139] Friedman, *A Failure of Nerve*, 11.

Numerous authors have recognized that leadership is essentially emotional versus cognitive or technique-driven.[140] Therefore, building trust is primary to the practice of leadership. Brené Brown notes that human beings live along a continuum of connection to disconnection. She suggests that human beings innately desire connection with one another. It is empathy that promotes connection with others; however, it is shame that pushes people toward disconnection.[141] Welch agrees with Brown in noting the connection between vulnerability and shame. Whenever one feels condemned or contaminated and fails to connect with that which will cleanse, ultimately people "must find a way to prove innocence."[142] It is insistence on innocence, essentially failing to acknowledge and even embrace what others observe, that leads to disconnection.[143]

The dial that moves human beings up and down the continuum of connection and disconnection is vulnerability.[144] It is through the power of one's ability to be vulnerable that genuine connection and trust between humans is established and maintained. In addition, Brown suggests that the more one's vulnerabilities are

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[140] Friedman, *A Failure of Nerve*; Goleman, Boyatzis, and McKee, *Primal Leadership*; Scazzero, *The Emotionally Healthy Church*; Richardson, *Creating a Healthier Church*; Herrington, Creech, and Taylor, *The Leader's Journey*.

[141] Brené Brown, "Shame Resilience Theory: A Grounded Theory Study on Women and Shame.," *Families in Society* 87, no. 1 (January 2006): 10.

[142] Welch, *Shame Interrupted*, 53.

[143] Ibid., 149.

[144] *Brené Brown: The Power of Vulnerability*, 2011, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iCvmsMzlF7o&feature=youtube_gdata_player.

acknowledged, the less power they have to imprison a person in shame.[145] She posits that the more someone is able to expose their weaknesses to offer support to others, the more they will be able to experience connection and growth into deeper emotional health.[146] This connection provides the foundation for trust. Welch essentially agrees with the caveat that concern for vulnerability lies not only, nor even ultimately, before other people. Rather, the establishment of connection that breaks shame must be with God first.[147] The maxim "mercy received, mercy given" propels people toward vulnerable living before others when they grasp the reality of God's cleansing and mercy toward them first.[148]

On the other hand, Brown's research found that oversharing results in disconnection and therefore erodes trust.[149] In order for connection, and therefore trust, to occur through vulnerable sharing, a context for the vulnerability must carefully be built. That context evaluates the relationships involved toward understanding whether they can bear the weight of intimacy. As previously observed in chapter one, absent the context, personal vulnerability may be experienced as "floodlighting," where the intimacy is far too bright and far too concentrated. The result is that the hearer disconnects, seeking to protect self from

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[145] Brown, "Shame Resilience Theory," 9.

[146] Ibid., 10.

[147] Welch, *Shame Interrupted*, 49.

[148] Ibid., 149.

[149] Brown, *Daring Greatly*, 159.

the inappropriate vulnerability.[150] Disconnection and therefore the erosion of trust also occur by use of a "smash and grab" technique, which reveals vulnerable information as a means of manipulating or ensuring a certain response.[151]

Herrick and Mann root the choice for vulnerability in an appropriation of the power of God at work within his people. It is by surrendering to God that the leader finds the ability to choose vulnerability. Leaders are called to embrace the risk that comes by giving others the power to wound in light of what has been disclosed. They see this action modeled in Jesus, the perfect God-man, by his submitting to sinful parents, his washing the disciples' feet in John 13, and ultimately his submitting to the cross. As Christian leaders, these authors suggest that the power that enables the leader to surrender to God and his will resides in and comes from God himself. In such a way, leadership is a matter of laying down one's life for the sake of others. [152]

In his work on building trust between couples, Gottman identifies three contexts that interplay to build and maintain trust. The first is what he labels as "sliding door moments": small, everyday interactions in which a context is built to answer the question "Are you there for me?"[153] The second context is the regrettable incident: an incident in which damage is done in the relationship and

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[150] Ibid., 160.

[151] Ibid., 163.

[152] Herrick, *Jesus Wept*, 58.

[153] Gottman, *The Science of Trust*, 196.

provides a moment for repair and intimacy.[154] The third context is conflict: incidents that can produce an absorbing state where repair is not likely or where these same incidents, with attunement, can move toward intimacy and trust.[155]

Sliding door moments tend to be routine events, serving as tests to determine the level of trust, while at the same time building a foundation of trust between people.[156] Susan Johnson's work on attachment theory describes how couples attach and provide a context for safety and intimacy.[157] This theory offers a frame on how these routine "sliding door" events build trust. Whenever one of these small opportunities for connection is experienced by a couple, trust can be built by turning toward the opportunity. Turning toward it could be as simple as engaging the partner with a positive emotion, which accrues to an emotional account that may be drawn upon during conflict.[158] Conversely, trust is eroded by turning away from the opportunity. Sliding door moments build trust by communicating an inviting, human presence when the other wonders, "Are you there for me?"

Couples build trust in the context of a regrettable incident by processing the incident without rehashing the particulars of the incident or the fight that follows. Gottman suggests that couples generally fight about nothing, that is, the context of everyday life breeds the most conflict. Whenever couples encounter everyday

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[154] Ibid., 201.

[155] Ibid., 212.

[156] Ibid., 197.

[157] Sue Johnson, *Hold Me Tight: Seven Conversations for a Lifetime of Love*, 1st ed. (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2008).

[158] Gottman, *The Science of Trust*, 199.

regrettable scenarios and fail to process them, relational damage is deepened.[159] Failure to process negative events erodes trust because the unprocessed negativity dominates the narrative for how the couple sees their relationship. The couple loses the narrative that each partner has the other's best interest at heart, which is foundational to trust.[160] Yet, when the partner is willing to process and understand the other's emotions following an incident, the sense that "You are there for me" is reinforced. This sense has a recursive effect on the positive narrative of the relationship, thereby building trust.[161]

The context of conflict reveals whether the negative view of the relationship has become an absorbing state, that is, the primary "story of us." When this happens, the partners may either escalate the conflict or withdraw, enacting a "distance and isolation cascade." Once this happens, each partner loses incentive to discuss and process as contempt has destroyed the context of trust.[162] Attunement during conflict can prevent this cascade of failure and actually provide opportunity to build intimacy and trust if, in the other two contexts, couples have developed skills of listening empathetically, understanding the other as a goal, avoiding attacking and blaming statements, and being willing to accept that their partner's narrative of

[159] Ibid., 202–203.

[160] Ibid., 204.

[161] Ibid., 205.

[162] Ibid., 213.

events may be correct even if the other can't immediately see the conflict the partner's way.[163]

These three contexts of research seem to suggest that the maintenance of trust in everyday interactions provides a stable environment for processing and dealing with more significant issues requiring trust. As the trust metric builds through small, everyday interactions, conflict is handled toward effective repair and the story of the relationship maintains a sense of being positive. Self-disclosure is utilized in this existing context of trust to build even more trust, even when the disclosure is of something negative. Disclosure functions recursively to build even more trust when the story of the relationship is overall a positive one and the existing trust metric is positive.[164]

While not focusing on organizational trust, the research of John Gottman on marital trust may offer insights into methods of developing trust in organizations. If, as cited earlier, organizational leadership is relational[165] and emotional,[166] then it seems reasonable to say that Gottman's research, which understands trust in the context of the most intimate of relationships, has some benefit to offer the understanding of the relational and emotional dynamics organizationally.

Intentionality toward the building of trust must be applied toward organizations and organizational culture as well. Organizational researchers Melita

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[163] Ibid., 221.

[164] Ibid., 373.

[165] Kouzes and Posner, *The Leadership Challenge, 4th Edition*, 4.

[166] Goleman, Boyatzis, and McKee, *Primal Leadership*, 26.

Prati et al have shown that a network of trust can be developed through a shared, although dynamic, sense of "values, attitudes, moods and emotions." This trust is reinforced when the expectations developed from such a shared sense are met, especially through occurrence of "intimate interactions."[167] Once a high level of trust is established in a relational network, a recursive effect comes into play reducing the need for the perpetual testing of trust.[168]

Several researchers suggest vulnerability and transparency as characteristics that are culturally conditioned. In particular, the drive toward transparency is a function of the digital culture. The presence of "ubiquitous tattle-tales" presses organizations toward as much transparency as possible, whether organizations like it or not. The blogging culture, readily available information, and every young person with a cell phone camera are forming a culture that expects a certain level of see-through-ability.[169] There is a "new transparency," suggests Bennis, founded on the increasing exposure expected in a digital age. He suggests that this demand for transparency will only increase with the development of technology and will unsettle those people and organizations that have rested on the control of information flow.[170]

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[167] L Melita Prati et al., "Emotional Intelligence, Leadership Effectiveness, and Team Outcomes," *International Journal of Organizational Analysis* 11, no. 1 (2003): 11.

[168] Ibid., 32.

[169] Bennis, Goleman, and O'Toole, *Transparency*, 17.

[170] Ibid., 117.

A context for honest feedback is a critical component of organizational culture that is developing trust.[171] At the heart of the drive for feedback is a leader's desire and intention toward mutuality with their followers, that is, understanding concerns and serving needs.[172] Followers associate this mutuality with consideration of their needs in decisions.[173] The goal must not be the minimizing of conflict and discomfort; rather, the goal in such an organizational culture is the normalization of discomfort.[174] Others have labeled this culture as one that "names the elephants in the room."[175] Trust is built by a leader's ability to be transparently committed to the mission and goals of the organization over their own advancement. Continual feedback and a culture that welcomes independent judgment provide such context.[176]

Dan Allender, in his typically thoughtful yet provocative style, suggests that the sort of leadership which is able to effectively move an organization toward trust is done humanly. Distinctly human leadership is the sort that enables leaders to be fully present, emotionally alive, and engaged while at the same time willing to be honest about their limitations and weaknesses. He writes:

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[171] Brown, *Daring Greatly*, 198.

[172] Nicole A Gillespie and Leon Mann, "Transformational Leadership and Shared Values: The Building Blocks of Trust," *Journal of Managerial Psychology* 19, no. 6 (2004): 591.

[173] Ibid., 592.

[174] Brown, *Daring Greatly*, 198.

[175] Heifetz, Linsky, and Grashow, *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership*, 102.

[176] Ibid., 104.

> Here is God's leadership model: he chooses fools to live foolishly in order to reveal the economy of heaven, which reverses and inverts the wisdom of this world. He calls us to brokenness, not performance; to relationships, not commotion; to grace, not success. It is no wonder that this kind of leadership is neither spoken of nor admired in our business schools or even our seminaries.[177]

Interpersonally and organizationally, in order to build a structure of trust, people must open up to one another. Someone must begin this process and Kouzes and Posner suggest that it is the leader's job to trust first. It is those who demonstrate trust in others who are perceived to be the most worthy of trust.[178] Carol Rusaw's research suggests something similar. She found that rather than trust being something governed by some sort of exchange theory, trust-building ultimately rests on the leader's work of promoting a shared ethos and the willingness to trust followers, even when followers may not trust back.[179] Additionally, her research suggests that as leaders set organizational norms, followers begin to experience those norms as the organizational climate.[180] As the leader exhibits trust, trust will be built as part of the organizational climate.

Locander and Luechauer studied leadership and trust within the public relations field. They determined that empathy is the most important emotion for leaders to exhibit in building employee trust in their leadership. It is empathy that

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[177] Allender, *Leading with a Limp*, 55.

[178] Kouzes and Posner, *The Truth About Leadership*, 80.

[179] A. Carol Rusaw, "The Ethics of Leadership Trust.," *International Journal of Organization Theory & Behavior* 3, no. 3/4 (November 2000): 564.

[180] Ibid., 561.

empowers the sense that one is not alone.[181] Not only is it important for leaders to have the capacity for comprehending the emotions of those who work alongside them, but also important is the ability to re-experience the feelings of employees who contributed toward "mutual understanding and compassion in the workplace."[182] Brown concurs in finding empathy the antidote to shame.[183]

In addition to empathy being a factor for establishing trust, Bennis, Goleman, and O'Toole propose that the free flow of information within an organization creates the conditions wherein trust is built. Not only must leaders provide contexts for judgment to be challenged, but they must also ruthlessly ask questions throughout the organization without expecting pre-packaged answers. Essentially, the authors describe a posture of humility rather than certainty that garners trust organizationally. These seasoned business leaders recommend a posture of confidence—the capacity of taking in information and correcting mistakes—rather than certainty—the stubborn refusal to be curious of other narratives describing an issue.[184]

In surveying the literature on building organizational trust, we have learned that trust is built when people perceive leaders pursue the best interests of others. This sense is developed through consistency of action on the part of leaders. Further

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[181] Brown, *Daring Greatly*, 80.

[182] William B. Locander and David L. Luechauer, "Trust & Betrayal: Mayzie and Horton Leaders.," *Marketing Management* 17, no. 2 (March 2008): 175.

[183] Brown, *Daring Greatly*, 74.

[184] Bennis, Goleman, and O'Toole, *Transparency*, 69.

trust is developed as leaders seek to build a culture of honest feedback, inviting relationships around the shared mission and ethos of the organization.

Leadership Communication

As leaders seek to develop communication for organizational growth and change, they must carefully consider how specifically to communicate toward these ends. The systemic nature of organizational leadership was outlined above as the emotional minefield of leadership and the vulnerability required for a leader to risk tackling adaptive challenges. Perhaps leadership communication then is best summed up as "disturbing people—but at a rate they can absorb."[185]

These communication practices are not merely techniques, however, suggests Edwin Friedman. He proposes "the colossal misunderstanding" related to leadership communication is that the communication of insight will work to bring change to people who are not already motivated to change. Rather he suggests, "If you want your child, spouse, client, or boss to shape up, stay connected while changing yourself rather than trying to fix them."[186] According to Friedman, it is by focusing on the leader's "presence and being" that provides the tracks for organizational growth and development.[187] Communication theorists Muehlhoff and Lewis concur by pointing to distinct levels of communication: the content level and the relational level.[188] In their rubric, the content consists of the words, the rational

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[185] Linsky and Heifetz, *Leadership on the Line*, 20.

[186] Friedman, *A Failure of Nerve*, ix.

[187] Ibid., 4.

message itself. The relational level speaks to the manner of communication, seeing the messenger as part of the message. It is the relational level that provides a posture of presence and concern for the other that provides context for genuinely persuasive communication.[189]

Surveying classic works on preaching turns up very little consideration of vulnerability in communication. Haddon Robinson, widely considered the dean of evangelical preachers, speaks to the truth of scripture being "applied to the personality and experience of the preacher," even going so far as to suggest that there "exists no place for the preacher to hide."[190] Yet, discerning how transparently the pastor's heart and experience should become to the congregation does not merit a single word in his seminal work on preaching.[191] His chapter on "How to Preach So People Will Listen" lays out advice for delivery, grooming and dress, movement and gestures, eye contact and so forth. But the concept of sharing of the preacher's own life is not addressed. In a private conversation with Dr. Robinson, the researcher was advised that the classic works don't consider personal vulnerability "because this sort of thing wasn't done."

Yet, the homiletical record is not silent on this question. Andre Resner, Jr. devoted an entire chapter of his seminal work *Preacher and Cross* to the historical

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[188] Tim Muehlhoff and Todd V. Lewis, *Authentic Communication: Christian Speech Engaging Culture* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2010), 192.

[189] Ibid., 194.

[190] Haddon W. Robinson, *Biblical Preaching: The Development and Delivery of Expository Messages* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Pub Group, 1980), 24.

[191] Robinson, *Biblical Preaching*.

consideration of the role of the preacher's person in the act of preaching.[192] Resner suggests that Barth's doctrine of scripture and accompanying understanding of preaching primarily about God speaking to his people supplied the historical dividing line in the homiletical discipline, offering twin liabilities to the preacher. Those following Barth, Resner believes, tend toward "homiletical Docetism, that is, a discussion of the word of proclamation apart from its physical embodiment in the preacher," while those opposing him tend toward "homiletical Donatism, i.e., a position wherein the efficacy of the preached word is dependent in some way on the person of the preacher."[193] The grand struggle Resner sees is between the disciplines of theology and rhetoric, with American homiletics (strongly supported by John Broadus and Fred Craddock) siding with rhetoric.[194] In so doing, the measure of efficacy has been persuasiveness and influence.[195]

In another classic work on preaching, Phillips Brooks famously suggested that preaching is "truth through personality," that is, truth pouring through not only the pen, but also the entire life of the preacher.[196] According to Brooks, this sort of expression of personality happens when the pastor has "brought his life close" to the congregation "with sympathy."[197] What Brooks means is that preaching with

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[192] Resner Jr, *Preacher and Cross*, chap. 2.

[193] Ibid., 62.

[194] Ibid., 67.

[195] Ibid., 82.

[196] Phillips Brooks, *Lectures on preaching, delivered before the Divinity school of Yale college in January and February, 1877* (New York: E.P. Dutton & company, 1902), 8.

appropriate vulnerability serves as the embodiment of the truth in the life of that pastor. Truth is poured through the life of the preacher into the lives of other men and women in the congregation.

Lloyd-Jones points out the potential abuse of too much personality and not enough truth in the preacher's message. He has concerns that being self-referential in a sermon carries the potential of obscuring the truth by "pandering" to the basest curiosities of the congregation regarding his personal life.[198]

This concern, however, seems to address an abuse of Brooks' maxim and not the maxim itself. The underlying question is whether the vulnerability serves the purpose of highlighting the truth preached or simply setting the lives of pastors or their families on display. The truth, rather than the event or story of the pastor's life, must be the point.[199]

Brené Brown's research has empirically found the category with which Brooks is concerned. Although her research is not about preachers, Brown's language for the manipulative use of vulnerability is "smash and grab." Utilizing such a technique highlights some emotional or motivating aspect of personal life as leverage to grab some sort of advantage over others. [200]

Homiletics researcher Susan Durber concurs when she writes that the church does not need to hear the preacher's "endless anecdotes" of personal or family life,

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[197] Ibid., 74.

[198] David Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Preaching and Preachers* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Publ. House, 1971), 233.

[199] Brooks, *Lectures on preaching, delivered before the Divinity school of Yale college in January and February, 1877*, 122.

[200] Brown, *Daring Greatly*, 163.

as if simply repeating personal stories or putting the life of the preacher on display were the point.[201] Rather, the far better practice is for preachers to expose their own experiences of and with God in such a way that the congregation is able to connect with experiences beyond their own. This exposure should be done while not particularly drawing attention to the experience of the preacher per se. Instead, the idea is connection—connection of congregation to God as modeled in the life of the preacher.[202]

Experienced preacher David Schlafer essentially agrees in seeking to change the metaphor for preaching to that of a sacred conversation, where both the preacher and congregation are aware of their own role in the dialogue.[203] As such, preachers need to do their "internal homework" to develop enough reflective capacity to engage with the God of scripture. As preachers engage with God in a reflective manner, they also may invite the congregation into that conversation with them.[204]

The life of the preacher is best not displayed as to encourage voyeurism. Far better for the life of the people of God, Durber posits, is for preachers to reflect upon their own experiences of God and of this world in such a way that the congregation brings its own experience to the Lord.[205] Along these lines, Schlafer employs

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[201] Susan Durber, "The Preacher's Inner Life," in *The Future of Preaching,* ed. Geoffrey Stevenson (SCM Press, 2010), 179.

[202] Ibid., 182.

[203] David J. Schlafer, *Your Way with God's Word* (Cambridge, MA: Cowley Publications, 1995), 129.

[204] Ibid., 18.

Flannery O'Conner's dictum "show, don't tell," ensuring that the congregation is watching God rather than watching for the preacher.[206] Practically speaking, he advises that vulnerability—and particularly personal stories—in sermons be sufficiently "blurred around the edges" to draw congregations to truth rather than the preacher's own experience.[207]

Graves' own take on this advice of being personal, while sufficiently vague as to draw the eye of the congregant away from the preacher, is to pose a question. His question which guides personally vulnerable communication is: "What is the center of attention?"[208] Although Graves acknowledges this center of attention may vary from preacher to text to congregation, he insists preachers use this question intentionally as they communicate with personal vulnerability. While suggesting preachers do not need a specific rule to guide vulnerability,[209] he does concur with Thomas Long's rule of intent, that is, a preachers' own monitoring of their intent of disclosure. Long argues that congregations have the relational ability to discern why a pastor discloses.[210]

Brené Brown proposes similar questions to guide the boundary of what to share. One such concern is to label the expectation speakers desire by vulnerably

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[205] Stevenson, *The Future of Preaching*, 185.

[206] Schlafer, *Your Way with God's Word*, 126.

[207] Ibid., 56.

[208] Mike Graves, *The Fully Alive Preacher: Recovering from Homiletical Burnout* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), 137.

[209] Ibid., 71.

[210] Thomas G. Long, *The Witness Of Preaching,* 2nd ed. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), 221.

sharing.[211] Clarifying the expectation of sharing will help discern whether the goal is connection or some other self-oriented motive. She also cautions those communicating to watch against the use of vulnerable communication as a means of working through issues of self.[212] With this abuse of vulnerability, the act becomes not about empathy and connection but rather some sort of confessional activity.

Brooks also warns against opportunity for voyeuristic curiosity for the pastor's life. His precise concern is the erosion of the pastors' gravity, the component of a their character that allows congregations to hear and respond. In fact, Brooks' advice is that too much humor or self-reference contributes to a congregation not seeking the pastor in their hour of spiritual need.[213] Therefore, if vulnerability tears at the substance of the pastors' person, then perhaps the congregation's trust in them will become eroded.

There is a difference, Brooks suggests, in receiving truth simply for oneself—"abstractly" in his language—and in receiving and considering that truth in relationship to other people. This second sort of receiving truth seeks to give it away in power after preachers have sought to understand how it works in their own lives. True preachers, Brooks posits, are those who understand truth relationally such that it can be given away. This ability marks the skilled pulpiteer.[214] In some measure, as pastors preach, exposing their own personalities and exhorting the

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[211] Brown, *Daring Greatly*, 161.

[212] Ibid., 162.

[213] Brooks, *Lectures on Preaching, Delivered Before the Divinity School of Yale College in January and February, 1877*, 58.

[214] Ibid., 39.

congregation as they themselves have been challenged by the text, their own experiences of the gospel are poured in to the life of the congregation. As such, Brooks advises the pastor must not become so autobiographical as to limit the congregation's breadth of experience of how a particular text challenges life.[215] Thus, a liability of too frequent self-reference in illustrating and applying a text is to stunt the congregation's emotional and spiritual growth to the areas and categories that pastors have experienced.

Furthermore, the personal experiences expressed vulnerably by pastors could potentially limit the application of the truth because of the personal associations any congregant may attach to the stories pastors tell.[216] It may remind them of a similar experience from their own life in so powerful a way that the story becomes the point rather than the truth relationally expressed as the point.

Vulnerability expressed vividly and in vibrant language may emotionally overpower the hearers such that they are lost in their own experience as it relates to the story told by the pastor. Here again, the truth may be lost in the story rather than highlighted by the vulnerability in the sermon.[217] In this vein, Brown advises never to reveal fresh wounds or intimacies.[218] The temptation is too pronounced to resist turning vulnerability into a means of working out issues of self. This concern, once more, speaks to the abuse of vulnerability rather than the proper expression of

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[215] Ibid., 118.

[216] Ibid., 121.

[217] Ibid., 177.

[218] Brown, *Daring Greatly*, 161.

truth through personality

In a discussion regarding using the element of story in preaching, Thomas Troeger, a respected professor at Illif School of Theology, clarifies a challenge that is experienced while telling stories. Often stories seem somehow less real than theological discourse, especially in modernist-dominated congregations. He writes:

> As I am writing this review, I have just finished leading a conference where a gifted preacher told me of the resistance to story-thinking that was in his congregation of older persons and technically-trained engineers. In both cases the dominant culture of communication is precise language, and many listeners resist this preacher's gifted way with stories (or at least they do not appreciate a story unless it is explained). Their bias is exactly the one that Jensen names: they believe real thinking is thinking in ideas, not thinking in story. [219]

This response stands in stark contrast to Troeger's experience of how "younger people" respond positively to story in the sermon.[220]

Troeger notes the influence of mass media upon communication to press toward more "personal" communication and "narrative." He explains, "But to understand the personal, narrative mode, particularly as it is practiced through the mass media, is essential to formulating a homiletic that can adequately address the shift in the receptive consciousness of listeners." He suggests a background of this shift away from classical rhetorical strategy toward a more relational one lies, at least in part, in the shaping effect of television upon culture. [221]

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[219] Sally A. Brown and Patrick D. Miller, *Lament: Reclaiming Practices in Pulpit, Pew, and Public Square* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007), 33.

[220] Thomas H. Troeger, "Thinking in Story: Preaching in a Post-literate Age," *Homiletic* 18, no. 2 (December 1, 1993): 38.

[221] Thomas H. Troeger, "Emerging New Standards in the Evaluation of Effective Preaching.," *Worship* 64, no. 4 (July 1, 1990): 291.

Ethos is an aspect of preaching to be considered. According to homiletics professor and pastor Bryan Chapell, when preaching, the "influence of the preacher's testimony on the acceptance of the sermon" must be carefully weighed.[222] He continues, "We constantly reveal ourselves to others in our preaching; …the inside is always on view. People sense more than they can prove by the way we present ourselves in the most inadvertent ways."[223] On the other hand, Eswine reminds the reader that historically, self-reference in preaching has been downplayed in order to exalt God rather than the personality of the preacher.[224] Chapell interacts with this historical concern in suggesting that powerful and authentic preaching occurs when preachers do "not make [themselves] the focus of [their] sermons, but when [they are] willing to share [their] feelings, doubts, and fears with others as well as [their] faith."[225] In this way, they shine a light not on themselves but on a great redeemer.[226]

Although he uses terms differently from Chapell, Johnston essentially concurs by focusing on preaching as leadership communication, which requires both ethos (the motive) and pathos (the emotional appeal).[227] This communication

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[222] Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching: Redeeming the Expository Sermon* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1994), 28.

[223] Ibid., 29.

[224] Eswine, *Preaching to a Post-Everything World*, 87.

[225] Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching: Redeeming the Expository Sermon*, 326.

[226] Eswine, *Preaching to a Post-Everything World*, 93.

is intended to connect with a particular audience, not persons in general. Any listener's personal engagement with the message is a function of their perception of the preacher's engagement in their lives.[228] In order to facilitate this connection, not only must the nature of the message be crisp, but also the preacher must know well the persons the message addresses. By this he suggests that the sermon must not only communicate a message but also demonstrate the relevance of that message.[229] Personal engagement may be felt by congregations simply by the way preachers communicate that they understand the pressures the listener feels to turn away from the biblical message. This may be the case even without direct personal involvement with the listener, which is the case, for example, in itinerant preaching or listening via media from a distance.[230]

Troeger suggests that without a degree of self-awareness, authenticity and vulnerability in sermons are not genuinely possible. He explains, "No preacher can grab us by the entrails who is not in touch with his or her own fundamental humanity."[231] However, the endeavor to be authentic should not consist in the self-focused use of the pulpit as a confessional. Rather, Troeger suggests, authenticity is useful to "identify the deep common core we share with other human beings."[232]

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[227] Graham Johnston, *Preaching to a Postmodern World: A Guide to Reaching Twenty-first Century Listeners* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2001), 66.

[228] Ibid., 68.

[229] Ibid., 64.

[230] Ibid., 69.

[231] Troeger, "Emerging New Standards in the Evaluation of Effective Preaching.," 300.

[232] Ibid., 301.

Johnston concurs by suggesting that listeners trust a preacher's message when they sense the messenger has nothing to gain through influencing the listener.[233] Eswine agrees with the reminder that while preachers are not to preach self, the self is the vehicle through which Jesus is preached.[234]

However, communicators may not always be the best judge of what is appropriate to reveal of oneself. Brown has a rule for herself that she never shares information in public without working through the issues with someone close and beloved.[235] This practice guards against sharing information in order to express an unmet personal need. It also serves as a gauge on what may be appropriate for a particular setting.[236]

Admitting essential humanity through sermons contributes to the sense that what the preacher and/or leader has to say is relevant to the lives of those who listen. Johnston suggests that many preachers fail to build trust because they continue to address questions that no one asks any longer. Similarly, such preachers have nothing to say to the questions contemporary people ask.[237] There can be no separation of preaching and pastoring, Brooks writes. Rather, they "go hand in hand."[238] One cannot effectively pastor without some sort of preaching and cannot

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[233] Johnston, *Preaching to a Postmodern World*, 69.

[234] Eswine, *Preaching to a Post-Everything World*, 88.

[235] Brown, *Daring Greatly*, 161.

[236] Ibid., 162.

[237] Johnston, *Preaching to a Postmodern World*, 80.

preach without pastoring. Francis and Village, although writing nearly 140 years later, agree. They propose what they call the "pastoral model of preaching." They believe that preaching is more of a relational dialogue between preacher and congregation.[239] Pastors must develop the skill of not only reading the text, but also of reading the congregation such that they interact meaningfully with the people via the sermon.

Permeating the homiletical literature is the charge to leaders to communicate struggles as well as victories in their spiritual life. In sharing a struggle versus a problem over which the preacher has emerged victorious, communication actually reveals the heart of the preacher in which God continues to work.[240] Furthermore, the communication of a struggle serves to exalt the Savior in his greatness rather than shine the light on the personality and power of the preacher.

Latham explicitly disagrees with this idea of sharing personal struggles, suggesting that unresolved issues only distract an audience.[241] Taking the opposite view, Eswine—in recalling the words of the Apostle Paul[242]--encourages pastors to be willing to be seen vulnerably as jars of clay such that the power on display is the Lord's. Rather than distract the listeners, the act of communicating contemporary

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[238] Brooks, *Lectures on Preaching, Delivered Before the Divinity School of Yale College in January and February, 1877*, 77.

[239] Leslie J. Francis and Andrew Village, *Preaching: With All Our Souls: a Study in Hermeneutics and Psychological Type*, 1st ed. (New York: Continuum, 2008), 62.

[240] Johnston, *Preaching to a Postmodern World*, 130.

[241] Latham, "The Trauma of Transparency : 'Should I Let Them See Me?'," 11.

[242] 2 Corinthians 4:7-11.

struggles can exhibit weaknesses through which God can and does work.[243]

In summary, the survey of the homiletical literature has provided several conclusions. First, the topic of personal vulnerability in sermons has largely been ignored over the course of the history of homiletical texts. However, some have considered how best to highlight the truth of the Bible while not obscuring its light by pervasive personal anecdotes. The chief concern seems to be to exalt the Lord rather than the person of the preacher by personal vulnerability. The truth of the text must not be obscured by the pastor as person.

Yet, recent works offer advice to speak vulnerably such that the congregation sees itself in the life of the preacher. In this way, preaching may become a means of pastoring. Others suggest that setting vulnerability on display is a means to exalt the Lord's strength rather than the preacher.

In the next chapter the design of the study and the qualitative methodology utilized will be examined.

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[243] Eswine, *Preaching to a Post-Everything World*, 89.

Chapter Three

Project Methodology

The purpose of this study was to explore how pastors use vulnerability in sermons to build the congregation's trust in their leadership. In order to examine this question, the following research questions guided interviews with six pastors purposively sampled according to the criteria listed below.

Research Questions

The research questions used to guide this study were as follows:

1. How do pastors assess vulnerability in their sermons?
    a. What benefits do they find?
    b. What risks do they find?
2. How do pastors perceive the relationship between their preaching and the congregation's trust in their leadership?
3. How do pastors discern the limits of vulnerability in their sermons to build the congregation's trust in their leadership?

In conducting this study, one methodological assumption held is that learning takes place in the context of ministry.[244] This context provides a ripe environment in which to seek to understand the point of view of pastors from their experiences of using sermons to build trust; therefore, a qualitative study was designed.

[244] Herrington, Creech, and Taylor, *The Leader's Journey*, xiii–xiv.

Design of the Study

Sharan Merriam, author of *Qualitative Research: A Guide to Design and Implementation*, writes: "[Q]ualitative researchers are interested in understanding the meaning people have constructed, that is, how people make sense of their world and the experiences they have in the world."[245] The qualitative method serves to assist the researcher to better understand "how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences."[246] Utilizing the qualitative method offers the researcher the opportunity to gather the rich data provided through interviews that help understand the ways pastors seek to build trust in their leadership through their sermons. This method has enabled this study to explore themes, common strategies and concerns, and the rich experiences behind the way pastors perceive building trust within their congregational leadership.

Rather than employing a tool for the measurement of trust, the researcher was interested in exploring the understanding of the pastors themselves as they sought to build trust through vulnerability in their sermons. A basic qualitative study provided an adequate framework for exploring this topic as "a phenomenon for those involved."[247]

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[245] Sharan B. Merriam, *Qualitative Research: A Guide to Design and Implementation*, 3rd ed. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2009), 13.

[246] Ibid., 5.

[247] Ibid., 22.

Participant Sample Selection

This study utilized "purposive sampling"[248] for identifying participants to provide relevant rich data. Six pastors were interviewed following the interview protocol listed below. The pastors each served as the primary preaching pastor for their congregations and had done so for at least three years. This criterion was important in identifying participants who are the majority voice of leadership extended in the pulpit for preaching. Their voices provided the staple for maintaining vision and shaping the culture of the congregation through the Sunday morning sermon. Additionally, each pastor interviewed had experience being the regular preaching voice in their congregation (although perhaps not the current call) for at least seven years. Following this criterion for selection allowed for the experience of preaching and leading for a significant period of time.

In addition, the pastors interviewed were selected based on the criteria that they were known through common reports of congregants and by reputation to use vulnerability within their sermons. In order to create a sample set from which meaningful, rich data could be gained from this study, it was necessary to choose participants who significantly use this practice according to the reports of regular church attenders as well as the pastors' self-reporting.

Furthermore, each of the pastors was male, evangelical, and reformed, and conducted their ministry within the southeastern United States. These criteria closely matched the researcher's own background. This criterion was important because the researcher more easily gained access to them and was able to find

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[248] Ibid., 77.

subjects that fit all the criteria within the time limits of the research. Additionally, these specific criteria established some degree of commonality for the congregations these pastors serve, thus limiting the variables that are not a focus of the study analysis.

Data Collection

The interviews followed a semi-structured protocol. Utilizing the semi-structured protocol provided the researcher the opportunity to consistently explore the experiences of the pastors from pre-designed questions, yet with flexibility to pose new questions pursuing matters arising from the answers to the questions themselves.[249] Prior to the interview, each participant received written communication outlining the purpose of the study and the research questions. Further, each participant willingly signed a consent form. Skype provided the preferred method for interviews; however, three interviews were conducted via telephone.

The following interview protocol guided each of the interviews. With the use of the semi-structured protocol, each interview made use of questions not found in the following protocol as the researcher pursued rich data from the experiences of the pastors.

1. Think back to the last several months of sermons you preached. To what extent were you vulnerable?
2. What benefits to trust in your leadership did you find?
3. What risks to trust in your leadership did you find?

[249] Ibid., 90.

4. Think back to a sermon when you felt that you were very vulnerable. How did your congregation respond?
5. How were you feeling inside when you risked vulnerability before your congregation?
6. What are the factors you watch for to determine how vulnerable you can be?
7. Think of a time of real challenge when you needed your congregation to trust you. How did that impact your preaching?

Interviews were recorded using an Olympus DS-2 Digital Voice Recorder. They were then transcribed by an administrative assistant to be used for analysis and evaluation by the researcher. Following each interview, the transcript was printed and the hardcopy studied, coded, and analyzed prior to subsequent interviews by the researcher using the constant comparison method. This process of interview/transcribe/code was followed for each of the six interviews. After completing all six interviews, the entire set of data was analyzed once more against the research questions. The analysis process will be presented later in this chapter.

Information about the research subjects and their ministry settings is given below. Pseudonyms have been used to protect the confidentiality of each subject. They are listed below in order of length of time in their current pastoral call.

Research Participants

Timothy

Timothy planted his current church in a metropolitan suburb just over three years ago. Prior to this planting experience, he pastored an established, rural church

for four years. As a planting pastor, Timothy is the primary preacher, delivering the sermon on average forty-five Sunday mornings per year.

Luke

Luke also planted the church he currently serves. He began this work nearly seven years ago in a small city. Luke's church also has an assistant pastor who provides some of the Sunday morning preaching. However, Luke is the primary preacher; he preaches forty to forty-two Sunday mornings per year. This church is the first congregational pastorate in which he is the primary preacher.

Peter

Peter has served a historic church in a small city for eight years. Although there are several associate pastors who occasionally preach, Peter not only preaches more than forty Sunday mornings per year, but also three Sunday evening services each month. Peter has previously served as the primary preaching pastor in one other historic congregation.

John

John planted the church he serves fourteen years ago in a major metropolitan downtown area. Two associates serve together with John; however, their ministry areas do not allow for much preaching. John preaches roughly forty-five Sunday mornings per year. Planting this church is John's only congregational pastorate.

Barnabas

Barnabas has served in a suburban congregation for sixteen years. This large church has numerous other pastors that function in a preaching team across

multiple services in different locations. The move to multiple locations came about under Barnabas' leadership.

Although the preaching leadership is shared, Barnabas is the primary voice the congregation hears across its multiple locations. Barnabas has previously served as the primary preaching pastor in a suburban outside a major metropolitan city.

Paul

Paul planted the church he currently serves nearly twenty-five years ago in a metropolitan setting. Although the church has a large pastoral staff, Paul's role as senior pastor has him preaching the vast majority of Sunday mornings.

Name	Years in Current Church	Planted Current Church (Y/N)
Timothy	3	Y
Luke	Nearly 7	Y
Peter	8	N
John	14	Y
Barnabas	16	N
Paul	Nearly 25	Y

Data Analysis

The researcher used the constant comparative method of analysis in order to interpret the data. Merriam describes the constant comparative method in the following way:

> Basically, the constant comparative method involves comparing one segment of data with another to determine similarities and differences. 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 identify patterns in the data.

> These patterns are arranged in relationship to each other in the building of a grounded theory.[250]

The transcriptions of the interviews were analyzed and coded following each interview and prior to subsequent interviews. Following the coding of each interview, the data was compared and contrasted with every prior interview to identify patterns and themes. This methodology was utilized in order to discern patterns in the data as it is constantly compared to subsequent data. One further advantage to the constant comparison method is that it provided the researcher the context to identify new sources of data. The patterns mined from analysis were coded and placed into categories to address the research questions outlined in chapter one.

Researcher Position

Utilizing the qualitative method demands that researchers clearly state their assumptions and biases, commonly referred to as the researcher position. The underlying reason for this demand is that a qualitative researcher is the primary instrument in interpreting data and therefore constructing meaning.[251] Analysis is filtered through the researcher's own subjective values and worldview. Clarification about the theoretical framework enables readers to better understand the interpretations the researcher makes of the data.[252]

In large measure, the researcher matches the purpose of criteria utilized in the selection of the study participants. The researcher is a male, evangelical,

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[250] Ibid., 31.

[251] Ibid., 15.

[252] Ibid., 219.

Christian minister ordained in the Evangelical Presbyterian Church. Although the researcher has not held the primary preaching responsibility within his congregation for seven years, he has recently assumed that responsibility. Additionally, as a regular preacher, the researcher does seek to use vulnerability in most of his sermons with a conscious aim toward building trust. In this study, however, his position is as a researcher seeking to interpret the experiences of other pastors conducting a similar ministry.

The researcher's location of ministry is in the southeastern United States of America. He serves in a rather conservative, traditionally structured church.

Study Limitations

Due to limitations of time and funds, only six pastors were interviewed for this study. The reader may also discern the limitations of the study because only male pastors were participants. Generalization of particular aspects of what is learned in this study must be tested in the reader's particular context. The findings in this study may have implications for how pastors in other regions of the United States use vulnerability in building trust.

Furthermore, these findings may be applicable to pastors who serve in different denominational contexts. As with any qualitative study, however, responsibility for understanding how findings applied within their own specific setting lies with the reader.[253]

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[253] Ibid., 226.

In this chapter, the study methodology was described. Interview subjects were selected utilizing the purposive criteria. Following selection, semi-structured interviews were conducted and transcripts produced from the audio recordings of the interviews. The transcripts were evaluated using the constant comparative method. Commonalities and themes among the pastors were noted as trends in the use of vulnerability in their sermons to build trust in their leadership.

The report of the interview data is the subject of the next chapter. This data was analyzed and is presented along the lines of the research questions in chapter one.

Chapter Four

Findings

This study was designed to explore how pastors use vulnerability in sermons to build the congregation's trust in their leadership. This study included interviews with six Reformed pastors from the southeastern United States. Each of these pastors serves as the primary preaching voice in their congregation and has done so for at least seven years, three or more in their current call.

Three research questions were framed to guide the study. The research questions were:

4. How do pastors assess vulnerability in their sermons?
    a. What benefits do they find?
    b. What risks do they find?
5. How do pastors perceive the relationship between their preaching and the congregation’s trust in their leadership?
6. How do pastors discern the limits of vulnerability in their sermons to build the congregation’s trust in their leadership?

In this chapter the insights of research subjects to the above research questions will be presented.

The first research question asked how pastors assess vulnerability in their sermons. What benefits do they find; what risks do they find?

Before discussion of the themes noted in the research it must first be reported that each pastor interviewed continually assesses vulnerability in their sermons. Although the purposive criteria selected pastors who are reputed to use vulnerability in their sermons, the research discovered that they also assess their use of vulnerability in an on-going fashion. As will be discussed below, the factors of assessment may change, but the fact of assessment did not.

Not only is the practice of assessing vulnerability a normal practice, three subjects reported undergoing significant changes to their use of vulnerability in sermons upon changing calls. Peter, Barnabas, and Timothy each experienced to differing degrees painful and challenging exits from their previous calls. Each of them reported reassessing the way they presented themselves in the pulpit as they prepared to go into a new congregational setting.

After a "major experience of breaking," Barnabas reported a deeper vulnerability that accompanied his ministry life and preaching. While he described himself as a vulnerable preacher before this experience, his assessment was that he "practiced vulnerability in public so that I wouldn't have to be vulnerable and private–especially with my wife." His session supported him, granting leave to reflect upon his life and ministry in order to process the recent difficulties and its effect upon all his relationships. Barnabas suggested that he is still in ministry because of that freedom to make assessment and consider his ministry.

Following the leave he began to engage with a search committee from a different congregation. His presentation of himself and his ministry style to the search committee was greatly changed; he represented himself as a "transparent,

nerdy leader." Speaking of his fears, anxieties, and depression, Barnabas sought almost to talk the search committee out of calling him. However, the search committee heard this deeper vulnerability in his sermons and saw that it matched his life. It was precisely that vulnerability that drew them toward his pulpit leadership. Therefore, as he began ministry in his new congregation he had been transformed into a truly vulnerable presence in the pulpit.

Peter spoke of a similar experience of being broken and rebuilt prior to taking a new call. In his previous place of service, he suggested he didn't vulnerably reveal himself in the pulpit because he didn't know how to talk about it, commenting that he "didn't know exactly what would happen" if he were vulnerable. Yet, he endured two periods of difficulty in his previous call that altered his preaching ministry in his current call. Disclosure marked the earliest days of his new relationship, which he explained in this way: "From the beginning, I informed the search committee, the whole session, and even the whole congregation of past battles with depression and anxiety and burnout." He continued: "I needed them to know that from the beginning, before they chose me," the type of minister I would be. In Peter's understanding this was important to his new congregation because his predecessor preached warmly and yet interpersonally was very guarded. There was a difference in the pulpit persona and the person of the minister. Peter's assessment was that the congregation needed him to "bring these two closer together" from the outset of his ministry.

Timothy had served as pastor in a historic church. He began to speak of inner difficulties and depression privately with other leaders as well as occasionally from

the pulpit. This practice made his congregation very uncomfortable; eventually he was dismissed under a cloud of being unfit for ministry due to the things he disclosed—although none of them related to immorality or other disqualifying conditions. After a season of healing, Timothy began to have discussions with a core group for a new church plant in a different state. Speaking to them of his intention to continue expressing vulnerability from the pulpit he said, "[I]f there's one thing I can promise you about me and my leadership as your church planting pastor, I make you a promise that I will, without any doubt, let you down in your expectations of me." He suggested that he did this so that the congregation would expect the degree of his vulnerability to match the experience of his life.

Other research subjects expressed that ongoing assessment of vulnerability in their sermons has led them to change their practice over the years. While Paul planted the church he serves over twenty-four years ago, his own development of vulnerability in his preaching has come through growth in "maturity in the gospel." John reported that his use of vulnerability in his sermons could be compared to the swing of the pendulum. When he planted his church fourteen years ago, his preaching was filled with "narcissistically importing probably every week some illustration about me." Through the counsel of someone he loved in that congregation, his preaching began to shift away from such a self-focus. Vulnerable illustrations are less frequent in his preaching now; however, vulnerability in his application happens virtually every week. He reported, for example, speaking of "my temper, my lust, my jealousy, my insecurity, my control, my fear."

Luke spoke of assessing the change in his use of vulnerability not in terms of spiritual maturity as Paul did, but rather in terms of chronology. As his children aged and the landscape of his marriage has changed, he has become more and more vulnerable with respect to how the gospel is worked out in the life of his family. Additionally, his use of vulnerability changed as he become more comfortable in the office of pastor, better understanding who he is in the light of what a leader of God's people should be. Specifically, he spoke of the change in his view of what "diminishes the office" of pastor. Earlier in his ministry he sought to emulate living as a hero in order to lead. As he has grown in years and in gospel maturity he reported taking great comfort in the Apostle Peter's life and ministry, which he described as a "moron" struggling to "get it." He suggested that anyone would be "hard pressed to paint Peter as a hero leader."

What's more, each one of the research subjects reported continually assessing their use of vulnerability in their sermons nearly week by week. While some devote more hours of preparation specifically to communicating their personal vulnerability in the sermon, each of them reported that this consideration takes at least some of their preparation time.

For example, Paul claimed he is "intentionally vulnerable literally every sermon. It's actually one of my preaching goals in every sermon." He reported that he labors over vulnerability each week, wrestling to identify specifically where the vulnerability element is in each sermon. In a typical week Paul prepares thirty to forty iterations of his message, making "constant changes and literally printing out

my notes thirty or forty times." These iterations largely hinge on the expression of his vulnerability in the message.

Barnabas also reported laboring specifically over how to present himself as vulnerablein sermons as a "regular and normal" practice. Not only is he vulnerable in the course of delivering his sermon, but also in pronouncing the benediction. At the close of the service Barnabas frequently asks, "Are you like me hearing the voice of your inner man responding to what we talked about a few minutes ago? That is why we close with this benediction; grab onto it and hold on for dear life. Live out the rest of the week with this promise." Even following the close of the service, specifically when his preaching is praised, Barnabas reported attempting vulnerable communication. He frequently responds to accolades by asking the one who praised his message to "pray that I will believe everything I just told you because I struggle underneath with unbelief."

Common Themes Regarding Assessment of Vulnerability

Research subjects suggested a wide variety of benefits and risks to the use of vulnerability in sermons. However, when examined specifically within the frame of vulnerability and its relationship to trust, several themes emerged.

Benefits

<u>Unmasking of Shame with a Gospel-Oriented Culture</u>

Participants reported the benefit of the unmasking of shame with a gospel-oriented culture. Luke claimed that as the congregation sees him "wrestling with" God and the demands of the gospel, trust is built. In those moments of struggle Luke suggests that it is important to the congregation to know that the pastor also

experiences failure, often wondering “if God is still really working.” Those moments of accessibility into the emotional and spiritual life of the pastor begin to unmask the shame that Luke says so often plagues the congregation.

Barnabas agreed, seeing as normal this unmasking of shame in the way the Bible presents its spiritual leaders. He found that it is easy to say, “Good night, Lord, why am I reading about this dysfunctional family?” That normalizing of the persistent presence of sin and brokenness within the lives of leaders enables congregation members to be honest about the presence of the same sins within their own lives.

Paul characterizes the unmasking of shame as a hallmark of gospel preaching. It provides freedom for the congregation and, in fact, does build trust. Vulnerability divorced from true gospel preaching, in his view, simply exalts the personality of the pastor. Yet, preaching that acknowledges that although broken people, we are at the same time being made whole by the power of the gospel, builds hope. It is that hope “that we can grow and experience the power of the Holy Spirit to heal,” Paul believes, that provides the context for genuine trust in fellowship between the congregation and the pastor. When pastors are willing first to extend trust by unmasking their own shame, then the congregation “sees that we're in this together.” The culture of gospel freedom helps shape the congregation's opinion that it is “less likely that the pastor will try to pull the wool over our eyes because he will probably tell us if he were trying to, ” which forms a foundation of trust, Paul suggests.

Both Peter and Paul claimed that congregations would like to know that pastors understand that they do not “have it all together.” However, the disclosure must go beyond the shared experience of brokenness to an understanding that the gospel provides the hope of healing. Peter spoke of the benefit of this unmasking of shame to the pastor's own spiritual life, “making myself apply the gospel before I preach it.”

Timothy concurred by suggesting that preaching is “an opportunity to share how I have need of the gospel in a variety of ways.” This benefit of unmasking shame is realized as pastors speak with specificity as to their own shame and the way the gospel breaks its power. Timothy also spoke of how exposing communication issues between himself and his wife is a particularly shaming aspect of his spiritual life. He has spoken of those difficulties in his sermons as a means of opening up within the congregation conversations about how the gospel challenges the things that shame us. Paul reported speaking with specificity in the pulpit the temptations he faces as pastor cover the same landscape as the temptations faced within the life of the congregation. John addressed the same benefit in disclosing that although he rarely uses an illustration that is personal any longer, but frequently speaks vulnerably about application, speaking of his “being in the ditch with them.” Recently in one of his sermons, John spoke about the reality of anger as a systemic reality in families with explosively-tempered men. He then spoke openly of his own anger and fighting his own temper. He does so because, “in order for them to meet Jesus, you have to need Jesus.” Unmasking his own shame in preaching enables the pastor to become a conduit for God's grace into the lives of people within the congregation. Being

named among them rather than standing apart from them builds trust, John reported.

Both Peter and Barnabas linked the unmasking of shame and building of trust to pastors being willing to place themselves within the demands of scripture. Peter suggested that when the congregation sees pastors exposing their own sin and shame to the challenges of the text then congregations realize that pastors are "seeking to bring them along into the life of repentance," a common condition between them. Barnabas expressed the same sentiment in suggesting congregations want to know that the pastor's vulnerability "puts us in the text rather than taking us from it."

Luke set a different light on this benefit by suggesting trust comes when the congregation not only sees the pastor as vulnerable in the pulpit, but also when he expresses a joyful posture for the opportunity to preach. When he models joy by being challenged by the text and preaches from the emotional position of "I get to preach this text to these people" then there is an element of trust that is built. In this way, rather than feeling the pressure of making a shameful admission before the congregation, the joyful expression of the power of the gospel to change motivates the congregation to seek gospel-oriented change in their own lives.

Paul and Luke both spoke to the limitations of being free to unmask shame from the pulpit. For both of these pastors, largely in different generations of pastoral leadership, speaking to sexual temptation and sin is an area beyond the pale. While each of them spoke to the reality of sexual temptation and sin, neither of them

address this from the pulpit. Luke suggested taking this risk would present too much to qualify and pose too many ways to be misunderstood.

Empathy

A second benefit to vulnerability is the presence of empathy, the sense that pastors are real, authentic persons just like their fellow brothers and sisters in the pew. Empathy creates the connection that Peter labeled as “not just saying that you are welcome to be vulnerable here but that your pastor is just such a person.” As pastors know themselves and communicate their vulnerability with joy and hope in the power of the gospel, congregations are encouraged to live in like manner. They can begin to ask similar questions of their own hearts, bringing them to the challenge of the text in the way pastors have modeled bringing their own hearts to the challenge of the text.

Being an empathetic presence, Paul suggested, is a factor of temperament; it comes easy to him. Nonetheless, he reported many visitors coming to his church saying things like, “I've never seen a pastor like you; you're one of us.” Being like them, in Paul's case, meant that his expressions of doubt and struggle provided the congregation the space “to be in touch with where [they] are and where [they] have hesitancies.” When asked how Paul conceived of empathetic presence building trust, he answered that vulnerability simply acknowledges what everyone already knows to be true. “Everyone knows,” he explained, “that no one has it all together. That admission almost paradoxically builds trust.” When pastors are “posers” and pretend to be someone they are not, Paul suggested, not only is there an absence of

trust being built, but also distrust becomes the emotional environment of the congregational relationship.

Luke connected empathy directly to leadership in suggesting vulnerability presents the pastor “not as a hero but as a fellow sojourner.” In so doing the pastor is not only an accessible person to the normal congregation member, but also the pastor's life experience is normalized. When the pastor confesses failure and need, Luke suggests that the congregation is freed to wrestle with the places in their lives “where they feel like they've failed.” The emotional experience of hearing a pastor speak only of victory over sin continually shapes the congregation to believe that God only accepts victory. Yet, Luke proposed, that simply is not true and does not match the pattern of life for anyone.

When the pastor is an empathetic presence, the congregation is given tools to make sense of the joys and struggles within their own lives. However, if empathy is merely an occasional strategy rather than consistent practice, trust is diminished, suggested five of the six participants. Barnabas, Timothy, Luke, Paul, and John each spoke to the need for consistent expressions of empathy, of connection to real life, in the experiences explicated from the pulpit. Luke saliently made the point in contending, “it is more important that they see me striving to apply [the Bible] daily rather than apply it perfectly four times a year.” Barnabas recognized the power of consistent connection with the congregation versus only occasional connection; he proposed the benefit of the regular witness of vulnerability as the usual pattern of preaching. Timothy suggested this regularity was to be preferred even when the experiences communicated were not spectacular or unusual. There have been any

number of times, Timothy reported, where people from his congregation sought him out to say, "[T]he fact that you seem real and are willing to talk about yourself makes me realize that I can ask for help in these areas, too." The perpetual witness of connection and empathetic presence is far more important than the occasional and emotionally powerful, vividly vulnerable illustration, John proposed.

Modeling of Limits

A third common theme to the benefits of vulnerability in sermons was the modeling of limits. Vulnerability provides for pastors not to be omni-competent leaders. They are limited individuals with certain skills, gifts, and abilities. They are not, however, those who know all and can do all as heroes. Vulnerability ensures an honest portrayal of being a creature with limits before the congregation.

John specifically modeled these limits, and embraced his own limitations as a man and a leader, in exposing his lack of certain ministry abilities. For example, he testified that he says to the congregation "at least six times a year" that they do not want him providing counseling. Not only did he highlight his inability in this area, but also he spoke to the reality of his "impatience" that showed up in his limitations in this ministry.

Barnabas modeled embracing limits in promoting the gifts, talents, and abilities of others from the pulpit. Some of these talents were things that people often expected the pastor to be able to do, yet he was not especially proficient at doing. There was risk in exposing these deficiencies before the congregation, especially as these deficiencies ran counter to expectations of professional expertise congregations regularly have for pastors. Some of these limitations for Barnabas

were his ability to run meetings–even serving as moderator of the session. He has clearly spoken from the pulpit about his inability in that function. On a deeper heart level, he spoke of his limitations of being able to love well a large congregation like the one he currently serves. Not only does he speak of his own limitations, but he also actively promotes the ministries of others, promoting their leadership ability and his intention to follow after them.

Timothy reported that this dynamic affects his preaching in demonstrating a posture of being teachable, learning from, and following the lead of others. Specifically related to ministry initiatives within his church plant, Timothy models embracing his limits in a twin fashion. First, he promotes the ministries of others and the leadership of others; he gives credit away for success of ministry. The twin to this activity, Timothy suggested, is the willingness "to show your own need publicly" of the ministries of these other leaders. The twin function, therefore, is both the promotion of others and the embracing of need of the partnership of others. This approach, Timothy suggested, has been especially important during stages of congregational growth requiring a great deal of trust by the congregation in Timothy's leadership.

Also a church planter, Luke realized this dynamic of modeling limitations from the pulpit as a critical function of launching his church plant. To a certain degree he presented himself not as a hero leader, but rather as a broken leader. Timothy spoke of the same dynamic in presenting himself as a "limping leader." Luke expressed limitations of judgment, or pursuing the wisest course of action as a leader. Presenting himself as a broken leader enabled him to model the freedom to

fail, normalizing the reality that, “decisions that seem best at the time may turn out to be poor.” Theologically speaking, modeling limits is a way of merging the category of process leadership together with the doctrine of depravity.

Peter addressed one further frame on the modeling of limits presenting self as the same man inside the pulpit and outside the pulpit. His leadership was a bit of a contrast to his predecessor and his current call. While his predecessor presented himself as warm, welcoming, and vulnerable in the pulpit, his interpersonal affect was more guarded; few people could get close. Peter intended from his earliest days in his new pastoral ministry to bring the man inside the pulpit and outside the pulpit closer together. Speaking of his vulnerabilities from the very beginning of his ministry set him apart is a man who did not present himself as one who does all things exceedingly well nor as one who even tries to do everything perfectly. Modeling these limits, Peter explained, “in the beginning earned great capital” of trust with the congregation. Barnabas sees the modeling of limits as a means of also modeling “knowing oneself,” living with an honest assessment of gifts and brokenness.

Paul communicated how embracing limits before the congregation sets forth what he called the “gospel pipeline” for maturation as a disciple. There is a trajectory of growth, he suggested. By modeling vulnerability before the congregation the pastor’s efforts to continue to grow and seek to change provides a similar expectation for the life of the normal congregant. Whether through the limitation of sin or the limitation of gifting, by communicating vulnerability he sets

before the congregation the hope of healing and growth as the pathway all disciples walk.

Magnifies God, Not the Leader

One further common theme of the benefits of vulnerability in sermons was that vulnerability magnifies God, not the leader. Perhaps we could say this benefit summarizes all the other benefits. The unmasking of shame, the presence of empathy, and the modeling of limits all serve to exalt the Creator rather than the creature. Barnabas noted that "large churches tend to [be led by] large personalities. [Yet] the personality around which a church should turn is the triune God." It was that same refusal to be the larger than life, strong personality that characterized the posture in which Barnabas entered his current pastoral ministry.

Vulnerability clearly brings forth to the congregation the identity of the true leader. Peter told of speaking vulnerably of his "anxiety, or depression, or stress, or lack of faith, or fear" and wondering at the same time whether "the people are going to fall in behind me." Yet, one of the hallmarks of his ministry has been to proclaim the lordship and "grace of God for imperfect people." He spoke numerous times throughout the course of the interview of desiring the people of God to be drawn to God rather than to him as the leader. Transparently communicating his needs ensures the congregation "grows in love more with Christ rather than being impressed" by him and his ministry.

In magnifying God rather than self through a vulnerable presence in the pulpit, Luke approvingly quoted George Whitfield, who said that pastors "want the work to continue in their absence." It is vulnerability in preaching that magnifies

Christ rather than any human leader that produces a context of ministry which does not rely upon the expertise of a pastor, Luke proposed.

Timothy suggested that vulnerability in generalities rather than in specific has been a technique he used to appear humble and yet hold onto the appearance of strength. All that began to change when he stepped away from speaking in generalities and moved toward specifics in communicating his own vulnerability and needs. Speaking vulnerably squarely places the pastor in the position of being a disciple such that his needs "will help people see the same things in their own lives, come to grips with it, and confess it." Doing so elevates Christ as the ultimate leader.

John mentioned a similar posture of speaking about self vulnerably and at the same time being able to disappear. He suggested that "pastors are called to embrace modesty, to move toward anonymity in their service and their righteousness." The way pastors speak of themselves can establish them as strong or as those who need a strong God. The pastor's job, John suggested, is to tell stories of self in which they come off as "dumb and foolish and unwise" so that the strength and wisdom of God is magnified. Paul concurred with the need to expose specific weakness, saying that with the exception of one specific category of growth, over the course of his twenty-four years of ministry in his church he has never used himself as a positive illustration. This dynamic is not so that he can "create an arrogance of who can share the most," but rather so that no one in the congregation misunderstands by thinking he is strong. His vulnerability is intended to demonstrate the strength of God in the face of human weakness.

Risks

To a certain degree, the risks identified in analyzing the data correspond to the benefits. They are the underbelly of abuse of some of the benefits identified above.

Self-focus

Participants listed the common theme of self-focus as the primary risk of vulnerability in sermons. This risk corresponds to the benefit of unmasking shame in a gospel culture. Speaking of self, and vulnerably highlighting need and brokenness, potentially leads to the abuse and risk of self-focus on the part of the pastor.

Luke stated that vulnerability in the pulpit runs the risk of sermons becoming "more about you recounting stories of your life then it is about the great story of redemption." He went on to question the pastor who has some illustration or story about himself in every sermon. Luke suggested that such a pastor more than likely is focused on the wrong things–taking the eyes of the congregation off of Christ and onto himself as leader.

Self-focus damages trust, Peter claimed, because the congregation questions whether they are being brought along into a life of repentance or the "pastor is trying to fill something for himself." It is that impulse for manipulation that concerned Peter. John shared great concern with the self-focus in his sermons. Earlier in his ministry he reported being too vulnerable, "almost narcissistically importing every week some illustration about me." When pressed about his motives for speaking so vulnerably of himself, John generally charged that pastors "are so

used to adulation, attention, adoration. I think they really do think people care what cool activities they're doing."

The technological culture feeds the impulse toward manipulative self-focus in pastors' sermons in John's view. He spoke almost mockingly of the way pastors frequently used social media, posturing for the adulation of a congregation. Getting used to attention is carried over into the pulpit, John suggested, and becomes simply a tool for manipulation of the congregation rather than discipling them deeper into a relationship with Christ. He went so far as to predict a backlash to this sort of exposure, where congregations will desire more modesty from their pastor. Paul also spoke specifically of the technological environment in our culture that provides a breeding ground for self-focus. The fascination with Facebook and Twitter, Paul proposed, feeds an arrogant and inappropriate use of vulnerability, where there is a twisted competition of "who can share the most."

Barnabas and Peter both made impassioned pleas for pastors not to use vulnerability to magnify self at the expense of exalting the Lord Jesus. Barnabas spoke of the twin worries of congregation members not knowing themselves well enough and congregation members being only, or perhaps ruthlessly, focused upon themselves and their problems. If the pastor models a focus upon self without turning the attention of vulnerable illustrations or applications onto the Lord and his work, then the congregation's concern rests with self and not God. He reported, "You're not going to grow in grace until you've made God bigger than anything else, until you really understand yourself and self-consciously ask if God is bigger than anything I hate, hurt, or am hopeless about…. The better you understand God the

better you understand yourself." In other words, talking so much about self may distract the congregation from the truth of what God is doing in the text. Peter spoke of this self-focus at the expense of God as the pastor "conducting some kind of emotional voyeurism." He suggested a way to deal with this risk is to ask the question, with pastoral sensitivity: "What is my *real* strategy and purpose for sharing this?" (emphasis belonged to research subject). If there were no redemptive purpose of the exalting the gospel or the lordship of Christ, then Peter questioned the prudence of including expressions of vulnerability in the sermon.

Luke's specific warning was self-focus runs the risk of having the congregation trust the pastor too much. A particular risk to emotionally unhealthy congregations or persons, Luke proposed vulnerability potentially creates "codependent and unhealthy relationships" between the pastor and a congregation. He further asserted that this risk is minimized with healthy persons and congregations. However, Luke's warning concurred with the concern of Peter and Barnabas of the exaltation of pastor over Christ.

Foster a False Sense of Connection

A second common theme of risk of vulnerability in sermons is that vulnerability could foster a false sense of connection with the congregation, which assumes a level of emotional relationship that is not genuinely present. This risk corresponds to the benefit of being an empathetic presence. The impulse toward empathy, the research subjects reported, can be turned toward a manipulative connection to move the congregation in a certain direction. This false connection

does not seek the best interests of others, but rather pursues an emotional link for some other purpose.

John recognized fostering a false sense of connection in the ways pastors in general, and he in particular at times, used emotionally riveting vulnerable stories as illustrations. He recalled early in his ministry an occasion of a woman speaking to him following the service saying, "I could listen to you preach forever!" He replied with: "Thank you. What did you like? What do you remember about today?" To John's dismay, she suggested: "I don't remember anything you said to me. But it was awesome!" There was an emotional connection made, John suggested, that essentially left the text and the point of the sermon out. The real liability and risk to this false connection is the belief that "[I]f I am honest and authentic, I can get away with anything…say anything," which, John proposed, was "used as a license to harm and maybe as license to sin." The false connection assumes a level of relationship that is not genuinely present.

The associated risk in relationships established through these false connections are not genuine in that they form bonds absent the context to bear the weight of the genuine intimacy they purport to bear. They are inherently one-sided, therefore, easily abused, either by pastors to manipulate or congregants to accuse. Timothy and Luke both understood the one-sided nature of vulnerability in sermons. There are things disclosed that could be used as a "bullet," Timothy warned, to come back and get you at a later date. Paul not only agreed, but also used a similar metaphor of disclosure as "ammunition" that people will use against pastors. Luke recounted the experience of people storing up disclosures to use in

the waging of conflict at a later time. Peter recalled a similar experience of his vulnerably speaking of his depression and stress; a while later some challenged his leadership on a major initiative by questioning whether he was "stable enough."

On the pastor's side, this false connection is a risk because pastors can become caricatures. Barnabas confessed he often practiced vulnerability in public, in sermons and other settings, "so that I would not have to be [vulnerable] in private with my wife." In a projection of connection with the many, the more intimate connection with the few could be avoided. While concurring with this concern, Paul highlighted the benefits of a long pastorate to mitigate this risk. Being in the same congregation for more than twenty years affords the depth of the relationship on both sides. Vulnerability is not merely a one-sided disclosure process because the congregation and the pastor have shared so many experiences together that build trust.

Luke highlighted a different aspect to the risk of false connection as the underside of empathy. When a pastor so much appears "the same guy on Tuesday as you see on Sunday"—a godly impulse he confessed—then the risk of "diminishing the office" is present. The pastor simply may not be type of leader a congregation wants to follow; he may appear a bit too ordinary. Luke suggested that perhaps deconstructing some of those opinions is a good thing; however, there can develop a diminished capacity to lead because of the disclosures and impulse of too much peership. He further proposed this becomes more of a problem with "too much detail" vulnerably disclosed from the pulpit. Peter also spoke of the diminished capacity of the office by so much disclosure that people perceive the

"entertainment" value of the preacher's life, rather than the redemptive thrust of where the sermon might challenge them.

Using the Pulpit to Work Out Personal Issues

Participants reported one further common theme of risks of vulnerability in sermons, the risk of using the pulpit to work out personal issues. While not a complete match, this risk corresponds to the benefit of modeling limits. The disclosure of limits and brokenness, modeling in sermons how they can be embraced in some cases, devolves into working out private or unresolved issues in the public place of a sermon.

Several participants spoke of the abuse of the pulpit as a "confessional," meaning that sin or need was confessed there as some attempt toward absolution. Timothy spoke of the inappropriate use of the sermon "to make confession or just to be somebody who is hip and the most broken guy in the room." This drive to disclose may be rooted in insecurity. Paul expressed concern over the "spiritual immaturity" that expresses itself in "diarrhea of the mouth or the soul" as pastors look for affirmation from congregations. Paul wondered aloud for these pastors: "Where is the power of the gospel in your life? You're always so broken; you're always so vulnerable. Is Jesus doing anything in you?" Using the pulpit to deal with one's own insecurity, Paul charged, actually "cheapens vulnerability."

Peter broadened the category of this risk to include issues currently unresolved. For example, in his city, a project was moving forward that created racial overtones. He was frustrated by the actions of one of the sides, which just so happened to be planning to come to worship at his church one Sunday. He

considered “blasting” these folks as a means of not only influencing them, but also expressing his displeasure, proving to the congregation that he’s “a gutsy guy who’s not afraid to call people out.” However, upon reflection, Peter realized his action would simply be self-aggrandizing and self-serving. It was largely a way for him to work out his frustrations in the pulpit. Upon reflection Peter realized his purpose in his planned address related to his issue of wanting to appear strong and not seeking the redemptive application of the text. In a slightly different way, Peter also reported he occasionally speaks vulnerably about his fear and stress in sermons. By his admission, he grapples with the use of that information as a means of displacing some of that stress elsewhere as well as a “way to get more sympathy.”

A specific issue at risk of pastors using the pulpit to work it out is using vulnerability to deal with issues of insecurity, specifically the desire to be liked and followed by the congregation. Luke spoke of the pressure to appear a certain way before the congregation, as one whom they will willingly follow. He noted that, at times, speaking vulnerably about self projects an image “contrary to what people see a leader should be.” The temptation is to be the person the congregation wants versus the one a pastor knows him or herself to be. Timothy spoke of hiding his clinical depression from his session in his previous call, going to the length of filling his medication prescription in a neighboring town so as not to get caught. Therefore, his self-presentation in the pulpit was colored by who he wanted the congregation to believe he was. This desired persona affected the way he spoke to certain topics and in what ways he engaged vulnerably or didn’t. The risk presented was working out his own issues in what or how he addressed others.

Whether by using the pulpit as a confessional or by selective disclosure of that which pastors suppose the congregation will accept, pastors are tempted to work through their own personal issues in how they present themselves in the pulpit. The risk once again in this practice, as John suggested, is manipulation, which destroys trust between the pastor and the congregation.

In summary, pastors suggested a wide variety of benefits and risks to the use of vulnerability in sermons. Common themes from the data regarding the benefits of vulnerability in sermons are: the unmasking of shame within a gospel-saturated culture, empathy, the modeling of limits, and vulnerability that magnifies God, not the leader. The risks to vulnerability reported by pastors are: self-focus, fostering a false connection between pastors and congregations, and the use of the pulpit to work out personal issues.

Common Themes Regarding the Perceived Relationship Between Preaching and the Congregation's Trust in Pastoral Leadership

The second research question sought to understand how pastors perceive the relationship between their preaching and the congregation's trust in their leadership. Utilizing a qualitative method provides rich data through which to understand the perceptions of pastors. Perhaps more could be gleaned through the frame of the congregation's perceptions upon the same question. However, this study restricted itself to analyzing and understanding pastoral perceptions.

To better understand how pastors perceive the relationship between preaching and trust, the research subjects were asked to recall occasions in their ministry lives in which significant trust by the congregation was required. They were asked to report how they perceived that trust and its effect upon their

preaching. Three common themes emerged from the data as factors that the pastors considered to govern their perceptions between preaching and trust.

Pastoral Presence

Each of the six research subjects drew the connection between pastoral presence, both in and out of the pulpit, and trust. In fact, in asking probing questions, it was difficult to have the subjects keep their attention on the relationship between preaching and trust. It could be assumed the underlying reason for this difficulty was that the pastors did not actively perceive the relationship. However, the interviews suggested quite the opposite. In the discussion of preaching in general and critical incidents in particular, all six subjects connected the public and the private. The perception that there is really no such thing as preaching that builds trust disconnected from the pastoral vocation dominated the discussion.

Both John and Paul specifically connected trust as the benefit of longevity of pastoral call. It is that longevity of service, as John described, as the benefit of the persistent presence of love that builds a context for trust. “Living life,” John offered, enables the congregation to believe “that I want what is best for the church.” Further, he proposed that because “everyone in this church is connected to me,” the people find it relatively easy to trust him. Connection has been forged by “working with kids earlier in college, now having married them and baptized their children.” When specifically asked whether there has been a situation in which John perceived the congregation was on the verge of not following him, once more he returned to the theme of presence mixed with persistence in saying “sometimes they don't agree

with me, and my philosophy is like: I'll outwork you; I'll outlast you; I'll out love you; And I usually win." The expectation of this persistent presence informs John's preaching by enabling him to communicate the same presence inside and outside of the pulpit.

Paul spoke to a similar dynamic of being a persistently gracious presence inside and outside of the pulpit. Preaching that leads to trust, Paul proposed, must lead congregation members "to see that vulnerability is biblical and essential without being self-righteous about the gospel." The only way to connect those two, he suggested, is to follow the maxim: "If we're going to preach grace we better start with trying to be gracious." Peter's frame on this dynamic came in discussing the ministry of his predecessor, whom he described as "warm and gracious" in his preaching persona, yet "very guarded so not many people could be close" interpersonally. This confusing pastoral presence, in Peter's perception, contributed to mistrust of his predecessor's leadership. Moreover, noting that failure governed much of how Peter entered into his new pastoral call. He engaged others with the intention of connecting pastorally and interpersonally outside the pulpit such that he might be better followed in offering direction to the life of the church from inside the pulpit.

Another frame on the theme of pastoral presence is the power of empathy in sermons. Timothy and Paul relayed their experiences of empathetically labeling their own fears when taking a difficult decision as a church. When Paul's church faced an expensive building campaign, he vulnerably exposed lack of certainty in the project, saying, "I think this is what we should do, but I have all kinds of fears

here…And maybe you are where I am as well." He reported that his vulnerability about these fears was so pointed, some feared he might scuttle the entire campaign. Yet, the congregation responded with trust. Why? Paul attributes it to preaching as an empathetic presence. The congregation responded by communicating thanks to him and their leadership "for allowing us to be in touch with where we are and where we have hesitancies." Their trust, interestingly, was deepened through Paul's modeling that "our hesitancies don't need to get the best of us as we trust that God is in control even though risk is involved." Timothy's vulnerable communication in a series of sermons provided an empathetic presence that seemed safe to follow, he suggested. The intention, he reported, was to "model that he is a leader who is also a follower" of Jesus. In doing so, trust was built as others were able to see themselves mirrored in how the pastor responded to challenge and doubt.

Luke's empathetic presence builds trust, he proposed, not only in times of difficult decisions, but also in speaking to a difficult text of scripture. His vulnerability builds trust, he suggested, when he begins a difficult sermon with a prelude such as "This is hard for me to swallow and this is why…I started out on this text on Monday and I hated it. Here we are on Sunday and I'm coming to you with some measure of anxiety." He went on to explain that trust is built specifically as they "come to realize the pastor is struggling to believe, too," and receive him as a regular person who has the same fears and challenges that others have.

Barnabas' experience in serving as an empathetic presence, he reported, also is largely through vulnerably modeling how he manages his fears and anxieties. During his interview, when pressed on the way he pastors through his preaching,

Barnabas commented more than once, “the phrase the congregation is used to me saying is…” His empathetic presentation builds trust within the congregation in part because it is not occasional, but rather persistent. Further, his congregation trusts because they hear him express over and over again how he is continually being pastored by the Lord and his fellow elders. He spoke of a persistent practice of stating how he is following the other pastors in certain areas and initiatives, thus modeling to the congregation that everyone is a follower, even the senior pastor. Vulnerably and persistently modeling an empathetic presence in the pulpit strategically demonstrates Barnabas is not seeking to strong-arm his way into leadership. He follows just as he calls others to follow; therefore, he develops trust.

Process Awareness

A second factor that affected the way the pastors perceived the connection between preaching and the congregation’s trust in their leadership was process awareness. The author is using this term to describe the systemic complexities of leadership and the pastors’ abilities to appreciate those complexities in how the lead.

The pastors interviewed had a sixth sense of the systemic, or process, components to leadership. The way most understood their preaching fit into a leadership paradigm that saw preaching as a communication event that shaped a system. It was perceived as a tool for leadership, but not the same thing as leadership.

The two pastors serving in the oldest, or most established, congregations were Barnabas and Peter, who seemed not to answer the protocol questions related

to research question two upon being asked. Rather, they both spoke of context first. Each of the other four subjects eventually spoke of the painstaking process of leadership and the context of leading a voluntary association like the church. Yet, this researcher found it very interesting that the most experienced pastors spoke of process first.

Barnabas explicitly spoke of his hiring process when asked how he perceived the connection between preaching and leadership. He described in detail how he honestly and vulnerably presented himself before the search committee that interviewed him, the session of the church that called him, and finally the congregation. Each of these portraits of himself were intentionally vulnerable and strategic conversations on the part of Barnabas. In describing is predecessor as a "strong, natural leader (a SNL)," he also understood that a strong, natural leadership model shaped the "church style and process." In the beginning stages of their consideration of one another, Barnabas narrated how he perceived their processes as a church caught in this strong natural modeling. Further, he sought to draw contrast with who God made him to be and what the expectations they communicated through the processes, which in his mind led them toward strong, natural leaders. Rather than throw away questions or moments of discomfort, Barnabas took advantage of those clashes of style to introduce disequilibrium by saying things like, "This could be the real deal breaker for me." He would then articulate what he perceived of their expectations of a new leader, describe vulnerably how he is not that person, and then invite a dialogue. This same process was repeated with the session, with which he orchestrated conversations to "de-SNL

them," and with the staff. After first discussing the way he developed trust with the search committee and session, the researcher pressed Barnabas to answer how an occasion requiring the congregation's trust affected his preaching. He once again answered, "Well first let me tell you what I did in private." This strategy, once again, was deliberate; it was not an attempt to skirt the issue. Rather, Barnabas genuinely perceived the connection to process leadership and the building of trust.

Peter also devoted much of his answer to the questions about preaching and trust to process and capitalizing on anxiety of a changing system. He arrived in his new call having undergone a great deal of change in his own life—from a more perfectionistic background to becoming a more openly broken man. Not only had he undergone change, but the congregation he was being called to serve had begun to travel that road itself, through a succession of leaders. He explained, "It was essential for me to share [his own past depression and anxiety] with the congregation given they were coming out of a long period in which you were not allowed to be imperfect; you weren't allowed to be weak and vulnerable." In that context, Peter considered speaking of his own growth process to the search committee, the session, and the congregation to be imperative, describing a "new era in the church, not just saying that you are welcome to be vulnerable here, but that your pastor is just such a person." Those early months of setting context in Peter's ministry provided foundational system inputs, signaling a different man in leadership of a different system than people were used to in leadership.

Paul acknowledged this process awareness in relation to preaching and trust by describing the ways he seeks to give the congregation space to honestly express

their thoughts and feelings on significant matters. In his preaching during a season of capital expansion at his church, Paul openly expressed his doubts and fears, intentionally creating a space for others in the congregation to express their feelings. In this way, the context was created through the preaching that fed into private conversations. Inviting feedback, engaging honest dialogue, and creating emotional space to have potentially difficult conversations are elements of trust-building frequently utilized by Paul. In fact, he relayed, "People will just expect it from the pulpit here."

The concept of narration was used by five of the six research subjects to describe their perceptions of what is necessary for the congregation to follow them through challenges. Timothy described the necessary process posture: "We want to explain well" whatever challenges the congregation faces. Yet, the necessary component to explaining well, specifically informed by vulnerability, was to exhibit the humility to employ a team approach to key decisions. He suggested that the leader's posture as "my plan" is not always "the best plan," and further enables the congregation to trust "that the team is in clear communication, looking at [any problem] from all angles." Therefore, the narration required is not simply an apologetic for any decision taken. Rather, the narration is walking the congregation through the process by which a decision was taken, inviting dialogue all along. Luke saw narration as a means of "inviting [the congregation] into what is going on" rather than simply informing them. On account of this, Luke suggested that his preaching had become increasingly "communal" in recent years, meaning that he has sought to apply the texts of the Bible in "situationally specific" ways, so much so

that those not directly a part of his church or at least his city may not gain the full benefit of his preaching.

Narration for Barnabas became an exercise in providing a narrative of vision and challenge, in which his fears, the fears of other leadership and those of the entire congregation were forthrightly communicated in public and in private, in meetings and from the pulpit. Describing how he conducted this labeling of fear, he spoke of offering it to the congregation for their evaluation in a way such as, "Here's my narration. Do you think it works?" The occasion of which Barnabas spoke was a plan placed before the congregation to plant other locations for their church, a risky and expensive proposition. Not only did Barnabas narrate the details of the plan, but he also addressed the beliefs and values held by the congregation. To make the point, he used the metaphor of a birth of twins where all the lives involved must be protected. His narration of the problem labeled the fears graphically and ingeniously concealed as complications related to birth—post-partum depression for the mother and "adventuresome kids" who "come crying back to mama when they do stupid things." He spoke of conversions and churches birthed not as this one-time decision, but rather, "This message should be a movement, so let's narrate it." The net result of this narrative, which took place in sermons and in private, was the overwhelming sense that "We've got to trust God." Through the awareness of the process, Barnabas was able not only to have the congregation trust him, but to see the congregation changed as they went through the process. Narration provided a way for this church system to deal with the anxiety of change.

Process awareness is also valuable in the transition from private communication to public communication. As noted above, five of six research subjects spoke of the importance of doing relational work in private, behind-the-scenes, as a critical strategy to build trust. Yet, all six relayed the importance of congruence between the private communication and the public communication. Paul spoke of this dynamic as having the same character in and out of the pulpit. Luke expressed how important it was "that [the person] they see in the pulpit is the same person they see on Tuesday." By that he meant that how pastors process thoughts and form opinions requires some level of transparency in the pulpit in order to match how people hear them discuss things throughout the rest of the week. It stretches credulity for a preacher to be bold and provocative in pulpit, yet timid in personal relationships. Peter put this dynamic more theologically by explaining how preaching that builds trust through vulnerability is about "taking ourselves to the text to be scrutinized." Moving from the private to the public requires a congruence of life in order to be believed. Otherwise, the congregation suspects self-interested motives behind the public communication.

Warning about this move from private to public, however, was labeled by three research subjects as a caution against "too much detail." Labeling fears and narrating a change process are important, but the pastor must develop a sense of how much anxiety to introduce into the system through their detailed revelations. Luke and Paul, although arguably from differing generations of preaching training, both highlighted the necessity of discernment regarding what is appropriate vulnerability in, for instance, counseling, versus congregation-wide communication

such as a sermon. Peter agreed by pointing to "shock preachers" who have no sense of what is appropriate for the pulpit. Paul ventured to describe a scenario in which his vulnerability in one sermon included too much detail, and he had to address it again the following week. He needed to engage the congregation in such a way as to model how to reprocess when a line has been crossed and too much detail has been revealed. However, that awareness of the emotional temperature of his congregation enabled Paul to return to the subject the following week as a means of developing "maturity" in the congregation.

The outlier voice related to process awareness was John, who acknowledged the need for process when leading, especially from the pulpit. However, his posture was almost to assume the trust of the congregation because he planted the church. When trust is in doubt, John's default posture can be described more as a contest of endurance rather than process awareness that invites participation and dialogue. According to him, he meets disagreement with a "philosophy that is like: I'll outwork you; I'll outlast you; I'll outlove you. And I usually win." Vision and movement is more centered on John's personality and vision rather than shared vision developed by the system. Consequently, John's leadership revolves around the perception that he has "all the social and political capital" the congregation senses from leadership. Although it may be too simplistic to say, the researcher maintains that John serves personally at the center of leadership challenges in such a way that trust revolves around his presence. It is that position of power that gives John so much concern over "manipulation" as an abuse of vulnerability in the pulpit, to the extent that he confessed his mentor has from time to time challenged his "narcissism." John's own

admission is of how vulnerability, being "honest and authentic," has been used "not only as a license to fail, but also as a license to harm and maybe as a license to sin."

A Culture of Vulnerability and Leadership

One further governing factor in how pastors perceive the relationship between preaching and trust in their leadership is the culture that has been developed, nurtured, and grown within the church.

Four of the six research subjects planted the churches in which they currently serve. Each of them spoke to the benefits—and challenges—of creating a culture of church. Part of the role of the preacher, they suggest, is to shape the culture of the people by how they model being mastered by the Bible as individuals as well as how they speak about the soul work being done in them. Each of them recognized that they are culture building, and preaching is one tool, one part, of that larger enterprise. Often, suggested Luke, pastors are building a culture differently than the congregation might expect. Some, he proposed, expect the pastor to be the paragon of virtue and revealing vulnerabilities of their lives is "contrary to what they see a leader should be." Further, he claims many fear it "diminishes the office" for a pastor to reveal aspects of his experiential struggle with sin.

Timothy's experience, coming from a historic congregation, of planting a new church is instructive in this light. In his previous call, the expectation placed upon him was that he, as the spiritual leader of the church, was not allowed to be broken. Yet, he suffered from clinical depression. As a consequence of the pressure in his church culture, he explained that he felt the need to "go to a different town to get [his] medicine." His preaching propped him up more into a "gospel champion," that

sense that he had to rise above the petty concerns and struggles of everyday parishioners. Thus, according to him, he "spoke in generalities more than specifics" about renewal and spiritual growth. His preaching rested on the trust that the congregation placed in him as a strong man who spiritually existed on a different plane. The problem was, however, that man did not really exist. His revelations of his struggles eventually cost him his job; the congregation lost trust in his ability to lead them due to his brokenness.

When Timothy planted his current church, however, he explained how he determined to preach "as a leader who also is a follower of Jesus." By that he meant he wanted to set a "culture and tone" that modeled a reality of grace that was distinct in a church culture. This culture-shaping desire affects how he preaches, and thus the congregation's trust in his leadership. They trust him, Timothy sensed, as they experience him "following Jesus" and "living by grace." The culture that distrusts the hero leader is a maturing culture.

John explained that the culture built in his church had happened through private interactions as well as preaching to a congregation that has grown to expect their preacher to present himself as "foolish and unwise, broken, needy and dependent." This strategy was designed to clear away "any hints of strength" in the preacher himself. It has become the expectation that the preacher is "real. "

Paul explicitly connected preaching and trust in the development of "a gospel culture." A culture informed by the gospel, Paul suggested, not only permits him to be vulnerable in the pulpit, but also demands it. The premises to arriving at such a place, Paul outlined as the following: 1) "We are all broken people, and when we're

converted we are not automatically made whole;" 2) "You actually grow as you acknowledge your brokenness;" 3) "As the scripture says, when we confess our sins, we are actually healed;" 4) "Through acknowledging and confessing your brokenness you actually experience the power of the Holy Spirit to heal you." Through these four premises, Paul posits, a church is on its way to "being a transparent culture." Each of these is a necessary component for the church culture to grow such that the culture is not just a reflection of his open personality, Paul posed, but rather has become "a normative gospel culture."

Luke summarized well the place of a vulnerable culture in the relationship between preaching and leadership by suggesting that vulnerability provides a "culture and system where the reality of admitting a bad decision is not earth-shattering." He explained that it is the regular practice of vulnerability in and out of the pulpit that "affords the opportunity to lead not as heroes but as fellow sojourners whom God has called to serve and exercise certain gifts." When the congregation experiences the pastor as a needy sinner saved by a gracious savior, then the beliefs, habits, and expectations of that congregation begin to be shaped by that truth.

Barnabas and Peter, although different, still communicated the need for building a culture of vulnerability. Barnabas boldly suggested the link between preaching and trust within a vulnerable culture because of the "way the Bible presents its leaders." He suggested, the Bible is so clear about God's "dysfunctional family," so as to draw hearts to trust in an unfailing God, and at the same time communicate that the leaders of God's people will be frail and fallible, too. Without

seeking to build such a culture, the people of the congregation can be led to believe they are not needy, or that the apex of the spiritual condition is to have no need to communicate vulnerably, perhaps like the pastor. But, according to Barnabas, rather, a culture of trust is maintained when the pastor seeks "to depend on the community when he's broken" and clearly communicates a deep trust in the presence of Christ to offer grace to the needy. Peter relayed an instance in which an elder in his church helped him to see that he "is discipling" the congregation when he makes himself apply the gospel to his own life. The point of the elder's encouragement was that trust is built when, through his preaching, Peter opens up his life for the congregation to see he is a disciple, too. Through preaching, the congregation is not only challenged to grow, but has growth modeled for them.

One final aspect regarding the role of culture-building in the relationship between preaching and trust was brought to light by Barnabas: accepting help. Barnabas preaches roughly 40 percent of the Sundays each year and makes a point to be seen sitting under the preaching of his colleagues. While his is the primary preaching voice heard, Barnabas encourages other voices in the pulpit intentionally. As Barnabas described the practice, theologically it is rooted in the doctrine of depravity; he did not want his "personality to be the one around which the church turns." Further, it is intended to model the needs and gifts of the body, i.e., everybody has them to use and everyone benefits from others' gifts. Barnabas, as a Christian man, has need to benefit from the preaching ministry of others. By this demonstration, his church observes a man distrusting himself, that is, his self-sufficiency. He models being one who has to trust the preaching of the word just as

one seated with the congregation. In so doing, he actively works toward modeling trust as the preacher and the preached word as one of the people.

In summary, pastors reported a series of factors that govern their perceptions of the relationship between preaching and trust in their leadership. The common themes that govern pastors' perceptions are: a pastoral presence, maintaining process awareness, and building a culture of vulnerability and leadership.

Common Themes of Discerning Limits of Vulnerability

The third research question sought to understand how pastors discern the limits of vulnerability in their sermons to build the congregation's trust in their leadership. There are potentially numerous frames to utilize in the analysis of discerning the limits of vulnerability in sermons. For example, one could study best practices for the use of vulnerability. Or, one could consider, from a pastor's perspective, which areas of personal vulnerability are improper to communicate. Yet, this research question places the frame on discerning the limits of vulnerability and the relationship of those limits to the trust of the congregation.

Several of the pastors interviewed attributed their discernment of the limits of vulnerability to intuition more than anything else. Paul noted that he has "always lived [vulnerably], even before I was a Christian." Timothy relayed he had "no rules" to specifically govern what he does or does not say from the pulpit. However, the data can best be presented by using the metaphor of a windshield. Each of the research subjects keep several principles before them that help guide their decisions related to vulnerability. None of them expressed explicit rules never to be

broken, or always to be kept. Yet, these common themes rest before their eyes at all times to more or less serve as the lenses through which to make decisions about what and how to share vulnerably from the pulpit. What are the themes that contribute to their windshield?

Personality and Temperament

The personality and temperament of the pastor is a factor that aids in the discernment of the limits of vulnerability in sermons. For some pastors and professional communicators, the ability to open up their lives in their communication simply comes easier, suggested Paul. Describing himself in particular, "It isn't something I've ever had to work on," he claimed. Two pastors, Timothy and John, due to their open personalities, explained that a piece of their discernment process is formed by having the sense that they had "gone too far." It was crossing the line, an ill-formed and intuitive line, yet a line nonetheless, that shaped their discernment process. Having an extroverted and open personality makes vulnerability come easier for some preachers, these pastors proposed.

Peter spoke of the difference in his temperament versus his predecessor, who "appears to be more vulnerable in the pulpit than he is personally." This factor, Peter attributed to "his wiring—not hypocrisy." When Peter was called, seeking to bring the pulpit presence "closer together" to the private presentation, "earned great capital" from the beginning of his new ministry.

Peter was not always such an open pastor in the pulpit, precisely because of concerns related to trust in his leadership. His ministry reached a crisis point when he "hit a wall" of burnout, and Peter struggled to know how and whether or not to

talk about it. His temperament was more private to begin with. In addition, he explained that he feared "what would happen if he began to explain" the turmoil and struggle in his life. The lack of vulnerability was directly related to concerns about his ongoing leadership. Yet, through processing with two mentors, Peter determined to talk about the "stress and burnout with the people around me, including my wife and elders and then, to a degree, from the pulpit." This experience marked his ministry as most responded in an overwhelmingly positive fashion to his disclosure. He continued that same practice of preaching with a vulnerable presence in his new call.

Barnabas also experienced a breaking point that marked his vulnerable presence in the pulpit. His temperament by nature is perhaps more open than Peter's temperament; however, the experience of breaking shaped him anew also. According to him, his change was more of "deeper integration" from using vulnerability as technique, with "finesse bypassing pride" to more honest integration of his public and private lives. As with Peter, Barnabas began to more freely communicate the reality of his spiritual battles, and his congregations responded with more intention to trust his leadership rather than less.

While not related to a personal breaking to shape his temperament, Paul's description of trust in his leadership is directly related to his intentional and deliberate vulnerability, he suggests. He explains that the congregation thinks, "Since [Paul] is so vulnerable, it's less likely that he is trying to pull the wool over our eyes…or he is so transparent that we could tell if he were trying to."

The personality and temperament consideration not only applies to the pastors themselves, but also to congregations as entities. Paul spoke of evaluating the level of "maturity" in the congregational health as a factor in determining how vulnerable to be from the pulpit. Specifically, Luke correlated the level of emotional health of the congregation to their willingness and expectations for vulnerability in the pulpit. For, what he called, "unhealthy" congregations, Luke proposed that a pastor's temperament for being a vulnerable presence in the pulpit can cause the congregation to trust too much in the pastor's leadership, developing "co-dependent relationships" with pastors. Peter concurred with the concern over unhealthy congregations forming "voyeuristic" relationships with pastors and their families. Yet, far more common throughout the interviews was the concern related to the temperament of the congregation distrusting a vulnerable pastor.

Temperament is also informed by generational factors, suggested three pastors. Luke proposed that "although it may look differently from generation to generation," people are looking for "hero-leaders" who have a story to tell of the "victorious Christian life." The "war generation" in particular, proposed Paul, struggles to trust a "touchy-feely" pastor. The way forward, he suggests, is to work toward growth not only in pastors' lives to see "vulnerability as biblical and essential" but also to grow congregations toward maturity to expect the same.

If the "war generation" struggles to trust a vulnerable pastor, John relayed the desire of the "gen-X crowd that wants the authenticity thing" from preaching. Without it, there is a loss of trust in the pastor's leadership, John suggested. Luke agreed by suggesting a growing distrust among younger generations when

vulnerability is reduced to a technique trotted out "four times a year." He asserted that it must be a "regular" part of the observed temperament on the pastor in order to shape the temperament and culture of the congregation toward trusting vulnerable leaders.

Intentional

A second common theme that appears to make up the windshield for discerning the limits of vulnerability in sermons to build trust is the intentionality with which vulnerability is used.

John spoke of the "Facebook preacher," who by his disclosures says, "Look at my life!" Pastors have a tendency to believe, he suggested, that people "actually care about what cool activities they are doing" because pastors are accustomed to "adulation, attention, and adoration." John explains that this idea blinds them to the ability to recognize when disclosure is "posturing" rather than purposeful. In his own ministry context, this posturing and perpetual disclosing of stories of his life in sermons caused one of his best friends to exclaim, "If I hear one more story about your brother, I'm going to jump off a bridge!" The relentless disclosure without a discernable purpose in the sermon eroded trust in his leadership.

Each of the six research subjects spoke of keeping before them the question of "Why?" Specifically, they keep in their windshield view the concern of intention: Why am I telling this story or revealing this thing at this place? Barnabas, for example, always asks of his own intentions for revealing, "Does this put us in the text or take us away from the text?" Timothy, likewise, asks whether a particular

vulnerable communication will "help people see the same thing in their lives, come to grips with it, and confess it."

There seems to be a calculation each pastor is making related to vulnerability, inquiring as to the risk/reward ratio. That intention calculation relates to trust because, as Barnabas puts it, "There may be a time when it is good for the pastor, and may not be as beneficial for the congregation." This evaluation of the intersection of revelation and trust is the leadership component in vulnerable communication.

Peter described the question of intention as "pastoral sensitivity," that is, being sensitive to the pastor's own intentions within his soul as well as what sort of effect the vulnerability will have upon the congregation. He seeks to ask of himself: "What is my real strategy and purpose for sharing this?" There are occasions where this question which seeks to sense the motives of the soul have revealed to Peter the purpose of seeking to "create a personal following" or "trying to gain an angle" on someone or something. He explicitly related it to trust by suggesting the congregation begins to discern that each time he makes himself vulnerable, "he is attempting to bring [himself] into the text and into a life of repentance rather than fill something up for himself."

One example Peter relayed was the intention to speak in a sermon to specific racial tensions in his city and church. He planned what to say and had it all prepared on Friday. Yet, by Sunday morning, he realized the "self-serving intention" in his own heart by including his vulnerable illustration. He explained that he simply desired for others to see that "he's not afraid to call people out. He is a gutsy guy."

So, on Sunday morning he removed this piece from his sermon because he sensed his own poor intention that ultimately would destroy trust in his leadership through unintentionally polarizing his church and city.

In seeking to discern intention, Peter guarded the congregation against his own manipulation. John agreed that pastors seeking to know the motives of their own hearts for sharing vulnerably may mitigate potential manipulation.

Paul spoke of the intentionality of discerning who may be affected by the pastor's vulnerability. Others may be harmed by the pastor's vulnerability, which, again, begins to undermine trust. For example, Paul seeks never to damage his wife's reputation in any way, saying, "I'll never use a situation where I'm vulnerable about her vulnerability." He asks whether his vulnerability may make others feel less safe and comfortable in the body of Christ because of something he shared.

Intentionality is a factor related to the detail shared by the pastor. Luke advised giving careful assessment to "the people's ability to hear the gospel implications of what you are saying. In preaching you must ask how does this one-size disclosure fit everyone in this room." The comfort level of the pastor is not the safest guide to determine whether the disclosure will be heard or is too much, however. Both Timothy and John suggested that pastors who are not embarrassed by what they disclosed have not gone far enough in their vulnerability. The intention and purpose of the pastor to be discerning and calculated enables the congregation to hear what the pastor desires them to hear and be moved to evaluate their own lives as a result.

Outside Voices to Aid Discernment

Four research subjects explicitly charged that pastors should not make decisions like these alone. Because pastors are broken of mind, will, and emotion just like every other member of the body of Christ, Barnabas suggests, "You need to depend upon a community" to discern the limits of wise vulnerability. This group or outside voice to aid in discernment is the third theme that contributes to the windshield of discernment regarding the limits of vulnerability.

Barnabas vulnerably relayed his own family system and brokenness in his family of origin to catalog his liabilities and biases in discerning limits to vulnerability. He grew up with "two alcoholic parents" and as a consequence, he feels "responsible for what's wrong with everybody." Taking that brokenness seriously, Barnabas explains that he "tries never to make decisions about how vulnerable to be from the podium or pulpit alone." He has surrounded himself with trusted partners—his wife, his children, his staff, and his elders—and consistently discusses with them whether or not to share particular matters in sermons as well as the detail in which to share them. In addition, he meets each week with his pastoral team for exegetical work in preparation for the upcoming sermon. In addition to exegetical work, Barnabas will "try out" various illustrations and points of vulnerable application with them and ask whether "this is a help or a distraction."

Timothy, taking lessons from his past experience of being harmed by how some misused the vulnerabilities he shared in his ministry, has also pulled together a team of people to help him discern when his disclosure will begin to erode trust in his leadership. His advice was to include individuals from outside the congregation

in this community of counselors, which would mean those who "do not have the power to fire you," to ensure against the fear of man being the motive to share or not. Paul proposed that such an outside group serve in a mentoring role as pastors mature in their ability to discern the limits of vulnerability. He suggested appointing a specific small group of trusted advisors to "offer feedback and point out when you think I've crossed the line."

Luke utilizes the counsel of his wife and other close friends in ministry to aid in his discernment about particular sermons or teaching. His use of such an advisory group can be categorized as more occasional, in contrast to Barnabas who makes weekly use of such outside advisors.

Peter suggested seeking advice from others to aid in discerning the limits of vulnerability in theology, particularly the "plurality of elders." Here Peter, perhaps more than any of the other pastors, connected preaching and trust in leadership in an explicit way. In answering this question about discernment, he couched preaching in the light of leadership, especially from the position of the consensus of elders around the truths of the preached word. The way he perceived preaching and leadership working together is: to "build consensus and lead collaboratively" even from the pulpit. It is as if he saw preaching not simply located in himself as preacher, but rather, he saw himself as a spokesman for the voice of the Lord through the elders. As a consequence, when he vulnerably communicates particularly some leadership initiative or direction in a sermon, he consciously does so with the backing and voice of the other elders. In so doing, Peter attempts to build trust in the leadership of the church by locating leadership not in himself as a leader, but

rather with the elders as a plurality of leaders. His assertion is that the trust in church leadership is strengthened when that trust is not really about him, but about the Lord working through the plurality of elders.

Yet, maintaining such a position calls upon Peter to work diligently to know the mind of the elders, as well as allowing them to know his mind in quite vulnerable detail. It also calls for sufficient time, "at least a day or two" to plan the disclosure "to make sure I've checked my motives and allowed the Spirit to influence me," Peter maintained.

Redemptive Purpose

The clearest and most resounding factor which contributes to the windshield of discernment for the limits of vulnerability in sermons was whether the vulnerability has a redemptive purpose. Each pastor interviewed spoke at length about this criterion for the use of vulnerability.

John spoke of redemptive purpose as the test which distinguishes between "manipulation" of the congregation and discipleship within the congregation. Timothy stated that redemptive purpose is the distinguishing mark between "confessing myself" or applying "to others' redemptive revelation."

Simply put, Barnabas maintained that the metric of redemptive purpose asks, "does [this vulnerable point] magnify Christ and deepen our grasp of the text, or does it magnify me and distract from the text?" Peter asks the same question as he prepares: "What is my real strategy and purpose in sharing this? Can I articulate the redemptive purpose in it?"

Frequently, these pastors have used themselves as negative examples, where they, in Luke's words, "have been poor [examples] of the biblical principles that are being driven home." The redemptive purpose in such disclosure is to allow the congregation to see "a husband and father seeking to apply the gospel to his life on a regular basis," Luke asserts. He continued, "The place they need to recognize the gospel the most is in those moments where they fell like they've failed." Whenever pastors reveal those moments in their own lives, and point to what God does to forgive, heal, and strengthen, then the purpose of the vulnerability is the elevation of the redemption found in Christ.

The willingness to ask for and receive feedback is critical in discerning whether the redemptive purpose is being understood by the congregation. Luke and Timothy both highlighted the necessity of welcoming the feedback of the congregation as a gauge to determine whether they hear the story of what Christ is doing in the pastors' vulnerability or simply whether they hear another story of a fellow traveler. Such feedback must be invited, Luke suggested, so that congregation members "feel freedom to come talk to you." It is through their feedback, some of which may be challenging, that pastors can genuinely understand if vulnerability is creating "emotional voyeurism," as concerns Peter, versus a genuine conformity to Christ.

Luke and Paul emphasized opposite ends of the spectrum in maintaining redemptive purpose. Luke sought to ensure that not all the stories and anecdotes have a happy resolution at the time of their telling. There is room for unresolved struggles to be communicated from the pulpit, he suggested. He notes that

redemptive purpose can be located in longing for redemption, being led forward by a "fellow sojourner" who is holding onto hope in the midst of difficulty.

Paul, on the other hand, sought to emphasize the healing power of the gospel in life. He asserts that redemptive purpose is not only found in the "fact that I'm broken, and therefore I need to be vulnerable, " but it is also found in putting "in front of people the hope of the gospel and substantial healing." Vulnerability is the "hip and in" thing right now, Paul maintained, especially when communicating "the brokenness of life." Yet he suggests that when pastors almost exclusively focus on brokenness, the congregation is left to wonder, "is Jesus doing anything? Where is the power of the gospel in your life?" Paul's fear is that by leaving out the healing power of the gospel, trust is undermined—not trust in the pastor, but trust in God.

In summary, to discern the limits of vulnerability in sermons that builds trust in their leadership, pastors reported constructing a metaphorical windshield to guide their discernment. The components of such a windshield were: personality and temperament, intentionality, utilizing outside voices to aid in discernment, and maintaining a redemptive purpose.

Summary of Findings

The chapter explored how six pastors use vulnerability in their sermons to build trust in their leadership. Each of the three research questions were posed and answered with common themes arising from the interview data. The next chapter is devoted to consolidating research from the literature presented in chapter two and the common themes from the data articulated in chapter four. Following a brief analysis, the researcher will draw conclusions.

Chapter Five

Discussion and Recommendations

This study was designed to explore how pastors use vulnerability in sermons to build the congregation's trust in their leadership. While there are numerous resources to aid the preacher in a theology of preaching and the practice of preaching, these same resources largely leave pastors to themselves to discern how and whether or not to use personal vulnerability in sermons. In the literature review it was seen that the concern is not that pastors have never considered this question; on the contrary, pastors are largely left to their own intuition in making decisions about the use of vulnerability. This study sought to address the practice of the use of vulnerability in a research-driven fashion.

A literature survey was conducted in chapter two, focusing on four key literature areas pertinent to the study purpose. These areas were: biblical and theological literature, literature related to the role of vulnerability in leadership, resources pertaining to building organizational trust, and literature regarding leadership communication.

In chapter three, the research methodology was identified, including the purposive criteria for participant selection and the means of gathering and analyzing data. This study included interviews with six Reformed pastors from the southeastern United States. Each of these pastors serves as the primary preaching

voice in their congregation and has done so for at least seven years, three or more in their current call.

Three research questions were framed to guide the study. The research questions were:

1. How do pastors assess vulnerability in their sermons?
    a. What benefits do they find?
    b. What risks do they find?
2. How do pastors perceive the relationship between their preaching and the congregation's trust in their leadership?
3. How do pastors discern the limits of vulnerability in their sermons to build the congregation's trust in their leadership?

Chapter four presented the findings of the interviews which were analyzed based on common themes arising in the data according to the three research questions above. This chapter brings together the data from the survey of relevant literature with the findings presented in chapter four in order to draw conclusions and make recommendations.

Assessing Vulnerability

When assessing the use of vulnerability, it seems the question of "Who benefits from vulnerability?" must be asked. Research suggests that the benefits of vulnerability, similar to the risks, accrue both to the congregation and to the pastor as a person.

Benefits to Congregations

Regarding the congregation, numerous benefits are enjoyed under the leadership of pastors who are vulnerable in the pulpit. First, the congregation experiences a fuller picture of humanity. Organizations, including churches, are a system with expectations. Often, those expectations rail against a vulnerable leader, even disallowing it, as Bennis, Goleman, and O'Toole found, weaving a bias against vulnerability on the part of the leader into the very fabric of organizational culture.[254] Yet, this bias is counter-productive and organizationally self-damning, effectively eroding trust in leaders who pose as omni-competent.[255] The presence of such attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors within the church represents an adoption of unhealthy practices from the business world that ultimately betray what the church is designed to be: the body of Christ. Whenever pastors willingly communicate their vulnerability in the pulpit, they proclaim to the congregation that they are limited creatures. Furthermore, their limits as creatures dignify the gifts and service of the remainder of the congregation. The effect of the willingness to "show your own need publicly," as Timothy stated it, serves to promote the ministry and ability of others within the congregation. This effect was seen in Barnabas' church, where although he is the senior pastor and primary preacher, he frequently sits under the preaching ministry of his colleagues.

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[254] Bennis, Goleman, and O'Toole, *Transparency*, 2.

[255] Heifetz, Linsky, and Grashow, *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership*.

As Allender suggests, this model of leadership is neither "admired in our business schools or even our seminaries."[256] Nevertheless, it is necessary to allow the congregation to develop into its full potential, expressing gifts and specific callings the Lord places on members of the congregation. Whenever the pastor purports to being unlimited in time, energy, and ability, the congregation is happy to allow this professional to do all the work. This, however, robs them of the freedom of embracing limits[257] and working together as a body of Christ to produce something beautiful together that could not be replicated by individuals.

It is a fuller humanity that embraces weaknesses and need. There is profound freedom in existing as a creature within a system of other limited creatures. Whenever pastors pose as something different, the congregation begins to distrust them. This distrust is rooted in the congregation's understanding "that no one has it all together" as Paul commented.

A second benefit of the pastor using vulnerability in sermons that accrues to the congregation is the development of a church culture that rests on the work of Christ, rather than a human hero-leader. Leaders will disappoint; as Luke suggested, they will "diminish the office" by actions, whether or not they disclose those actions. Disappointment is part of being a fallen human. Pastors will disappoint congregations, yet the more congregations are drawn to Christ and his work versus the strength of the leader, the healthier they will be. As Resner so aptly put it, the issue of central importance to the health of any congregation is the exaltation of the

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[256] Allender, *Leading with a Limp*, 55.

[257] Scazzero, *The Emotionally Healthy Church*, 132–151.

Redeemer and portraying the preacher as one of the redeemed.[258] Whenever pastors point to the work of grace in their lives either by illustration or application in sermons, they elevate the work of Jesus versus their own competence. That clear communication of the work of grace, resting on the finished work of Christ for identity and security, ultimately builds the congregation up into "maturity" and a "gospel-oriented culture," proposed Paul. Congregations will only grow so deep when their health is tied to the level of the competence of the pastor. Yet, for real growth and transformation to happen, pastors must take themselves out of the central seat of the Savior, and point congregations to the only Savior that can heal and grow them—the Lord Jesus.

The concern, however, is to "disappoint them at a rate they can absorb"[259] as Linsky and Heifetz advise. That capacity for disappointment, however ironically, is grown as pastors are willing to express their need for Jesus, which "puts us in the text rather than taking us from it," as Barnabas commented. Deeper still, John aptly stated, "in order for them to meet Jesus, you [that is, pastors] have to need Jesus." Whenever pastors demonstrate their need, willingly placing themselves within the demands of scripture, the hero Christ is exalted, and the man-hero/pastor-leader is returned to the rightful place—that of a fellow disciple.

Yet, someone has to be the first to offer trust (living an authentic and honest life), and it must be the leader.[260] For the congregation to grow toward seeing Christ

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[258] Resner, *Preacher and Cross*, 178.

[259] Linsky and Heifetz, *Leadership on the Line*, 20.

[260] Resner, *Preacher and Cross*, 178.

as hero and leader in a culture of grace, then pastors must be willing to venture the risk of placing themselves in need of that Christ and his grace. The pathway really does not work the other way. Pastors must demonstrate need first; congregations will take their cues from the vulnerable and grace-filled patterns that pastors set.

A third benefit to vulnerability in pastors' sermons for the congregation is the unmasking of shame as a primary motivator for spiritual growth. Sadly, Christians often live under the slavery of pretending a far more successful battle against sin than is reality. We feel shame, as Edward Welch noted, because we have "acted less than human, or were treated as less than human, or were associated with something less than human."[261] It is that shame that moves humans to hide rather than reveal the truth about oneself.[262] One aspect of the antidote to shame is fostering connection with a God who knows the truth already and loves anyway. Filling this gap of alienation and addressing the impulse to hide is "gospel preaching," according to Paul. The hope of healing provides freedom and unmasks the power of shame to imprison congregants. Through consistent preaching of union with Christ, Christians are given tools and truth with which to fight against that shame that drives toward disconnection and alienation.

Yet, it is not only the proclaiming of theological truth that unmasks shame, but also the manner in which that truth is proclaimed that frees God's people. Brené Brown proposed that empathy is the antidote to shame.[263] Empathy fosters that

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[261] Welch, *Shame Interrupted*, 2.

[262] Ibid., 104.

[263] Brown, *Daring Greatly*, 80.

sense that a person is not alone,[264] and that others are able to understand their thoughts and feelings. Vulnerability in sermons is a visible and public means for pastors to communicate an incarnational sense that congregation members are not alone. Their leaders are in the fight together with them, a "fellow sojourner," stated Luke. If pastors only, or even primarily, communicate victory over sin, without relaying the struggle common to humanity[265] they perpetuate the myth that God only receives the successful and victorious. Evangelical pastors would never proclaim the lie that God only receives the successful; however, often the manner and pulpit presence communicate just such a belief. On the other hand, whenever pastors are able to communicate their own struggles, honestly and vulnerably revealing appropriate details of their struggles, then they model a life moved by grace rather than imprisoned by shame. One research subject, Timothy, communicated the result of an empathetic pulpit presence when he relayed that a congregation member confessed, "The fact that you are real and talk about yourself makes me realize that I can ask for help in these areas, too."

Not only are the words heard by the typical congregant, but the life of the pastor, in some way, must also match or authenticate the message preached. Communication of a common struggle from the pulpit normalizes the battle for faithfulness each Christian faces daily. It invites people in the pew out of the shadows. The life-transforming message is brought to life when they not only hear but are allowed to see how the pastor is being changed by the gospel, too.

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[264] Ibid., 80.

[265] Romans 7.

Benefits to Pastors

What are the benefits to pastors themselves? In a significant way, they are the same as those that accrue to the congregation, yet personalized. First, pastors claim the right to be fully human. By this, the researcher means pastors courageously lay hold of the freedom to be the same person in and out of the pulpit—a sinner redeemed by the grace of God. Phillips Brooks, in the Yale Preaching Lectures of 1877, proposed the oft-quoted line, preaching is "truth through personality,"[266] wherein the life of the preacher is "brought close" to the listener.[267] Undoubtedly, Brooks' emphasis lay on the truth aspect of the quote; nevertheless, the truth comes through the life and witness of a particular preacher in a particular culture to a particular people. The reality is that the preacher is not all that dissimilar from the people in the pew. Vulnerability in the pulpit is a simple recognition of that fact; preachers are sinners just the same as congregants. They deal with the same doubts, the same struggles, and experience pain the same as other Christians. The use of vulnerability communicates that the life "on Tuesday," as Luke put it, matches the life on Sunday morning. There is a profound freedom afforded to preachers who can be honest about their need for the Savior, emotionally as well as spiritually.

The converse is true as well, noted by Barnabas and Peter. If pastors are not vulnerable in private, they best not attempt it in public, lest they be noted as people who posture and pretend. Posturing erodes trust, no matter whether pastors desire

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[266] Brooks, *Lectures on Preaching, Delivered Before the Divinity School of Yale College in January and February, 1877*, 8.

[267] Ibid., 74.

to appear more holy than they really are or whether they seek to gain style points for being broken and needy.

In the end, the research demonstrated that vulnerability afforded pastors the freedom to embrace their limits and authentically communicate as sinners saved by grace. All the while, vulnerability need not distract from the truth poured through the personality of the messenger. Quite the opposite, a vulnerable relational presence in the pulpit matches the congregation's experience of the pastor as a fellow human being. Vulnerability provides the pastor the language to match the way they are experienced by fellow sinners. In the pulpit, vulnerability provides one clear frame for the congregation to experience the strength through weakness of which the Apostle Paul wrote.[268]

Second, the pastor also personally benefits from a church culture that elevates Christ rather than the pastor as hero. Peter and Luke both noted the personal blessing of ensuring the text is applied to themselves before preaching it. This is one means of maintaining an active and lively faith in a profession that can be hazardous to spiritual health. Revealing weakness such that people are drawn to Jesus versus being impressed with the pastor leaves less room for pastors to think more highly of themselves than they ought. Resner noted that in the Apostle Paul's day credibility largely was measured by honor and success.[269] The world is not much different today, where success of a ministry in worldly categories lends more credibility to the pastor. The pressure to maintain a posture of strength is almost

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[268] 2 Corinthians 12:10.

[269] Resner, *Preacher and Cross*, 178.

too much to bear. However, when pastors are able to believe and personally minister in the power of God's redemptive plan of what Resner calls "reverse ethos"[270] then communicating as a fellow sufferer is recognized as a benefit rather than a risk.

Third, pastors personally benefit from unmasking shame as a primary motivator for spiritual growth. No differently than any other profession, pastors fall into the "value via accomplishment" treadmill of which Brown wrote.[271] Perhaps the pressure is more heightened in ministry, because the tasks are supposed to be for God. Certainly Timothy's experience of feeling it necessary to go to a different town to fill his prescription for medication for depression reveals the crushing weight of performance. As Welch noted, achievement is not sufficient to provide a healthy sense of worth simply because it does not endure.[272]

As with other professions, pastors can be motivated by shame, especially the shame of failure to achieve great things for God. That drive to achieve potentially is borne out of a personal woundedness that has not healed. Lacking self-management—recognizing feelings and managing them versus being managed by them—contributes to the deepening prison of performance in ministry, measuring one's spiritual value and growth by what has been achieved. The willingness to selectively and wisely reveal the struggles of the soul frees pastors to exalt Jesus's achievement rather than their own. Being valued for what Jesus has done instead of

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[270] Ibid., 130.

[271] Brown, *Daring Greatly*, 69.

[272] Welch, *Shame Interrupted*, 60.

ministry achievement and successes robs shame of its power to motivate. Christians, including pastors, are freed by these simple gospel truths.

Risks to Congregations

The assessment of vulnerability in sermons to build trust also must wrestle with the risks to such a practice. After all, vulnerability by definition invites risk. Similar to benefits, risks to vulnerability were found to affect congregations and pastors.

The primary risk to congregations related to the practice of vulnerability on the part of the pastor is the potential of being shaped into being a personality-driven group. As Barnabas proposed, the personality of the "Triune God" is the one around which the congregation's life should turn. Yet, a consistently vulnerable presence in the pulpit exposes any congregation to manipulation through self-focus by the pastor. It was this risk that cautioned the acclaimed preacher Phillips Brooks. He labeled the risk as encouraging voyeuristic curiosity into the life of the pastor's family, which ultimately erodes the gravity of the pastor's ministry.[273]

If the personality of the pastor is particularly powerful, then the concern of manipulation arises, wherein the congregation is liable to be led in a direction not by the demand of the scriptures, but rather by the force of the personality of the pastor. Brown spoke to this manipulative dynamic as the "smash and grab,"[274] a means by which vulnerably-shared information becomes the means of ensuring a certain response in the listener. This same potential for abuse and manipulation

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[273] Brooks, *Lectures on Preaching, Delivered Before the Divinity School of Yale College in January and February, 1877*, 58.

[274] Brown, *Daring Greatly*, 116.

concerned several of the interviewed pastors. Not only was it a concern, but at least John acknowledged having used vulnerability in the pulpit for that purpose.

Another frame on the potential for becoming personality-driven was articulated by experienced preachers Martyn Lloyd-Jones[275] and Susan Durber,[276] and echoed indirectly by Barnabas and Peter. The concern is that the truth of the Scriptures will be obscured by the personal anecdotes of the pastor. On the face of it, this muddling of biblical teaching is concerning. Yet, this researcher is further concerned that what is modeled about how to study the scriptures is also confusing. Granted, this concern can be mitigated by heeding Schlafler's advice of stories "blurred abound the edges,"[277] meaning vague details. Yet, still this does not address the hermeneutic being taught, or better, modeled by the pastor. If there is no clearly delineated method of interpretation explicitly being taught, then the congregation will be uncertain how to bring the concerns of their lives to the text. Barnabas spoke of his intention to ask whether the vulnerability puts the congregation "in the text or takes us away from the text," which is a right concern. Yet, without speaking to hermeneutical rules, the congregation still is at risk of being driven by the personality and winsomeness of the pastor rather than the force of the scriptures.

The degree of emotional health of pastors who use vulnerability in their sermons also puts the congregation at risk of becoming personality-driven. Peter Scazzero, writer and pastor, noted that the health of any organization will ultimately

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[275] D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Preaching & Preachers* (Zondervan, 1972), 233.

[276]Susan Durber, "The Preacher's Inner Life," in *The Future of Preaching* ed. Geoffrey Stevenson (SCM Press, 2010), 179.

[277] Schlafer, *Your Way with God's Word*, 56.

reflect the emotional health of its leaders.[278] When leaders are not sufficiently differentiated persons, then the wounds of the past come to affect inordinately and often unknowingly the life of the organization. For this reason, Brown advised never to expose fresh or unprocessed issues in vulnerable public communication.[279] Her concern is that the temptation is too great to turn such public communication into a means of working out the issues of self. The pastors interviewed recognized this temptation to turn the pulpit into a "confessional," as Timothy reported. Peter even more explicitly noted the inherent danger of addressing unresolved issues of self or issues within the community.

Yet, it seems almost by definition that pastors are called to address unresolved issues, for the sanctification process is always unresolved. People, including pastors, are always in process. Granted, there is particular concern regarding working out personal issues in the pulpit, or even in a twisted manner seeking absolution by confession in a public forum. Yet, although risky, to fail to wade into open wounds and issues within the congregation or city is ultimately a failure of leadership, or more pointedly a failure of nerve, as Edwin Friedman titled his treatise on this topic. There is no safe way to engage in open issues or wounds, sins or brokenness in a community, yet pastors must engage.

Healthy engagement, rather than that which becomes personality-driven, occurs when pastors grow toward differentiation, "the ability to be in charge of self, even when others in the emotional field are actually trying to make us different from

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[278] Scazzero, *The Emotionally Healthy Church*, 46.

[279] Brown, *Daring Greatly*, 180.

how we are."[280] As they grow into differentiated leaders, pastors find new abilities to engage in difficult issues without the scenario defining them as people.

Preaching as differentiated leaders adds yet another layer to the leadership and trust challenge. For preaching and pastoring are more about being a redeemed person and messenger than about being a professional. Redeemed people are willing to engage in the difficulties and challenges of life precisely because Christ is king. By preaching vulnerably, the preacher becomes a perspicuous presence, where congregations are allowed to see this King Jesus at work in the sins, difficulties, and challenges the pastor faces personally. Thusly, the pastor's personality will not be exalted as central, but rather the Christ who is alive and at work is exalted as central. Engagement in unresolved issues, even from the pulpit, sets the working Christ on display before congregations, which they desperately need for their own spiritual growth.

Risks to Pastors

In addition to congregational risks, there are risks to pastors themselves regarding the use of vulnerability in sermons. First, there is a risk to the pastor's soul being malformed through overexposure. John's deep fear of "narcissism" in himself personally and in pastors in general comports with the fears of Lloyd-Jones,[281] Durber,[282] and Brooks[283] highlighted above. The "adulation" of pastors, as

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[280] Richardson, *Creating a Healthier Church*, 87.

[281] Lloyd-Jones, *Preaching & Preachers*, 233.

[282] Stevenson, *The Future of Preaching*, 179.

John put it, feeds into the risk of the soul turning upon itself, thus failing to call God's people out of the worship of self and toward Christ as king. Perpetually placing self on display before congregations runs counter to the self-emptying incarnation of Jesus. When pastors tell stories revealing themselves and then begin to believe people are interested in them primarily as people rather than as heralds and stewards of another's (Jesus's) story, then their character begins to take on a misshapen form.

An assumption of the researcher at the start of this study was that pastors may be concerned about a loss of leadership credibility when vulnerable in the pulpit. Luke, Peter, and Paul reported concern about the level of detail revealed. Paul and Timothy used particularly violent imagery of "bullets" and "ammunition" to describe this risk of offering details of struggles that those who hear may use to harm the pastor personally later. Yet only Luke explicitly expressed concern that correlated this detail with the loss of leadership ability. He feared some may perceive a "diminishing of the office" of pastor from vulnerability. The literature was divided on this question as well. Material especially from older professional homeliticians such as Brooks[284] and Lloyd-Jones[285] wrote of their concern that vulnerability would obscure the truth amidst the personal revelations. A feared

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[283] Brooks, *Lectures on Preaching, Delivered Before the Divinity School of Yale College in January and February, 1877*, 58.

[284] Brooks, *Lectures on Preaching, Delivered Before the Divinity School of Yale College in January and February, 1877*, 179.

[285] Lloyd-Jones, *Preaching & Preachers*, 233.

result was the loss of weightiness.[286] Yet, modern professors of homiletics were less concerned. Troeger of Illif School of Theology was concerned in the opposite direction: an erosion of trust if there is an absence of vulnerably relayed story.[287] He further ascribes some context for such a concern to the ubiquitous media presence, already in 1991, where narrative voices bombard modern people from all directions.[288] Narrative voice certainly has grown since 1991 with the advent of Facebook and the Twitter universe.

Rather than reporting that vulnerability diminishes trust, the secular literature primarily focused on vulnerability building trust. Bennis, Goleman, and Biederman propose that credibility, and therefore trust, is eroded by the unintentional importation of unwritten rules from the family of origin of the leader that may exclude the revelation of weakness and limitation from discussion.[289]Brown proposed that trust, at least in part, is established and maintained through the connection of leader and people. The dial that moves humans up and down the continuum of connection and disconnection is vulnerability.[290] Therefore, the absence of vulnerability, suggest these experts, diminishes trust.

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[286] Brooks, *Lectures on Preaching, Delivered Before the Divinity School of Yale College in January and February, 1877*, 58.

[287] Troeger, "Thinking in Story: Preaching in a Post-literate Age," 38.

[288] Troeger, "Emerging New Standards in the Evaluation of Effective Preaching.," 291.

[289] Bennis, Goleman, and O'Toole, *Transparency*, 97.

[290] Brene Brown, *Power of Vulnerability,* 2011 video.

In the church context, this researcher proposes, the factor that bridges the gap in the divergence of expert opinion is whether or not the church is a gospel-saturated context. If the doctrines of grace are not only taught but embodied by the leadership, then the expectations of congregations for leaders and pastors in particular will be shaped by grace. The context for congregations to allow pastors to be weak is built through intentional and conscious exaltation of Christ and his redeeming, restoring grace. Absent this serving as a primary focus of the pastor's preaching ministry and corresponding shaping of the church culture, congregations will expect their pastors to be strong persons in and of themselves. In short, the risk of the loss of credibility is real if the church culture is not continually saturated by the gospel. If the gospel does saturate the culture, including the leadership culture, then vulnerability is perceived as a strength.

Perceiving the Relationship between Preaching and Trust

The second research question in this study sought to understand how pastors perceive the relationship between their preaching and the congregation's trust in their leadership. Each research participant recognized the association between preaching and trust. The literature reviewed highlighted the function of leadership communication in the building of trust. Two conclusions were drawn regarding strengthening the ways pastors perceive this relationship and developing deeper strategies to grow trust.

The first conclusion regarding what strengthens the relationship between preaching and trust is that pastors must learn to recognize what trust is in order to develop it. While certain levels of trust are offered to the leader by virtue of

position, the development of deeper trust rests on relational connections. Rather than the leader, or pastor, resting on positional authority to motivate others to follow, Gottman's definition of trust places the emphasis elsewhere—upon the ability of leaders to communicate an understanding of the concerns of the followers. It is the belief that the leader has the best interests of others in mind that builds trust.[291] Therefore, for vulnerability in sermons to build trust, pastors must develop the discipline not only of asking themselves how they feel about their disclosures, but also asking how their congregations will likely receive vulnerable disclosures. Herrick and Mann charge pastors with watching the "circle of intimacy"[292] that develops among their congregation that enables them to process the emotional disequilibrium that may accompany disclosures from the pulpit.

The pastors interviewed recognized, although not in technical language, this dynamic of communicating the best interests of others through their preaching. Their category for this was empathy. Timothy and Paul spoke of labeling their own fears vulnerably that in some way mirrors the fears within the congregation as a technique for empathetic connection. Peter articulated this understanding of trust more deeply by suggesting congregations can sense when pastors try to "gain an angle" on them through disclosure or are "trying to fill something up" for themselves. His intuitive sense is that when others perceive a leader to be interested in self-advancement rather than the benefit of others then trust is diminished. The researcher would add that trust may be built if congregations do not immediately

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[291] Gottman, *The Science of Trust*, 76.

[292] Herrick, *Jesus Wept*, 45.

recognize the benefit to them but rather to the mission of the church. Spiritually mature congregations must not be characterized as speaking univocally for their interests; they also realize that Jesus' interests for his church may run counter to what they sense as immediate personal benefit. It is the development of maturity that allows a congregation to realize that commitment to the mission of Christ is of ultimate benefit, even if the experience of that benefit is more difficult to grasp.

When preaching, there seems to be a public negotiation of the interests of three parties: God, the people, and the pastor. Of course, orthodox theology of preaching understands the pastor to speak for God. Yet, as Barnabas and Peter articulated, there is an aspect of coming to God, or rather of being brought to God, that happens in the preaching moment. Bringing people to God is a pastoral enterprise, and if done with concern for the interests of all three parties, trust develops among congregations growing in maturity. Brooks understood this dynamic of trust when he articulated that preaching and pastoring cannot be separated. There is no genuine preaching without pastoring and no pastoring without preaching.[293] Francis and Village concur with their "pastoral model of preaching"[294] which understands preaching as a relational dialog. Trust develops when pastors are able to vulnerably expose their own hearts and the hearts of the congregation before the Lord so that he may either comfort or challenge them. Expressing the interests of others, giving rise to their voice, specifically in sermons, engenders connection and therefore trust between pastor and congregation.

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[293] Brooks, *Lectures on Preaching, Delivered Before the Divinity School of Yale College in January and February, 1877*, 77.

[294] Francis and Village, *Preaching*, 62.

How might this affect the phenomenon of itinerant preachers or, in the modern age, the broadcast of messages remotely? The researcher believes this phenomenon falls into good, better, and best categorization. Itinerant preaching is good. However, it is not best for the overall discipleship and growth of the congregation. Broadcasting or podcasting sermons is good. Yet, better still is the delivery of sermons in a context in which the sermon is aided by life together. For congregation members to know their pastor is present and loves them provides a much better context for people to be pastored by the word of God rather than simply listening to a good talk. Trust is best built in pastors in contexts in which they are known.

For example, the occasion for expression of trust (having the interests of others at heart) may come in moments of crisis or leadership challenges in the church. Yet, if these expressions only happen in those significant events, then the context for trust has not been established that will enable trust to flourish. In other words, if trust isn't built in the small things, it will not be available to rely on in the large things. Gottman calls the everyday opportunities for building a foundation for trust "sliding door moments,"[295] which are routine events that provide occasion to either build or maintain trust. In these moments people ask, "Are you there for me?"[296] Or these moments may provide an opportunity to reprocess damage that has been done in the relationship and repair trust.[297] From the model of attachment

[295] Gottman, *The Science of Trust*, 196.

[296] Ibid., 197.

[297] Ibid., 201.

theory, Johnson simply advises a turning toward these moments of opportunity versus turning away and letting them pass.[298]

How might this concept affect preaching? This question leads to the second conclusion. The building of trust through vulnerability in sermons does not primarily rest with the preaching moment. The organizational system requires attention to be built into one that values and prizes such a pulpit presence. Vulnerability in sermons plays a role in the development of culture. Yet, in significant ways it is the fruit of a culture built for vulnerability as a systemic value. In other words, vulnerable preaching is not about vulnerable preaching. Rather, it is a tool for the building of a gospel-saturated church culture. Vulnerable preaching is not an end in itself; on the contrary, it is an aspect of culture formation that prizes vulnerability as a biblical value. Therefore, preachers are not advised by the researcher to simply begin preaching with vulnerability. The context of the church life must be carefully attended to in order that the vulnerability expressed can "disturb people at a rate they can absorb."[299]

Attention to a system or culture that can receive vulnerable communication from the pulpit recognizes the adaptive nature of this issue rather than the technical. Adaptive challenges address the "attitudes, values, and behaviors"[300] of an organization, a category in which vulnerable communication rests. Preachers beginning to use vulnerability in sermons, while difficult and challenging for them,

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[298] Johnson, *Hold Me Tight,* 37.

[299] Linsky and Heifetz, *Leadership on the Line,* 20.

[300] Ibid., 65.

find that it serves as a technical solution—a program or technique—to an adaptive problem. A vulnerable pulpit presence calls upon the church as an organization to grow to value vulnerability. This adjustment of values may be quite difficult for the church and for the pastor, potentially inviting attack and critique. Therefore, pastors must grow together with congregations. Pastors must also grow into differentiated leaders who, as Herrington, Creech, and Taylor propose, have "enough emotional maturity to call a congregation to discern and pursue a shared vision, to remain connected with those who differ with the leader of the majority, and to remain a calm presence when anxiety arises."[301]

Shaping the culture as a differentiated leader is best done first in private, advised Barnabas, Peter, and Timothy. When asked about the relationship between preaching and trust, each of these pastors answered about private communication first. They spoke of work with search committees, the session, the staff, and even congregation members privately. John commented on relationships outside the pulpit that create the context for him as the leader to be seen as "foolish and unwise, broken, needy, and dependent."

Without attention to the relational context and system, vulnerability may be received as "floodlighting" according to Brown.[302] Floodlighting occurs when the intimacy shared is too intense for the relationship to handle, likened to a floodlight shined into the eyes. The result is disconnection: a flinching at content too concentrated, for example, disclosure of sexual temptation absent the relationship

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[301] Herrington, Creech, and Taylor, *The Leader's Journey*, 46.

[302] Brown, *Daring Greatly*, 160.

to bear such intimacy. This type of vulnerability erodes trust because it erodes connection, Brown's research found.[303]

Returning to the question, what conclusions can be drawn to direct preachers in the use of vulnerability in order to build trust? First, realize preaching is only one tool for the larger task of shaping the body of Christ. Preaching is not an end unto itself; it is a means of grace to affect the growth in maturity and sanctification of the church. Preachers must think of the system and culture as they preach vulnerably. They must ask a series of questions, almost engaging in a perpetual interrogation of the system in which they serve. What capacities does this system have for vulnerability? What are the expectations these people have for the person of the pastor and how this pastor is presented in the pulpit?

Second, preachers begin to grow the context toward valuing vulnerability through lives in which the public and private communication matches. They begin developing a biblical value for vulnerability and weakness in private through conversations with other leaders.

Third, experiment with vulnerability in the pulpit. The adaptive capacity of the systemic church culture will develop with appropriate experiments.[304] For example, use one vulnerable illustration in a sermon in a manner the congregation may not expect.

Fourth, pastors must remain a calm presence in the midst of the anxiety that will arise on account of the experimentation engaged. The growing presence of

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[303] Ibid., 159.

[304] Linsky and Heifetz, *Leadership on the Line*, 13.

vulnerability represents change in the system and anxiety will result. The ability of the pastor to remain calm will directly correspond to the level of differentiation in the pastor's life.[305]

Finally, invite feedback and process the anxiety experienced.[306] Engaging in feedback may feel the most vulnerable of all for pastors. Not only are they being asked to expose themselves to the emotional risk of vulnerability, but being willing to talk about it with other key leaders may seem a bridge too far. However, feedback provides a necessary step for the system to grow. Feedback enables pastors to assess the rate of disequilibrium in the system as well as how far to press growth.

To summarize, pastors can develop their perceptions of the relationship between preaching and trust in their leadership by understanding what trust is, that is, the sense that the leader is seeking the best interests of others. As pastors preach, vulnerably exposing their own lives, congregations may be able to see their own challenges mirrored in pastors' lives. Such vulnerability contributes to trust, as long as these same congregations are able to perceive motives for their benefit rather than the pastors'. Second, the relationship between preaching and trust grows when pastors attend to the culture, or system, of the church. Preaching is one tool to shape the culture. A careful investment in the growth of the system is repaid by development of trust.

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[305] Friedman, *A Failure of Nerve*, 13–14.

[306] Gillespie and Mann, "Transformational Leadership and Shared Values: The Building Blocks of Trust," 591.

Discerning the Limits of Vulnerability

How exactly should pastors discern the limits of vulnerability in their sermons to build trust in their leadership? The researcher has found no hard and fast rules that apply in any and all circumstances. Such a design was beyond the scope of this study, which restricted itself to qualitative data in a sample established by purposive criteria involving geography and a theological system. However, principles emerged from the literature review and qualitative interviews that help guide pastors in making well-informed determinations as to the limits of vulnerability.

On the minds of many pastors will be the question of how far one should go in being vulnerable. None of the pastors interviewed provided rules always to be heeded. On the contrary, Timothy explicitly stated he had "no rules." In chapter four, the researcher utilized the metaphor of a windshield through which the pastors looked to guide their decisions on the question of limits of vulnerability. Outlined below are four principles to aid pastors in navigating the precarious depths of the limits of vulnerability.

First, whenever using vulnerability, pastors much clarify there is only one strong one—the Lord Jesus. There is only one hero. Resner cautioned against homiletical Donatism, a position wherein the efficacy of the preached word is dependent in some way upon the person of the preacher.[307] This dangerous position may be maintained whether pastors are heroes of their own stories (as Paul and John explicitly cautioned against) or always held up as broken and needy. It may

[307] Resner, *Preacher and Cross*, 62.

happen as pastors vulnerably express only stories that are resolved in ways in which they are victorious, as Luke cautioned. The unintended consequence is the communication that pastors and leaders are those who are strong enough to successfully resolve any and all challenges. Perhaps without knowing it, what emerges is a portrait of the victor, the strong one who prevails.

Much healthier, as Susan Durber proposes, is for pastors to expose their experiences of and with the Lord in such a way that congregations are able to connect with experiences beyond their own.[308] The experience of the preacher is not the point, neither is the preacher as a person the point. The critical element should be the connection to the same Lord who is at work both in the pastor and the people. Neither the pastor nor the accomplishment should be the focus to highlight; rather, the Lord's work must be set on display such that he is the strong one who comes to the aid of a weak people. Johnston proposed that listeners trust a pastor's message when they sense the messenger has nothing to gain through the influence of the listener.[309] The Lord's work must be the focus.

An easy strategy to point to the Lord's strength rather than any pastor's is to frequently use illustrations or applications in which the pastor places himself in a light of being in need of the rescuing power of God. In Brooks' view, highlighting the way some truth has worked in the life of the pastor, then giving that experience away to the congregation marks the skilled preacher.[310]

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[308] Susan Durber, "The Preacher's Inner Life," in *The Future of Preaching,* ed. Geoffrey Stevenson (Norwich, England: SCM Press, 2010), 179.

[309] Johnston, *Preaching to a Postmodern World*, 69.

The strategy can be taken too far, however, when pastors present themselves as so broken that congregations begin to wonder if the gospel has any power to transform. Such wallowing in brokenness indicates a pastor's ministry as mired in immaturity, Paul suggested. While wanting to highlight that pastors are just as needy and broken as the remainder of the congregation, they must be careful not to, in a counterintuitive way, make being the worst sinner into a badge of honor. This tendency, particularly among younger ministers, especially concerned Paul. Vulnerability is not a race to see who can make themselves appear the worst. That also seeks to exalt the pastor as the hero of vulnerable stories. The safest strategy is to communicate just enough detail such that congregations see pastors as being in need of the same grace they need. Then, taking the next step, the light must be shined upon the Christ who supplies the need. Christ is the hero, never the pastor.

Second, pastors may not be the best at determining limits of vulnerability for themselves. Thus said four of the six pastors interviewed. Sin patterns, wounds, and family of origin concerns may cloud pastors' view of their own liabilities in leadership. In other words, pastors must know themselves well enough to distrust their wisdom in this area. Through the counsel and wisdom of others who are invested in the pastor's life and system and trusted implicitly, any pastor can receive aid in determining the limits of vulnerability for their particular church system.

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[310] Brooks, *Lectures on Preaching, Delivered Before the Divinity School of Yale College in January and February, 1877*, 39.

In the literature, feedback to the leader provides just this sort of advice. Helpful feedback that comes from genuinely independent judgment[311] and is not afraid to "name the elephants in the room.[312]as Linsky and Heifetz suggest. It could be said that helpful feedback is not found in the minimizing of conflict, but rather in relationships in which discomfort is normalized.[313] Trusted relationships with a close few that form a core group of others before whom pastors can be completely honest and express their uncertainties offer the context for wisdom to prevail in discerning the limits of vulnerability.

Barnabas and Peter both reported having groups that provide counsel on sharing vulnerably. Each of these experienced pastors regularly asks for input on whether to share certain vulnerabilities and even how best to share them. Their groups include fellow elders and staff members in addition to their wives. While the make-up of the group is important, the critical element is its mere existence to provide, in Barnabas' words, "regular" and on-going counsel over just this sort of matter. Any pastor who seeks to preach vulnerably would be wise to seek out a small band of trusted fellow-servants to provide counsel and feedback as to the limits of vulnerability in their sermons. Very few pastors know themselves well enough to not need such outside advice.

Third, discerning limits of vulnerability is not only a factor of knowing self, but also of knowing the congregation well enough to know where to make them

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[311] Heifetz, Linsky, and Grashow, *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership*, 104.

[312] Ibid., 102.

[313] Brown, *Daring Greatly*, 198.

uncomfortable. Without purposing to do so, each of the six pastors interviewed spoke of vulnerability not in generalities, but with respect to their own contexts and their own systems in which they participate. The bounds of vulnerability are not discerned in general without recognition of a specific context and a particular group of people. Pastors do not need to master vulnerability in general. Rather, they need to learn to master vulnerability within their congregations in particular.

Why? Carol Rusaw's research suggested that trust-building rests on the leader's work of promoting a shared ethos and the willingness to trust followers, even when followers may not trust back.[314] This data suggests that leaders must know their systems well enough to understand what norms exist and exactly how they will go about altering them with intentionality. They must calculate how far ahead of the people they can afford to be and still develop a culture of trust without succumbing to the inevitable fears of some that the sky is falling. Also, as leaders set organizational norms, followers begin to experience those norms as the organizational climate.[315] Pastors need to do the difficult work of knowing their starting point so they can discern, with input from other leaders, how far to push and how fast to push. They must ask enough questions and be observant enough to learn the liabilities in the system and lovingly press it to grow and change. But the growth and change must begin somewhere. Locating that "somewhere" is a leadership task that, if done sensitively, can engender trust while at the same time leaving room for gentle pushing toward change.

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[314] Rusaw, "The Ethics of Leadership Trust," 564.

[315] Ibid., 561.

The fourth principle comes closer to a rule than any of the others because it so clearly is set forth as a rule for leadership in the Bible. In discerning the limits of vulnerability in sermons to build trust, the pastor must retain a laser-like focus on redemptive purpose. Each of the six pastors interviewed spoke at length of the critical nature of this principle. Perhaps the clearest expression from the interviews of redemptive purpose came from Barnabas, who asks: "Does [this vulnerable point] magnify Christ and deepen our grasp of the text, or does it magnify me and distract from the text?"

The concern for redemptive purpose elicits the sharpest concerns against vulnerability in sermons within the literature. Many fret over a loss of the gospel in favor of the preaching of a person's experience. This fear was expressed by Brooks who was concerned too much of the life of the pastor in the sermon will distract from the truth of the text,[316] and by Lloyd-Jones who feared obscuring the truth by "pandering" to the base curiosities of congregations.[317] And yet, Troeger graphicly stated, "No preacher can grab us by the entrails who is not in touch with his or her own fundamental humanity."[318]

The limits of vulnerable communication in the pulpit must not extend across this bright red line: the exaltation of Jesus. If detail is too vivid so as to become the point of the illustration rather than the Redeemer, then the line has been crossed. If the topic of the vulnerable communication is so controversial that it becomes the

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[316] Brooks, *Lectures on Preaching, Delivered Before the Divinity School of Yale College in January and February, 1877*, 120.

[317] Lloyd-Jones, *Preaching & Preachers*, 233.

[318] Troeger, "Emerging New Standards in the Evaluation of Effective Preaching.," 300.

point, then the line has been crossed. If the level of emotion in the story is so heightened that listeners are drawn to a person versus a Savior, then the line has been crossed. Neither the brokenness nor the triumph of the pastor is the point of the sermon; Jesus is. Yet, if honest and vulnerable communication offers hope in the Lord who is at work in the life of the preacher, and that work is the main point of the story, then vulnerability may bless the congregation. Here is the principle, the only one rising to the level of a rule, stated simply for preachers in the form of a diagnostic question: does this vulnerability exalt Jesus and his work, or does it exalt me?

Why is this principle so deeply connected to trust? We return once more to the definition of trust in a leader, the sense that the leader is concerned for the best interests of others. Pastors share a common bond of humanity with the congregation, both in brokenness and hope. The only hope of humanity is the work of Christ. When congregations experience Jesus exalted as the focus of vulnerable communication, they more readily trust that pastors are not seeking personal gain and influence. Vulnerable sermons that lead away from self and unto Jesus bless the souls of those who know their only hope lies in Jesus.

Recommendations for Further Research

The researcher genuinely hopes this study has begun to address, in a data-driven fashion, how vulnerability in sermons can build trust in pastoral leadership. However, this work is simply a beginning and is far from complete.

Additional quantitative research could test the conclusions found in this study. Specifically, further research could enlighten whether the conclusions are

limited geographically. The research subjects in this study were all from the southeastern United States. It would be helpful to determine the factors affecting vulnerability and trust in other regions of the United States. Further study could test for international implications.

Also, additional research could explore how personality affects the use of vulnerability in sermons. Studies of personality types of pastors as well as congregations would provide an interesting matrix to examine which pastoral types most easily use vulnerability. Further, it would be helpful to understand which personality type of congregation most readily receives vulnerable communication. This research could aid in pastoral search processes to find a proper match between congregation and leader.

The effect of the generational population within the church is yet another field for future research. One of the pastors interviewed made statements about how "the war generation" receives or rejects vulnerability. Additional research on the general biases across generations would prove fruitful in learning better to equip pastors to tailor their preaching style toward the primary generational populations within their churches or communities.

Another study could seek to understand from a congregation's perspective which revelations are most distressing. Are there categories of sin or weakness that should never be discussed? If one of those must be communicated, what are best practices for communicating such that the intended message can be heard versus simply the shock of a perceived taboo subject.

Along these same lines, research on how to train pastors to communicate with appropriate vulnerability would certainly benefit overall church health. To date, learning how to be appropriately vulnerable is left mostly to intuition and natural gifting on the part of the pastor. However, there surely are best practices to be employed, and strategies to communicate for connection with the congregation while not losing the theological truth intended. Along these same lines, exploring how experienced pastors changed their preaching to include vulnerability would be fruitful. This information could provide blueprints for how pastors could begin to preach vulnerably without unnecessarily distressing their congregations.

Finally, developing a model for how trust is built particular to church congregations would prove worthwhile. There are a multitude of resources on building organizational trust, yet, what uniqueness is there to building trust in a congregational community? Again, this information could better train pastors to step into potentially broken circumstances and lead effectively from the pulpit.

A Final Word

The use of vulnerability in sermons can be a great blessing for congregations and pastors alike. Through it, the power and work of Jesus is magnified, leaders are given the opportunity to express God's strength through their weakness, and congregations sense the normal struggles of the Christian life are part of the journey.

Discerning the limits of vulnerability to build trust in the pastor's leadership can be a difficult yet rewarding study. There is only one final rule: the magnification of Christ. All else reduces to sound and biblically informed judgment. Churches are

organizational systems just like any other institution and experience the stress of growth and change in similar fashion. There is one key distinction, however. Christ is lord of his church and his spirit indwells it. In summary, one of the interviewed pastors aptly summarized the challenge of preaching well with vulnerability; “It is more art than science,” he said.

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