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Covenant Theological Seminary

**A Qualitative Study Exploring How Senior Pastors Can
Deliberately Move the Congregation toward Systemic Gospel
Health**

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

By
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Saint Louis, Missouri

2016

A QUALITATIVE STUDY EXPLORING HOW SENIOR PASTORS CAN
DELIBERATELY MOVE THE CONGREGATION TOWARD
SYSTEMIC GOSPEL HEALTH

By

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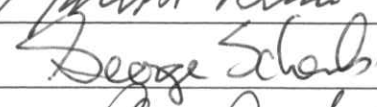

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED
TO THE FACULTY OF
COVENANT THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

Graduation Date MAY 13, 2016

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to explore how senior pastors can deliberately move the congregation toward systemic gospel health. The following research questions guided the study.

1. How do senior pastors describe systemic health?
2. What does the pastor believe to be some of the unique challenges that hinder systemic health?
3. How do senior pastors cultivate systemic health within their congregations?

The literature pertinent to the study's purpose was reviewed: biblical and theological material that relates to a congregation's systemic nature and how the scriptures define congregational gospel health; change theory as it relates to organizations; systems theory and its critical concepts that shape a system's health; and the leader's role in the system. In every area of the literature review, leadership literature and biblical texts were integrated to support and defend the principles surrounding congregational health.

In order to explore how senior pastors can deliberately move the congregation towards systemic gospel health, the case study approach was used. The researcher interviewed two senior pastors of two different churches as well as their spouse, staff, and lay leaders. These interviews gave data about the similarities between each senior pastor's actions to move the congregation toward gospel health. The researcher then compared those actions with what the literature said about leading systemic change, focusing on the transferable skills and practices the senior pastors demonstrated during the change process.

Both senior leaders articulated four skills that the literature supported. First, the pastors emphasized the importance of personal growth and growth within their marriages. Pursuing gospel health within their lives and within their marriages allowed the pastors to lead the congregation toward systemic gospel health. Second, both leaders discussed how learning to think systemically about the congregation and their relationship within it gave them clarity and discernment in their leadership. Third, both pastors had a working knowledge of the critical aspects of change theory. Finally, both the literature and interviews focused upon the importance of having at least one co-laborer in the work of change. A co-laborer partners with the senior leader to help a congregation move to a healthier place. This kind of systemic change is not simply technical in nature, but it is adaptive.¹ The research clearly emphasizes that adaptive change cannot be done alone. Adaptive change is a team sport.

¹ Linsky and Heifetz, *Leadership on the Line*, 13.

To Stephanie

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Acknowledgments

In 2006 my family and I moved to Roanoke, VA to participate in God establishing a new church. By his grace, we were up and running quickly and by late 2007 had become an “official” church in our denomination. Within months following that celebration I found myself in a leadership challenge greater than any I had experienced. As I reached out to some of my closest friends they began recommending books and articles on the topics of gospel health, organizational change and family systems theory. The next 7 years was a journey of learning and self-discovery. In the midst of that time, two great friends encouraged me to participate in a D.Min cohort on the topic of congregational leadership. I had no idea what I was getting into. This project is the end result of my attempt to understand how to more effectively and fruitfully lead and serve a local congregation. I am grateful for Bob Burns and George Schenk for all their encouragement. This would have never been completed with you both. I owe my D.Min. cohort an eternal debt of gratitude. You men helped me think more deeply about these topics and my own soul. Back in Roanoke, Dr. Pete Schemm was a source of constant encouragement. Thank you for helping me complete this work.

I am grateful for my editor Elizabeth Hart. Thank you for your patients as you took what was in my head and made it understandable.

Over the course of this project I have had two employers that have given me the freedom to work on this project and they have encouraged my work. Thank you, especially Gary Campbell, Mark Melendez and the rest of the RBI staff.

To my children, “Dad is finally done!” Thank you for allowing me to spend so many nights and weekends on this project. I pray the Lord enables me to transfer some of

what I have learned into our home in order that you may benefit from what I have learned. Each of you is teaching me so much about the beauty of Christ and I cannot imagine life without you. I love you immensely and look forward to enjoying more time with you.

Finally, I want to thank my wife Stefanie. The past 25 years are not at all what I expected and I am grateful. Thank you for taking on so many additional duties in our home in order to enable me to complete this project. Thank you for being my primary conversation partner, the one who picked me up when I was weary and discouraged and the one who has walked this road with me. I would not be the man I am today without you. I look forward to the years ahead as we grow closer to one another. This project was, in part, an attempt to learn how to be a better husband to you and father to our children. I pray that, if the Lord gives us another 25 years, you will reap the benefits of this project most. I love you and love being your husband

Chapter One

Introduction

In Genesis 1 God gives Adam, and the entire human race through him, the first great commission. Genesis 1:28 reads, “And God blessed them. And God said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth, and subdue it and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.’”² This commission quickly unravels with the entrance of sin into God’s creation. After the fall of humanity, God reveals that he has put a plan in motion to redeem and restore his creation: sending of his son, Christ Jesus, rescuing his people, and reestablishing humanity’s commission over his creation.

Theologians Bryan Chapell, D. A. Carson, and Timothy Keller equate God’s rescue plan with the gospel in their pamphlet, “What is the Gospel?” Chapell, et. al. state that the gospel is “the message that God has fulfilled his promise to send a Savior to rescue broken people, restore creation’s glory, and rule over all [creation] with compassion and justice.”³ At the end of Christ’s earthly ministry, God once again gives his people a commission. However, this commission must begin with exercising dominion over spiritual forces in the cosmos. Matthew 28:18-20 explains,

And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy

² Gen. 1:28.

³ Bryan Chapell, D. A. Carson, and Timothy Keller, *What Is the Gospel?* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011), 7.

Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”⁴

This great commission calls the church to invite men, women and children into right relationship with God and his creation through faith in the person and work of Christ. This mission that the church has been called to pursue raises several questions. First, “Is the church pursuing this mission?” Much has been written on this topic and there are as many opinions as there are authors. In light of the continuing witness of the church to the person and work of Jesus since he walked through Judea and Galilee, it is safe to make the claim that since the time of Jesus’ resurrection there has been some part of the church seeking to embrace the great commission as her calling. An example of this in the twenty-first century is the Presbyterian Church of America (PCA), which seeks to be a denomination that is, “faithful to the Scriptures, true to the reformed faith, and obedient to the Great Commission.” The Acts 29 network, “a movement of church-planting churches,”⁵ states that their mission is to, “plant new churches and replant dead and dying churches around the world. This work is done in obedience to the great commission (Matt. 28:18-20), with the goal of seeing millions of lives changed by the power of the good news of Jesus Christ.”⁶ From these two examples, it is clear that there are some churches and denominations that are stating a desire to pursue this mission in the present.

⁴ Matt. 28:18-20.

⁵ “What We Are,” Acts29.org, accessed August 12, 2016, <http://www.acts29network.org/about/>.

⁶ “What We Want to Be Known For,” Acts29.org, accessed August 12, 2016, <http://www.acts29network.org/about/>.

The second question is, “If the church is seeking to pursue the great commission, how well is she doing?” This second question is much harder to answer because it is evaluative in nature. Before answering this question, one must define what “doing it well” means. It requires defining success, something that is extremely difficult to do in the social sector. Superficially, corporations can easily measure success if the corporation is producing a high quality product at a fair market price while making a profit.

According to Webster, success is the ability, “to attain a desired object or end.” The goal of business is to provide quality services to customers at a sustainable cost. However, in *Good to Great*, Jim Collins encourages his readers to pursue greatness rather than success. He writes, “Good is the enemy of great...the vast majority of companies never become great, precisely because the vast majority become quite good – and that is their main problem.”⁷ It would seem like with an institution like the church, things are a bit more complicated, though Jim Collins rejects that notion. He writes,

I don’t primarily think of my work as about the study of business, nor do I see this as fundamentally a business book. Rather, I see my work as being about discovering what creates enduring great organizations...that good is the enemy of great is not just a business problem. It is a human problem...Good churches might become great churches.⁸

Collins believes that the church must resist the idea, “that the primary path to greatness in the social sectors is to become more like a business.”⁹ Sadly, too often churches use business criteria to measure their effectiveness and identify success. An early leader of the church growth movement, C. Peter Wagner, defined church growth as,

⁷ Jim Collins, *Good to Great: Why Some Companies Make the Leap... and Others Don’t*, 1st ed. (New York: HarperBusiness, 2001), 1.

⁸ Ibid., 16.

⁹ Ibid., 1.

“All that is involved in bringing men and women who do not have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ into fellowship with Him and into responsible church membership.”¹⁰

This definition has received criticism noting that though,

The Church Growth Movement takes its marching orders from Matthew 28:19...the problem lies in the way the Church Growth Movement tends to equate discipleship with church membership...a shift in emphasis from creating faith to creating church members. With this shift...comes a corresponding shift in means to accomplish the goal. Now the primary question is no longer: What is needed to bring this person out of darkness into light?...Instead the question is: What can we do to make our church – its buildings and grounds, its people, its worship, its programs – as attractive as possible so as to bring more people in?¹¹

This thinking has led pastor and theologian J. I. Packer to write,

I have found that churches, pastors, seminaries, and parachurch agencies throughout North America are mostly playing the numbers game – that is, defining success in terms of numbers of heads counted or added to those that were there before. Church-growth theorists, evangelists, pastors, missionaries, news reporters, and others all speak as if (1) numerical increase is what matters most; (2) numerical increase will surely come if our techniques and procedures are right; (3) numerical increase validates ministries as nothing else does; (4) numerical increase must be everyone’s main goal.¹²

As a result, individual churches feel successful if the church is producing a good quality product, by which they mean a quality ministry program, at a fair price, which typically means free or inexpensive programs that are carried out and directed by free or low paid laborers. According to *The Christian Index*, “Southern Baptists have historically

¹⁰ Elmer L. Towns, “The Relationship of Church Growth and Systematic Theology,” *JETS* 29, no. 1 (March 1986): 63.

¹¹ David J. Valleskey, “The Church Growth Movement: An Evaluation,” *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* 88, no. 2 (1991): 83.

¹² Justin Taylor, “Packer: Too Many Churches in North America Are Playing the Number Game,” thegospelcoalition.org, July 16, 2013, accessed August 4, 2014, <http://thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/justintaylor/2013/07/16/packer-too-many-churches-in-north-america-are-playing-the-number-game/>.

defined success by how many members a church has today and how many more it will have tomorrow.”¹³ In short, churches are measuring success based upon increased attendance and higher giving numbers. But is that how success should be measured in the church or outside of it for that matter?

Kevin Ezell of the Southern Baptist Convention North American Mission Board says, “Success (of a church) cannot be defined based on how many people a church keeps (or attracts)...we must help (churches) redefine success.”¹⁴ What is redefined success? Is there a more robust way to think about success or can it really be reduced to giving dollars and attendance numbers? Or, as Joe LaGuardia says more crassly, “Three Big B’s: butts-in-pews, budgets and buildings.”¹⁵ While recognizing that metrics have a part to play in helping access some aspects of ministry, is this preoccupation with numbers and metrics hindering the church from fulfilling her true calling? René Padilla, Argentinean evangelist, observes that the church in North America is “far from being a factor for the transformation of society, it has become merely another reflection of society and (what is worse) another instrument that society uses to condition people to its materialistic values.”¹⁶ Could a fresh definition of success enable the church to become healthier and more effective? Is there a better way? Pastor and author Pete Scazzero

¹³ Joe Westbury, “NAMB Calls for New Definition of Church Success,” [christianindex.org](http://www.christianindex.org/9333.article), accessed January 23, 2016, <http://www.christianindex.org/9333.article>.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Karen Rohr, “JOE LAGUARDIA: Church Success Measured by Each Member's Relationship with God,” www.rockdalecitizen.com, March 12, 2014, accessed August 4, 2014, <http://www.rockdalecitizen.com/news/2014/mar/13/joe-laguardia-church-success-measured-by-each/>.

¹⁶ C. Rene Padilla, *Mission between the Times: Essays on the Kingdom* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1985), 55.

states, “The sad truth is that too little difference exists...between God’s people inside the church and those outside who claim no relationship to Jesus Christ...The church is to be known, above all else, as a community that radically and powerfully loves others. Sadly, this is not generally our reputation.”¹⁷

What if the church moved from seeking success as defined by business and set out to pursue greatness in the areas unique to her mission? What if the church sought to be faithful to the great commission Jesus gave to his disciples in a way that is life-giving for those inside, as well as outside, the church? What if the church replaced success with health that is life giving? What if the church pursued health as the gospel measure of success?

Problem Statement

Many churches measure success or fruitfulness based on the impact a church has for the advancement of God’s kingdom, and they measure impact through church new members and new baptisms.¹⁸ This emphasis on the number of baptisms has led to creative ways to generate more.¹⁹ Though baptism is central to any individual’s journey of faith in Christ, it is not the full story. Wagner identified three marks of a disciple of Jesus:²⁰ A disciple is a person who has come to believe in Jesus Christ. A disciple

¹⁷ Peter Scazzero, *The Emotionally Healthy Church: A Strategy for Discipleship That Actually Changes Lives*, expanded and updated ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010), 18.

¹⁸ One of the critiques of the Church Growth Movement is that they equate baptism with membership.

¹⁹ Sarah Pulliam Bailey, “Megachurch Pastor Steven Furtick’s ‘Spontaneous Baptisms’ Not so Spontaneous,” *Religion News Service*, February 24, 2014, accessed February 4, 2015, <http://www.religionnews.com/2014/02/24/megachurch-pastor-steven-furticks-spontaneous-baptisms-spontaneous/>.

²⁰ Valleskey, “The Church Growth Movement: An Evaluation,” 10-11.

pursues obedience. A disciple exercises “responsible church membership.”²¹ This model presents health in terms of numerical growth and activity.

Critics of Wagner’s teaching say this model creates busy church members. Scazzero, in contrast, defines success in terms of faithfulness. According to Scazzero, “Almost everyone is busy...we are overscheduled, tense, frantic, preoccupied, fatigued, and starved for time...we were bred to be that way. Activism is the key explanation for how evangelicals came to dominate the English-speaking world from 1850 to 1900.”²² This has led to books like Tim Chester’s, *The Busy Christian’s Guide to Busyness*, and Kevin DeYoung’s book, *Crazy Busy*. In *Crazy Busy*, seminary professor and pastor DeYoung writes, “don’t ignore the physical danger of busyness. Just remember the most serious threats are spiritual. When we are crazy busy, we put our souls at risk.”²³ In Thom Rainer and Eric Geiger’s *Simple Church*, they argue that churches can fill their calendars with activities, producing busy members but not necessarily faithful followers of Christ.²⁴ This emphasis on activity leads to a church culture of busyness. Pastor and author, Tim Keller, sums up this tension in *Center Church*, writing,

Many say that if your church is growing in conversions, members, and giving, your ministry is effective. This view of the ministry is on the rise because the expressive individualism of modern culture has deeply eroded

²¹ It is not the scope of this study to explore the confusion of justification and sanctification on this point. By turning obedience into a part of faith, rather than a fruit of faith, this teaching makes faith a work in the act of the justification of sinners.

²² Peter Scazzero, *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality: Unleash A Revolution In Your Life in Christ* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2006), 48.

²³ Kevin DeYoung, *Crazy Busy: A (Mercifully) Short Book about a (Really) Big Problem* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013), 26.

²⁴ Thom Rainer and Eric Geiger, *Simple Church* (Nashville: B&H Publishing, 2011), 41-43. In Chapter Two, they compare and contrast a “simple” church and an older church with multiple programs.

loyalty to institutions and communities. Individuals are now “spiritual consumers”...In reaction to this emphasis on quantifiable success, many have countered that the only true criterion...is faithfulness. All that matters in this view is...[being] sound in doctrine, godly in character...But the “faithful – not successful” backlash is an oversimplification...a more biblical theme for...evaluation than either success or faithfulness is fruitfulness.

The church growth movement has made many lasting contributions to our practice of ministry. But its overemphasis on technique and results can put too much pressure on ministers because it under-emphasizes the importance of godly character and the sovereignty of God. Those who claim that “what is required is faithfulness” are largely right, but this mind-set can take too much pressure off church leaders. It does not lead them to ask hard questions when faithful ministries bear little fruit. When fruitfulness is our criterion for evaluation, we are held accountable but not crushed by the expectation that a certain number of lives will be changed dramatically under our ministry.²⁵

Keller’s comments that fruitfulness becomes a sign or mark of health.

Beyond individual members bearing fruit, is it possible to develop fruitful church members while the church culture is not supportive of ministry that is faithful to the great commission? Pastoral counselor and author Ronald W. Richardson observes, “When people talk about particular churches, they often ask, ‘What kind of church is it?’ This question recognizes that each church takes on a particular personality over the years.”²⁶ This concept of church personality has led seminary professor Dr. Philip Douglass to write, *What is your Church’s Personality?* Douglass states, “Churches are different...your church’s personality is not the list of values published by your denomination...your church has an identity – a set of values, beliefs, norms – that shapes

²⁵ Timothy Keller, *Center Church: Doing Balanced, Gospel-Centered Ministry in Your City* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), 13.

²⁶ Ronald W. Richardson, *Creating a Healthier Church: Family Systems Theory, Leadership and Congregational Life* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), 27.

its practices and behavior like a mold shapes plaster.”²⁷ Douglass reflects the importance of organizational systems theory as it pertains to churches.

The idea that a church has a corporate personality or identity implies that a church is an emotional system. In an emotional system, every member is connected to one another. Richardson describes an emotional system as a “delicately balanced mobile. Any movement by any one part of the mobile, toward or away from the center of gravity, affects the balance of the whole mobile.”²⁸ Systems thinking is “a school of thought that focuses on recognizing the interconnections between the parts of a system and synthesizing them in a unified view of the whole.”²⁹ Systems theory teaches that the group as a whole, subsystems, and individual members play a critical part in enabling a system to be moving towards health or harm. Richardson writes,

Within the church system are a variety of other systems and subsystems. Some of these include the cultural, the structural (who has what offices and performs what jobs), communication, decision-making, and economic systems. Each of these is relatively obvious, rational, and easy to talk about and change, if necessary...it is the emotional system that is the most difficult to detect and to understand, let alone to try to change. The emotional system is one of the most powerful forces in any church or in any group of human beings.³⁰

Richardson aptly communicates how any discussion of congregational health must include systems theory that explores the complex system and subsystems that shape congregational health.

²⁷ Philip D. Douglass, *What Is Your Church's Personality? Discovering and Developing the Ministry Style of Your Church* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2008), 4.

²⁸ Richardson, *Creating a Healthier Church*, 30.

²⁹ Daniel H. Kim, *Introduction to Systems Thinking* (Encino, CA: Pegasus Communications, 1999), 19.

³⁰ Richardson, *Creating a Healthier Church*, 29.

Thinking about the congregation as an emotional system helps explain why the leader's conduct can have such a powerful effect on the congregation. In *Primal Leadership: Learning to lead with Emotional Intelligence*, Daniel Goleman writes, "When people feel good, they work at their best. Feeling good lubricates mental efficiency, making people better at understanding information...the ability of a leader to pitch a group into an enthusiastic, cooperative mood can determine its success."³¹ Goleman posits that true, deep success involves creating a culture of harmony or resonance between individuals within the organization as a whole and the broader community in which they live. This type of success leads to the flourishing of individuals as well as the flourishing of whole systems.

Over and over again, Scripture testifies to this relationship between the individual and the system. Redemptive history is filled with stories of individual change, or transformation, while the institutions within which those individuals dwell crumbles around them. Take for example the history of the Northern Kingdom of Israel during the life of Elijah. In 1 Kings 18 and 19 is the remarkable story of God using Elijah to defeat the false prophets of Baal. On the heels of that great victory, Elijah flees from Queen Jezebel and cries out to God in despair, "I have been very jealous for the Lord...the people of Israel have forsaken your covenant...and I, even I only, am left, and they seek my life, to take it away."³² The Lord comforts Elijah with his presence and the promise that God has left seven thousand in Israel who will remain faithful. Elijah is encouraged and emboldened to continue to serve the Lord, and God uses him for great spiritual

³¹ Daniel Goleman, Richard E. Boyatzis, and Annie McKee, *Primal Leadership: Learning to Lead with Emotional Intelligence* (Boston: Harvard Business Press, 2004), 14.

³² 1 Kings 19:10, 14.

purposes. Yet, the consequence is the collapse of the institution of the priesthood, and ultimately the nation.

There are other examples in redemptive history which capture seasons of flourishing, which are marked by both individual as well as institutional change. An excellent example of this can be found in Nehemiah. Upon completion of the Jerusalem wall, the priest Ezra read the law of God to the people. The corporate response was one of grief and mourning for their unbelief at which point Nehemiah urges them to return to the Lord. In Nehemiah 9-10, the entire community makes a covenant with the Lord to “walk in God’s Law that was given by Moses the servant of God, and to observe and do all the commandments of the LORD our Lord and his rules and his statutes.”³³ The people and the community flourished once again for a season. In addition to Nehemiah, a study of the good kings through the history of Israel in 1 & 2 Kings and 1 & 2 Chronicles proves the same point. During their reign, as individual leaders grew healthier there was institutional change that took place. What can these examples teach us about the leader and his relationship to the system? What lessons can leaders learn today?

In *The Leadership Challenge*, Kouzes and Posner report their findings from surveying over seventy-five thousand people around the globe. They asked individuals which qualities they “most look for in a leader, someone whose direction they would *willingly* follow.”³⁴ Kouzes and Posner found that people flourish when they know where they are going as well as why they are going there. Indeed, two of the five practices they

³³ Neh. 10:29b.

³⁴ James M. Kouzes and Barry Z. Posner, *The Leadership Challenge*, 4th ed. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2008), 28-29.

identified in exemplary leaders are, “inspire a shared vision”³⁵ and “enable others to act.”³⁶ When people are either unclear of where they are going or the destination continues to move, people lose the confidence necessary for flourishing. People also need to see the way modeled for them by someone else.³⁷

Jesus and the apostles provide such a model. In the gospels, Jesus invites his disciples to “follow me.”³⁸ In the New Testament, the Apostle Paul encouraged his young disciple and church leader Timothy by saying, “Follow the pattern of the sound words that you have heard from me.”³⁹ Christ taught Paul and Paul taught Timothy the power of modeling the way. Christ intends his church to follow his model. Kouzes and Posner likewise argue that for a system to move toward health, the leadership must model the way individually.

In *The Spiritual Formation of Leaders*, Chuck Miller writes, “when Jesus was shaping the leaders of the early church, he wanted the tapestry of their lives and ministries to reflect the solid integration of communion with God, community with one another, and commissioning to live in the world.”⁴⁰ As a result of humanity’s fall, this movement towards health will be resisted by death, decay, and disease. In Genesis 2, God cautioned Adam and Eve that disobedience to his command would lead to death. After

³⁵ Ibid., 14.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid., 14-16.

³⁸ Matt. 4:19; 8:22; 9:9; 10:38; 16:24; 19:21; Mark 1:17; 2:14; 8:34; 10:21; Luke 5:27; 9:23; 18:22; John 1:43; 10:27; 12:26; 13:36; 21:19, 22.

³⁹ 1 Tim. 1:13.

⁴⁰ Chuck Miller, *The Spiritual Formation of Leaders* (Maitland, FL: Xulon Press, 2007), 7.

the fall, God expanded the specific consequences of their disobedience to include relational difficulties and decay in the broader creation. As a result, work is filled with both fruitfulness and frustration. In Genesis 3, God summarizes these consequences as the curse. If the gospel undoes the curse, then part of the gospel must move individuals and communities towards health. Paul writes that effort is required to move towards health and on-going change is a natural part of the process. In 1 Corinthians 3:18 Paul writes, "we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another."⁴¹ Movement and change is all consuming and life altering. Elsewhere, Paul calls his readers to "work out their salvation with fear and trembling."⁴² In Romans 6–7, Paul writes that this work will be a fight and will require conscious and concerted action. In his first letter to Timothy he writes, "Fight the good fight of the faith."⁴³ For this reason, movement towards health must be a deliberate process.

In order for the church to move towards health, the leaders must equip the church to embrace change. Miller notes, "I am convinced a key to effective leadership is our personal, intimate, ongoing, and ever deepening relationship with God...[it is] a lifelong journey with God, a journey that offers answers to...questions about spiritual growth and about leadership."⁴⁴ In *Primal Leadership*, Goleman writes:

⁴¹ 1 Cor. 3:18.

⁴² Phil. 2:12.

⁴³ 1 Tim. 6:12.

⁴⁴ Miller, *The Spiritual Formation of Leaders*, 11.

[Organizational] change begins when emotionally intelligent leaders actively question the emotional reality and the cultural norms underlying the group's daily activities and behavior. To create resonance - and results - the leader has to pay attention to the hidden dimensions: people's emotions, the undercurrents of the emotional reality in the organization, and the culture that holds it all together.⁴⁵

Goleman, therefore, measures success with more than what can be presented in simple numbers. However, simply embracing change will not necessarily lead to healthy churches.

Systemic health involves growth and development in the life of the leaders as well as the system. In Kent and Barbara Hughes, *Liberating Ministry from the Success Syndrome*, they identify seven aspects to success, which focus more on health than numbers: faithfulness, service, love, belief, prayer, holiness, and attitude. They redefined success as a congregation that seeks to be fruitful, remains faithful, and possesses a posture of humble dependence upon God's mercy through deep communion with him. This deep communion leads the members to loving service as they are equipped to exercise their gifts, regardless of the "results," in an effort to serve in the world and God's Kingdom.⁴⁶

Purpose Statement

What is systemic gospel health? What value is there in seeking to create systemic gospel health in churches and not just individual followers of Christ? As already noted, Ed Stetzer, director of the Nehemiah Project of the North American Mission Board writes

⁴⁵ Goleman, et. al., *Primal Leadership*, 195.

⁴⁶ R. Kent Hughes and Barbara Hughes, *Liberating Ministry from the Success Syndrome* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008), 106-107.

that an average of 3,500-4,000 churches close each year in North America.⁴⁷ Is it possible to identify several principles, which, if practiced by senior leaders, could result in churches that possess greater gospel health? Could this health result in fewer church closures and greater gospel transformation throughout the culture? Could these principles transfer across ethnic and socio-economic lines? Across theological lines? Senior leaders or pastors have a great deal of influence and power within their local congregation, and their actions shape the entire congregation for good or ill. If senior leaders fail to recognize the scope of their power and influence, they could lead the church into extinction without a conscious thought. On the other hand, if senior pastors are aware of some principles, that would help aid their in moving an entire congregation towards systemic gospel health, stemming the church closure tide. Instead, churches would be marked by faithfulness, humility, compassion, and service. The purpose of this study is to explore how senior pastors can deliberately move the congregation toward systemic gospel health. The following research questions guided the study.

4. How do senior pastors describe systemic health?
5. What does the pastor believe to be some of the unique challenges that hinder systemic health?
6. How do senior pastors cultivate systemic health within their congregations?

⁴⁷ Ed Stetzer, *Planting New Churches in a Postmodern Age* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2003), 10.

Significance of the Study

Though the numbers are hard to verify, “it is clear that conditions of ministry have changed in the past few decades and that too many local church ministers leave as a result.”⁴⁸ In 1998 in a Focus on the Family Newsletter, James Dobson wrote,

More than 40 percent of pastors and 47 percent of their spouses report that they are suffering from **burnout**, frantic schedules and unrealistic expectations. We estimate that approximately 1,500 pastors leave their assignments each month, due to moral failure, spiritual **burnout** or contention within their local congregations.⁴⁹

For pastors who find themselves discouraged by challenges of congregational systems which are resistant to change, what if they had a resource to help them move themselves and their congregations towards systemic gospel health? A resource based on the experience of senior leaders who deliberately brought about systemic change and negotiated the process without burning out or bailing out could guide younger pastors facing similar challenges.

According to David Olson at the American Church Research Project, the number of churches being planted is one fifth of what is needed to keep up with population growth. For example, the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA) has lost ground in comparison with population growth. As of 2013, there are 1494 established churches and 314 mission works in the PCA. In addition, from 2009-2013, the PCA had on average established 21 churches per year and closed the doors of 7. Over the same five-year

⁴⁸ Dean R. Hoge and Jacqueline E. Wenger, *Pastors in Transition: Why Clergy Leave Local Church Ministry* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2005), xi.

⁴⁹ James Dobson, “Our Guest,” [standingstonementors.org](http://www.standingstonementors.org), 1998, accessed February 9, 2015, <http://www.standingstonementors.org/ourguest.htm>.

period, total membership increased by 20,625 or roughly 5.95 percent.⁵⁰ It is difficult to determine exactly how many PCA churches have either had no change in membership or declined over the past five years. If the principles from this study were taught as part of pastoral training and church planter training, the next generation of church leaders could be equipped with tools to develop healthier and more fruitful churches in the denomination.

Imagine providing churches and church leaders with insights that enabled 15 congregations, new and old, to experience greater gospel health. Health that could potentially reduce the number of church closures and increase the number of new congregations planted each year. Each year, if only twenty newly ordained ministers came to think of success in terms of gospel health, then they could possibly transform twenty congregations and thousands of individual lives. By the year 2050, the American population will have grown to 522 million, over twice what it was in 1990. If the PCA alone saw 15 churches renewed each year for the next 35 years, there would be 525 more healthy congregations. These congregations would measure health as cultivating a deep faith in Christ among their congregants individually and corporately, rather than being preoccupied with numbers. As a result, tens of thousands of individuals could be encouraged to pursue individual gospel health while being involved in systems that are modeling the very gospel health they are preaching. This could lead to the development of healthier systems within the whole denomination. It could lead to healthier homes, healthier communities, and a healthier culture. In addition, hundreds of thousands more dollars could be given for work in God's kingdom, and tens of millions would approach

⁵⁰ Presbyterian Church in America, *PCA Yearbook* (Lawrenceville, GA: Committee on Discipleship Ministries, 2013), 740, accessed February 9, 2015, <http://www.pcacdm.org/pca-yearbook/>.

their vocation as a kingdom calling with hundreds of thousands pursuing ministerial vocations.

Definition of Terms

Systemic Gospel Health – Gospel health can be defined as a culture of humble dependence upon God’s mercy in which everyone is encouraged and equipped to exercise their gifts for the advancement of God’s kingdom. In doing so, the community embraces at least four commitments. The first is a commitment to learning and growing as a community, giving everyone the freedom to fail and change. The second is to respect one another and growing as a community of givers. The third is a commitment to honest and open communication. Finally, yet not least important, is fiscal responsibility.

Senior Pastor – Those ordained church staff members responsible for leading the church, the staff, and the elders. They have the primary responsibility of preaching and teaching, training leaders as well as casting and implementing the vision for the church.

PCA – This is the abbreviation for the Presbyterian denomination founded in 1973 known as The Presbyterian Church in America.

Chapter Two

Literature Review

The purpose of this study was to explore how senior pastors can deliberately move their congregations toward systemic gospel health. The following chapter reviews literature pertinent to the study's purpose, and begins by exploring what the scriptures teach about a congregation's systemic nature and how the scriptures define congregational gospel health. A study of change theory as it relates to organizations follows. In this section, a definition of organizational change will be given and the senior leader's role in organizational change will be explored. The final area of literature reviews the topic of systems theory. In this section, systems theory will be defined; some of the critical concepts that shape a system's health like anxiety, differentiation, and power dynamics will be explored; and the leader's role in the system will be discussed. In every area of this literature review, leadership literature and biblical texts will be integrated to support and defend the principles surrounding congregational health.

Biblical and Theological Literature

The gospel can be defined as, "the message that God has fulfilled his promise to send a Savior to rescue broken people, restore creation's glory, and rule over all [creation] with compassion and justice."⁵¹ This restoration is a process which is global and personal. The scriptures recount how—through Christ—this great story of rescue, restoration, and reign unfolds. In, *The Institutes of Christian Religion*, Calvin writes,

This restoration does not take place in one moment or one day or one year; but through continual and sometimes even slow advances God wipes out

⁵¹ Chapell, et. al., *What Is the Gospel?* 7.

in his elect the corruptions of the flesh, cleanses them of guilt, consecrates them to himself as temples renewing all their minds to true purity that they may practice repentance throughout their lives and know that this warfare will end only at death...The closer any man comes to the likeness of God, the more the image of God shines in him.⁵²

The idea of coming closer to the likeness of God is called theosis, and God's people have sought theosis since their formation. The fourth-century church father, Athanasius, wrote that the Son of God became man, "that he might deify us in himself."⁵³ In his treatise, *On the Incarnation*, Athanasius states that Christ, "was made man that we might be made God."⁵⁴ Theosis is also described as, "deification, divinization or, as some prefer, participation in God."⁵⁵

In Jesus' day, rabbis and leaders sought to become more like God. From their reading of the Old Testament, they sought to be like God by submitting to his commands, but confusion arose about how to obey correctly. In an effort to accomplish this, rabbinic teachers and other pharisees added their own instructions in an effort to help the Jewish people "become like God."⁵⁶ During his life and ministry, Jesus encountered seminary professors, theological scholars, and prominent rabbis who asked him what he believed was the most important commandment. Though the pharisees attempted to trap Jesus using this question, the answer was important. Jesus responded by saying, the question

⁵² John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. F.L. Battles, ed. John T. McNeill (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1960), 3.

⁵³ Alexander Roberts, ed., *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Second Series (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Pub., 1996), 4:575-578.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Robert Rakeshaw, "Becoming Like God: An Evangelical Doctrine of Theosis," *JETS* 40, no., 2 (June 1997): 257.

⁵⁶ "Judaism 101: A List of the 613 Mitzvot (Commandments)," accessed February 13, 2015, <http://www.jewfaq.org/613.htm>.

was relevant. Jesus answered, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And the second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”⁵⁷ Jesus posits that when an individual experiences the rescue of the savior, they will seek to love God, neighbor, and themselves wholeheartedly.

On the night one of Jesus’ disciples betrayed him, and the remaining eleven abandoned him Jesus was teaching the disciples. Before his betrayal and abandonment he told the disciples, “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another.”⁵⁸ Christians still debate, what is new about this commandment? Jesus already rooted his summary of the law in loving neighbor as self. What makes this commandment “new”? Simply to love is not what is new, but to love one another “as Christ loved them” is what makes the statement unique. How was Christ’s love different? Chuck Miller writes, “Jesus expects us to love with the same selfless attitude and in the same sacrificial manner in which He has loved us. Jesus loved us not just in words but also through His actions. And that’s why the gospels help us learn to love.”⁵⁹

In light of the definition of the gospel stated previously, Jesus is the savior who has come in fulfillment of God’s promise to rescue, restore, and rule with compassion and justice. Jesus is calling his disciples to a love that is sacrificial, restorative, and redemptive. Commenting on Jesus’ new commandment, Miller states,

⁵⁷ Matt. 22:37-39.

⁵⁸ John 13:34.

⁵⁹ Miller, *The Spiritual Formation of Leaders*, 87.

The Christian life...is an ongoing relationship of deepening intimacy with Jesus Christ. The Christ life is more of a who than a what. And followers of Christ live the healthy Christian lifestyle when they take on the passions and priorities of Jesus Christ: an ongoing commitment to Jesus Christ, ongoing commitment to the body of Christ, and ongoing commitment to the work of Christ in the world. Now it's one thing to say that these priorities matter to us; it's quite another to let them shape our schedule and define each of us as a person.⁶⁰

In order to “take on the passions and priorities of Jesus Christ,” individuals must surrender their own passions and priorities to Jesus Christ. This surrender demands a deep humility. Therefore, any definition of gospel health must begin with an understanding of what humble dependence upon God’s mercy looks like. In *Mere Christianity*, C. S. Lewis describes true humility as being others focused. He wrote,

Do not imagine that if you meet a really humble man he will be what most people call “humble” nowadays: he will not be a sort of greasy, smarmy person, who is always telling you that, of course, he is nobody. Probably all you will think about him is that he seemed a cheerful, intelligent chap who took a real interest in what you said to him...He will not be thinking about humility: he will not be thinking about himself at all.⁶¹

A culture of humble dependence moves individuals away from focusing on themselves and toward becoming others focused. In Philippians 2, Paul invites the church to “do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves.”⁶² Paul goes on to explain how gospel humility is thinking of oneself less, not thinking less of oneself. Paul reminds his readers that the source of this gospel humility is,

Yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by

⁶⁰ Ibid., 92.

⁶¹ C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, paperback edition (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 2001), 114.

⁶² Phil. 2:3.

taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.⁶³

By doing this, people use their gifts for the advancement of God’s kingdom. Pastor and author Pete Scazzero writes,

The world practices a “power over” strategy characterized by dominance and win-lose competitiveness, Jesus taught a “power under” strategy characterized by humility and sacrificial service. In the world, says Jesus, leaders throw their weight around, “[but it is] not so with you... Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant” (Mark 10:42-43). While Jesus is the invisible God who holds all things together – Almighty, eternal, immortal, and infinite – he became human, temporal, mortal, and finite. Jesus demonstrated his power not by force or control, but by choosing to come under us, humbly washing feet and dying for our sins. He carefully stewarded his power: “[Christ Jesus,] who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant” (Philippians 2:6-7).⁶⁴

A healthy gospel culture promotes the kind of humble dependence that has certain qualities and characteristics. These characteristics include a humble dependence upon God’s mercy, a desire to learn and grow, a respect for every individual’s unique place in God’s economy, freedom to fail and change, a commitment to honest and open communication, and a commitment to fiscal responsibility. The following pages examine each part of this definition of healthy gospel culture, looking at how scripture informs an understanding of each phrase.

⁶³ Phil. 2:6-8.

⁶⁴ Peter Scazzero, *The Emotionally Healthy Leader: How Transforming Your Inner Life Will Deeply Transform Your Church, Team, and the World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2015), 253.

Humble Dependence upon God's Mercy

After spending two and a half chapters making the case that every human being—man, woman, child, Jew, Greek, rich, or poor—is guilty before God's justice seat; Paul writes, "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith...Then what becomes of our boasting? It is excluded."⁶⁵ In this brief passage, humble dependence upon God's mercy is clearly set before the reader as the greatest human need. Humanity is dependent upon God's mercy because in the state of sin, humanity would not have sought out God, "for all have sinned." God's mercy declares that all who are redeemed are justified by grace or unmerited favor. God's mercy to his people culminates in the obedient life and sacrificial death of Jesus Christ as their "propitiation," by which people, "are restored into fellowship and favor with [God]."⁶⁶

The call of God to humble dependence upon his mercy is one of the primary themes in scripture. In Genesis 3, God's mercy is seen as he proclaims the hope of the gospel amid the curses. God declares to the serpent, "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head and you shall bruise his heel."⁶⁷ Theologians call this promise the proto-evangelium, or first proclamation of the gospel, for it casts a long shadow over the entire Bible. It foreshadows the cosmic battle raging between Satan. and God and his people. It whispers

⁶⁵ Rom. 3:23-25, 27.

⁶⁶ R. C. Sproul, *The Truth of the Cross* (Lake Mary, FL: Reformation Trust Publishing, 2007), 128.

⁶⁷ Gen. 3:15.

of Christ's ultimate death and resurrection. Amid the curse, Adam demonstrates his humble dependence upon God's mercy in this moment. For though Adam was warned not to eat of the fruit of the tree, lest he die, God preserved his life. Then, Adam, in an act of humble dependence, names his wife Eve, "the mother of the living."⁶⁸

Noah's life displays the same humble dependence. Once he built the ark, Noah fully depended upon God to finish the preparations. From gathering the animals to the last act waiting for God to "shut Noah in."⁶⁹ Biblical examples abound: Abraham and the covenant God made with him in Genesis 15. Jacob's transformed life of dependence upon the mercy of God after wrestling with God at Penial in Genesis 32. Dan Allender observes, "After wrestling all night with God and gaining a limp that was obvious to all, Jacob in many ways became a different person. His story shows that God intends to wrestle with each of us in order to both bless us and cause us to walk and lead with a distinctive frailty."⁷⁰ This event left Jacob with a visible reminder of his dependence upon God's mercy—a lifelong limp.

Perhaps the greatest demonstration of this dependence is seen in God delivering the people of Israel from the Egyptians in the Exodus. In Deuteronomy 7, God, or Yahweh, makes the following declaration,

For you are a people holy to the LORD your God. The LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for his treasured possession, out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth. It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the LORD set his love on you and chose you, for you were the fewest of all peoples, but it is because the

⁶⁸ Gen. 3:20.

⁶⁹ Gen. 7:16.

⁷⁰ Dan B. Allender, *Leading with a Limp: Take Full Advantage of Your Most Powerful Weakness* (Colorado Springs, CO: WaterBrook Press, 2008), 45-46.

LORD loves you and is keeping the oath that he swore to your fathers, that the LORD has brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt. Know therefore that the LORD your God is God, the faithful God who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments, to a thousand generations, and repays to their face those who hate him, by destroying them. He will not be slack with one who hates him. He will repay him to his face. You shall therefore be careful to do the commandment and the statutes and the rules that I command you today.⁷¹

Author and speaker, John Ortberg captures the heart of humble dependence this way,

Your soul is a needy man, a needy woman. Thomas Aquinas wrote that this neediness of the soul is a pointer to God. We are limited in virtually every way: in our intelligence, our strength, our energy, our morality. There is only one area where we human beings are unlimited...we always want more: more time, more wisdom, more beauty...This is the soul crying out. We never have enough. The truth is, the soul's infinite capacity to desire is the mirror image of God's infinite capacity to give...the soul must orbit around something other than itself – something it can worship. It is the nature of the soul to need...our soul begins to grow in God when we acknowledge our basic neediness...the unlimited neediness of the soul matches the unlimited grace of God.⁷²

Renowned pastor, Eugene Peterson points out, “Disciple (mathetes) says we are people who spend our lives apprenticed to our master, Jesus Christ. We are in a growing-learning relationship, always. A disciple is a learner, but not in the academic setting of a schoolroom, rather at the work site of a craftsman. We do not acquire information about God but skills in faith.”⁷³

Gospel humility is rooted in God's mercy which is demonstrated most powerfully in the person and work of Christ. Growth in this direction is bound to how one

⁷¹ Deut. 7:6-11.

⁷² John Ortberg, *Soul Keeping: Caring For the Most Important Part of You*, 1st edition (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2014), 82.

⁷³ Eugene H. Peterson, *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction: Discipleship in an Instant Society*, 2nd edition (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 17.

understands their relationship to Jesus. Jesus makes this point in Luke 17. There, the disciples have asked Jesus to increase their faith. After commenting on the power of the smallest faith, Jesus says,

Will any one of you who has a servant plowing or keeping sheep say to him when he has come in from the field, “Come at once and recline at table”? Will he not rather say to him, “Prepare supper for me, and dress properly, and serve me while I eat and drink, and afterward you will eat and drink”? Does he thank the servant because he did what was commanded? So you also, when you have done all that you were commanded, say, “We are unworthy servants; we have only done what was our duty.”⁷⁴

Any spiritual growth Jesus’ disciple experience is connected to how they understand their relationship with him and their role in that relationship. This posture of humble dependence upon God’s mercy should mark people who trust in Christ Jesus as they experience spiritual growth. This humble dependence upon God’s mercy includes more than simply a matter of gaining more knowledge or information. Humble dependence must be lived. In Calvin’s *Institutes*, he declares,

Doctrine is not an affair of the tongue, but of the life; is not apprehended by the intellect and memory merely, like other branches of learning; but is received only when it possesses the whole soul, and finds its seat and habitation in the inmost recesses of the heart. Let them, therefore, either cease to insult God, by boasting that they are what they are not, or let them show themselves not unworthy disciples of their divine Master. To doctrine in which our religion is contained we have given the first place, since by it our salvation commences; but it must be transfused into the breast, and pass into the conduct, and so transform us into itself, as not to prove unfruitful.⁷⁵

According to Calvin, true gospel health is marked by humble dependence upon God’s mercy which involves an individual’s whole being.

⁷⁴ Luke 17:7-10.

⁷⁵ Calvin, *Institutes*, Chapter 6.

When disciples grow in humanity, this maturity effects every aspect of their humanity. Humanity can be spoken of as one's intellect, emotions, and behavior. Or, more simply the head, the heart, and the will.⁷⁶ The authors of the Westminster Confession Faith describe it this way in Chapter 14, paragraph 2, "On Saving Faith."

II. By this faith, a Christian believes to be true whatsoever is revealed in the Word, for the authority of God Himself speaking therein; and acts differently upon that which each particular passage thereof contains; yielding obedience to the commands, trembling at the threatenings, and embracing the promises of God for this life, and that which is to come. But the principal acts of saving faith are accepting, receiving, and resting upon Christ alone for justification, sanctification, and eternal life, by virtue of the covenant of grace.⁷⁷

Saving faith engages the heart through "accepting, receiving and resting;" it engages the head as the disciple "believes to be true whatsoever is revealed in the Word;" it transforms the will as the disciple "acts differently upon that which each particular passage contains." The Westminster divines describe heart, head, and will as the necessary parts of true and saving faith. Therefore, robust and holistic faith includes all three.

Many negative views surround the issue of the role human emotions play in the life of an individual. However, as seminary professors Bob Burns, Tasha Chapman, and Donald Guthrie explain, "Over the last thirty years, theologians and Christian counselors have acknowledged the role of emotions as a critical, God-given aspect of our

⁷⁶ David Clyde Jones, *Biblical Christian Ethics*, 1st edition (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1994), 13.

⁷⁷ The Orthodox Presbyterian Church, *The Westminster Confession of Faith and Catechisms As Adopted By the Presbyterian Church in America with Proofs Texts* (Lawrenceville, GA: Christian Education & Publications, 2007), 62–63. Chapter 14 on Saving Faith has three paragraphs. Paragraph one talks about the "grace of faith" and that it comes from hearing or reading the Scriptures. Paragraph three discusses the reality that faith is different in "degree" from one person to another but through Christ will ultimately come to full assurance.

personhood, which is made in the image of God.”⁷⁸ A positive view of the emotional realm of humanity can also be found in the work of B. B. Warfield’s article “On the Emotional Life of Our Lord,” in John Frame’s *The Doctrine of God*, in Peter Scazzerro’s *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality*, and in Wayne Grudem’s *Systematic Theology*. Frame states, “God, speaking in Scripture, regularly expresses emotion and appeals to the emotions of his hearers.”⁷⁹ Wayne Grudem writes, “In the area of emotions, our likeness to God is seen in a large difference in degree and complexity of emotions.”⁸⁰ Scazzerro writes, “Emotional health and spiritual maturity are inseparable.”⁸¹ In light of this history, more attention will be given to address the role emotions play in a biblical view of maturity and growth. A shorter examination of the other two aspects, the head and the will, follows.

The Heart

In James 4, the apostle asks, “What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this that your passions are at war within you?”⁸² In Mark 7, Jesus similarly declares, “What comes out of a person is what defiles him. For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts.”⁸³ James and Jesus identify how human behavior flows out of the heart. The heart is understood as the seat of human emotions, and the emotional

⁷⁸ Bob Burns, Tasha Chapman, and Donald C. Guthrie, *Resilient Ministry: What Pastors Told Us About Surviving and Thriving* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2013), 103.

⁷⁹ John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of God* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2002), 611.

⁸⁰ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994), 447.

⁸¹ Scazzerro, *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality*, 12.

⁸² James 4:1.

⁸³ Mark 7:20-21.

life is a central aspect to humanity. God's mercy and propitiation both address emotional aspects of God. In B. B. Warfield's "The Emotional Life of our Lord," he writes, "It belongs to the truth of our Lord's humanity, that he was subject to all sinless human emotions. In the accounts which the Evangelists give us of the crowded activities which filled the few years of his ministry, the play of a great variety of emotions is depicted."⁸⁴

The doctrine of God's impassibility captures the idea that God himself has emotions. J. I. Packer describes the doctrine, saying,

Not impassivity, unconcern, and impersonal detachment in the face of creation; not insensitivity and indifference to the distresses of a fallen world; not inability or unwillingness to empathize with human pain and grief; but simply that God's experiences do not come upon him as ours come upon us, for his are foreknown, willed and chosen by himself, and are not involuntary surprises forced on him from outside, apart from his own decision, in the way that ours regularly are.⁸⁵

This doctrine was designed to capture the deep emotional aspect of God. Brian Mattson says this doctrine was intended, "to ensure that God's emotions are viewed in ways compatible with who God really is: the sovereign creator and sustainer of all things. Ironically, a God who is not transcendent, free, and in control, who only reacts begrudgingly or unwillingly to human events."⁸⁶ Being created in God's image means having a robust emotional life. To learn and grow in a holistic way means one's emotions are engaged, mature, and move towards greater health.

⁸⁴ B. B. Warfield, "The Emotional Life of Our Lord," accessed August 8, 2014, <http://www.monergism.com/thethreshold/articles/onsite/emotionallife.html>.

⁸⁵ Peter T. O'Brien and D. G. Peterson, eds., *God Who Is Rich in Mercy* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1986), 17.

⁸⁶ Ken Sande, "Emotion in Christian Anthropology," *rw360.org*, August 18, 2013, accessed August 8, 2014, <http://www.rw360.org/2013/08/18/emotion-in-christian-anthropology/>.

The importance of the emotional life is found throughout church history. John Chrysostom, the 5th century preacher and archbishop of Constantinople, wrote, “Find the door of your heart, you will discover it is the door of the kingdom of God.”⁸⁷ Learning how to engage the emotional aspect of one’s humanity has recently received more attention from authors like Scazzerro and Ken Sande. Scazzerro describes the state of the church in America, saying,

Most of us, in our more honest moments, will admit there are deep layers beneath our day-to-day awareness...[In looking at an iceberg] only about 10 percent of an iceberg is visible to the eye. This 10 percent represents the visible changes we make that others can see. We are nicer people, more respectful. We attend church and participate regularly. We “clean up our lives” somewhat – from alcohol and drugs to foul language to illicit behavior and beyond. We begin to pray and share Christ with others. But the roots of who we are continue unaffected and unmoved.⁸⁸

Scazzerro paints an alternative picture to this “surface” spirituality: a community of people who begin to wrestle with the iceberg below the surface. He says,

In emotionally healthy churches, people take a deep, hard look inside their hearts, asking, “What is going on that Jesus Christ is trying to change?” They understand that a person’s life is like an iceberg, with the vast majority of who we are lying deep beneath the surface. They invite God to bring to their awareness and to transform those beneath-the-surface layers that hinder them from becoming more like Jesus Christ.⁸⁹

Regrettably, as Scazzerro writes, “The problem is that we can’t reflect and respond thoughtfully to our feelings if we don’t know what they are.”⁹⁰ Developing gospel health requires individuals, as well as the community, to be in tune with their emotional state.

⁸⁷ Scazzerro, *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality*, 80.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 17.

⁸⁹ Scazzerro, *The Emotionally Healthy Church*, 69.

⁹⁰ Scazzerro, *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality*, 71.

Ken Sande, founder of Peacemakers Ministry, began a new ministry called Relational Wisdom 360, which seeks to help churches, “prevent conflict by building healthy relationships.”⁹¹ He defines relational wisdom as the “ability to discern emotions, interests, motives, and abilities in yourself and others, to interpret them in the light of God’s Word, and to use these insights to manage your responses and relationships constructively...The gospel provides the motive, pattern and power for relational wisdom.”⁹²

Building on the tri-perspectival relationships found in Matthew 22:36-39, Sande sees people’s emotional life being lived out in relationship to God, others, and self. As followers of Christ experience the transforming love of Christ in their own life, they are able to love others. Evangelical Christians would say that a healthy Christian is one who loves God and others. A love for others that leads to their flourishing and becoming more human. The summary statement that Jesus gives the rabbinic scholars of his day has been the foundation for Christian ethics for centuries.⁹³ In it, Jesus captures the heart and soul of the Old Testament and paints a picture of gospel health that involves relationships with God, self, and others.

This command assumes that God made human beings for relationships and that how they engage in relationships is the most important aspect of who they are. In Christian theology, the idea that humanity was built for relationship flows from the conviction that humanity has been created in God’s image. In light of the doctrine of the

⁹¹ Ken Sande, “Meet Ken Sande,” rw360.org, accessed August 20, 2014, <http://www.rw360.org/meet-ken-sande/>.

⁹² Ken Sande, “Discover- Relational Wisdom,” rw360.org, accessed August 5, 2014, <http://www.rw360.org/discover-rw/>.

⁹³ Jones, *Biblical Christian Ethics*, 43.

trinity, being relational is central to God's character and nature. When the Apostle Paul invites his readers to, "be imitators of God, as beloved children,"⁹⁴ he is calling every believer to grow more relationally sanctified. In his commentary on the Sermon on the Mount, John Stott writes,

The three examples of "religious" righteousness which Jesus gives [in Matthew 6:1-18]—almsgiving, praying and fasting—occur in some form in every religion. They are prominent, for example, in the Koran. Certainly Jews were expected to give to the poor, to pray and to fast, and all devout Jews did so.... This trio of religious obligations expresses in some degree our duty to God, to others and to ourselves. For to give alms is to seek to serve our neighbor, especially the needy. To pray is to seek God's face and to acknowledge our dependence on him. To fast (that is, to abstain from food for spiritual reasons) is intended at least partly as a way to deny and so to discipline oneself.⁹⁵

The three aspects to an individual's relational orientation include their relationship with God, with self, and with others. Two aspects of this relational model, relationship to self and others, is found in Bradberry and Greaves' book, *Emotional Intelligence 2.0*. They state that people's emotional life can be broken down into four areas; self-awareness, self-management, social-awareness and relational management.⁹⁶ Ken Sande expanded these four categories in an effort to foster a more biblical understanding of emotional intelligence. He identifies the six areas as; self-aware, self-engaging, others-aware, others-engaging and adds, God-aware and God-engaging.⁹⁷ By self, Sande refers to the

⁹⁴ Eph. 5:1.

⁹⁵ John Stott, *The Message of the Sermon on the Mount* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1985), 127.

⁹⁶ Travis Bradberry, Jean Greaves, and Patrick M. Lencioni, *Emotional Intelligence 2.0* (n.p.: TalentSmart, 2009), 24.

⁹⁷ Ken Sande, "Discover Relational Wisdom| Ken Sande," rw360.org, accessed June 2, 2016, <http://rw360.org/discover-rw/>.

soul. In pastor and writer, John Ortberg, makes the helpful distinction between the self and the soul in *Soul Keeping*, saying,

The soul is the capacity to integrate all the parts into a single, whole life...the soul seeks harmony, connection, and integration. That is why *integrity* is such a deep soul-word...your soul is what integrates your will (intentions), your mind (your thoughts and feelings, your values and conscience), and your body (your face, body language, and actions) into a single life...psychology has focused on the self, and self carries a totally different connotation than soul. To focus on my soul means to look at my life under the care and connection of God. To focus on myself apart from God means losing awareness of what matters most.⁹⁸

Philosopher Dallas Willard describes the soul this way,

Our soul is like a stream of water, which gives strength, direction, and harmony to every other area of our life. When that stream is as it should be, we are constantly refreshed and exuberant in all we do, because our soul itself is then profusely rooted in the vastness of God and his kingdom, including nature; and all else within us is enlivened and directed by that stream. Therefore we are in harmony with God, reality, and the rest of human nature and nature at large.⁹⁹

The heart plays a central role in gospel health, and a holistic understanding of gospel health involves the heart.

The Head

Psalm 119 answers the question, “How can a young man keep his way pure?”¹⁰⁰ by saying to guard it, “according to your word.”¹⁰¹ The process of growth requires the engagement of the mind. As with all education, the mind must be engaged and exercised if the student intends to grow in knowledge and learning. This principle can be seen throughout the scriptures. One such text is found in Deuteronomy 6:4-9. Jesus uses this

⁹⁸ Ortberg, *Soul Keeping*, 43.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 15.

¹⁰⁰ Ps. 119:9.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*

text to answer the question, “What is the great commandment?”¹⁰² given him by the Pharisees in Matthew 22.¹⁰³ Deuteronomy 6 is known as the Shemah, after the first Hebrew word of the text, which in English reads, “Hear, O Israel.” Verse 7 states, “You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise.”¹⁰⁴ Training the mind is central to equipping the next generation of disciples.

In the book of Acts, the Bereans in Asia Minor are praised for “examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so.”¹⁰⁵ This examination involved their cognitive faculties. There is near universal agreement among Christians that mental assent is essential to faith. The promotion and establishment of Bible schools and seminaries evidence the high value Christians place on the intellect in growing a mature faith. Growth involves deeper understanding of spiritual truths and requires an engaged mind. The role of the mind is reinforced through what the will does with the acquired knowledge. Taking the acquired information about God and using it in an effort towards faithful obedience.¹⁰⁶

The Will

The third aspect of humanity that is involved in spiritual growth is the will. In Genesis 1, God commands Adam and Eve to be fruitful, to subdue the earth, to exercise

¹⁰² Matt. 22:36.

¹⁰³ Matt. 22:37-39, “And he said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.”

¹⁰⁴ Deut. 6:7.

¹⁰⁵ Acts 17:11.

¹⁰⁶ Peterson, *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction*, 17.

dominion over creation. This is the role of the will: the capacity to make choices, to act. Willard describes the will, saying, “The will is what makes you a person and not a thing...the will is very central, but it’s also incredibly limited...it is very bad at trying to override habits and patterns and attitudes that are deeply rooted in us.”¹⁰⁷

It is through the will that human beings carry out what has been learned. For example, when people drive a car, they have some knowledge (mind) of how the automobile works. In their travels, if they approach a traffic light and the light turns red what should happen? The person should recognize that a red light means stop (mind); they should have an emotional response of obey the law (heart); and as a result, they should place their foot on the brake (will).

The integration of head, heart, and will is called wisdom, and Proverbs is an excellent place to see how these three work in harmony to produce growth. In Proverbs, maturity is identified as being wise. Seminary professor and author, Dr. Jack Collins writes that wisdom is the, “skill in godly living, with a mind and heart in tune with God’s values and feelings. You might call it ‘the skill of making choices in the light of God’s value system,’ or more simply, ‘skill in the art of godly living.’ [Note carefully: It’s not just intellectual, and it’s not just practical: it’s both together.]”¹⁰⁸

Proverbs 1 states,

The proverbs of Solomon, son of David, king of Israel:
To know wisdom and instruction,
to understand words of insight,
to receive instruction in wise dealing,
in righteousness, justice, and equity;

¹⁰⁷ Ortberg, *Soul Keeping*, 41.

¹⁰⁸ C. John Collins, *A Study Guide for Psalms and Wisdom Literature* (study notes, Covenant Theological Seminary, St. Louis, 1996), 76.

to give prudence to the simple,
 knowledge and discretion to the youth—
 Let the wise hear and increase in learning,
 and the one who understands obtain guidance,
 to understand a proverb and a saying,
 the words of the wise and their riddles.
 The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge;
 fools despise wisdom and instruction.¹⁰⁹

In chapter two, the author goes on to say,

My son, if you receive my words
 and treasure up my commandments with you,
 making your ear attentive to wisdom
 and inclining your heart to understanding;
 yes, if you call out for insight
 and raise your voice for understanding,
 if you seek it like silver
 and search for it as for hidden treasures,
 then you will understand the fear of the LORD
 and find the knowledge of God.¹¹⁰

These passages highlight how exercising one's gifts for the advancement of God's kingdom requires the engagement of the whole person: head, heart, and will. Wisdom, then, is the foundation of gospel health in the church. Wisdom leads to individuals and communities who recognize that growth and learning are necessary in order to experience greater measures of gospel health, both individually and corporately.

Learning and Growing

In 2 Corinthians 3, Paul writes, “And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.”¹¹¹ This text implies that being

¹⁰⁹ Prov. 1:1-7.

¹¹⁰ Prov. 2:1-5.

¹¹¹ 2 Cor. 3:18.

made holy, or sanctified, is a process. Theologian and author Anthony Hoekema says it this way, “sanctification is that gracious operation of the Holy Spirit, involving our responsible participation, by which God delivers us as justified sinners from the pollution of sin, renews our entire nature according to the image of god, and enables us to live lives that are pleasing to Him.”¹¹²

The Greek word that Paul uses for, “being transformed” is the same word from which the English word “metamorphous” comes. Followers of Christ are experiencing metamorphosis as they become like Christ. This does not—and will not—happen overnight. John Bunyan describes the metamorphosis as a journey in *Pilgrim’s Progress* and as a battle in, *The Holy War*. Becoming like Christ is a process of learning and growing.

A scene in C. S. Lewis’ “The Great Divorce” illustrates this metamorphosis as a man getting rid of his lust and then being transformed. His lust is portrayed as a red lizard on his shoulder. The lizard whips his tail about and whispers in the man’s ear. Finally, one of the angels accompanying him rips the lizard from the man’s shoulder, and Lewis writes,

The Burning One (an angel) closed his crimson grip on the reptile: twisted it, while it bit and writhed, and then flung it, broken backed, on the turf. For a moment I could make out nothing distinctly. Then I saw, between me and the nearest bush, unmistakably solid but growing every moment more solid, the upper arm and the shoulder of a man. Then, brighter still and stronger, the legs and hands. The neck and golden head materialized while I watched, I saw the actual completing of a man—an immense man, naked, not much smaller than the Angel.¹¹³

Lewis goes on to explain what happened to the lizard.

¹¹² Anthony A. Hoekema, *Saved by Grace* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994), 192.

¹¹³ C. S. Lewis, *The Great Divorce*, revised ed. (San Francisco: HarperOne, 2015), 106.

At first I thought the operation (on the lizard) had failed. So far from dying, the creature was still struggling and even growing bigger as it struggled. And as it grew it changed... Suddenly I started back, rubbing my eyes. What stood before me was the greatest stallion I have ever seen, silvery white but with mane and tail of gold. At each stamp the land shook and the trees shuttered.¹¹⁴

The narrator asks his teacher what lesson is to be learned from this and is told, “You must ask, if the risen body even of an appetite (lust) is as grand a horse as you saw, what would the risen body of ... love be?”¹¹⁵ Being transformed is a process of change that requires growth and learning. It doesn’t happen in an instant but gradually over time.

Learning and growing is what make up the core of change. In Michael Fullan’s book *The Six Secrets of Change* he says that change is really about learning. He writes that, “Learning is the work” when talking about change. He goes onto to state, “Having a learning culture and the capacity to operate effectively is much more important to organizational success than having the right strategy... whatever is taught must be steeped in learning through reflective action.”¹¹⁶ Yeshudi Menuhin, considered the greatest violist of the 20th century famously said, “The difference between a beginner and the master – is that the master practices a whole lot more.”¹¹⁷ In *Leading with a Limp*, Dan Allender speaks of this learning process from the teacher’s perspective. He states, “It is the hope of

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Michael Fullan, *The Six Secrets of Change: What the Best Leaders Do to Help Their Organizations Survive and Thrive* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2011), 89.

¹¹⁷ Ronald A. Heifetz, Marty Linsky, and Alexander Grashow, *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership: Tools and Tactics for Changing Your Organization and the World* (Boston: Harvard Business Press, 2009), 44.

every good teacher to have students who take their work further than the teacher was able to do. To be surpassed is the ideal. To be replaced is the goal, not a sign of failure.”¹¹⁸

In John 15, Jesus describes this learning process in terms of growth, similar to a branch that depends upon the vine. He said,

I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. Every branch of mine that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit...Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.¹¹⁹

This “abiding” could also be called humble dependence and is seen in the life of Jesus’ disciples. At the end of the Apostle Paul’s life, he writes in 1 Timothy 1 that he considers himself the “foremost” sinner.¹²⁰ Earlier in his ministry, Paul called himself the “least of the apostles.”¹²¹ Ortberg reflects upon Paul’s humility, saying, “Paul was so vividly aware of his own sins that he could not conceive that anybody could be worse.”¹²² In Paul’s life, there was a growing awareness of his dependence upon God’s mercy. Commenting on this text, John Stott writes, “Paul is not saying he did a careful study of every sinner in human history and found out he came in last place. The truth is, rather,

¹¹⁸ Allender, *Leading with a Limp*, 22.

¹¹⁹ John 15:1-5.

¹²⁰ 1 Tim. 1:15-16.

¹²¹ 1 Cor. 15:9.

¹²² Ortberg, *Soul Keeping*, 72.

when we are convicted by the Holy Spirit, an immediate result is we give up all such comparisons.”¹²³

This downward progression exemplifies what humble dependence upon God’s mercy produces in the life of a believer. Other scholars expound upon this biblical truth, noting the importance of humility in leadership. Allender writes, “to the degree you attempt to hide or dissemble your weaknesses, the more you will need to control those you lead, the more insecure you will become, and the more rigidity you will impose – prompting the ultimate departure of your best people.”¹²⁴ For the one who is seeking to grow in gospel health, learning and growth are necessities. In *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership*, Heifetz and Linsky write, “think of your life as a...laboratory. In that laboratory, you are continuously facing opportunities for learning how to be more effective in living a meaningful existence, and for making more progress on life’s deepest purposes and leading meaningful change.”¹²⁵

Repeatedly in the Bible, Christian development is spoken of as moving from infancy to maturity. In 1 Corinthians 3, Paul tells the church that he, “fed you milk, not solid food, for you were not ready for it. And even now you are not yet ready, for you are still of the flesh. For while there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not of the flesh and behaving only in a human way?”¹²⁶ It was not a problem that the Corinthians were once on milk. An infant, whether physical or spiritual, needs milk for a season. To give

¹²³ John R. W. Stott, *Guard the Truth: The Message of 1 Timothy & Titus* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 53.

¹²⁴ Allender, *Leading with a Limp*, 3.

¹²⁵ Heifetz, et. al., *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership*, 43-44.

¹²⁶ 1 Cor. 3:2-3.

infants anything else but milk would harm them. However, to remain on milk exposes a developmental problem in the child. Growth and learning leads disciples to change and mature. For this reason, a gospel healthy church is committed to learning and growing. It must be a mark of a community moving towards greater gospel health. So too, a respect for each individual's unique role in God's kingdom work.

Respect of Every Individual's Unique Place in God's Economy

In 1 Corinthians, the Apostle Paul proclaimed, "men ought to regard us as servants of Christ and as those entrusted with the secret things of God. Now it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful."¹²⁷ What does it mean to be faithful? In examining the scriptures, it becomes apparent there are at least two aspects to faithfulness. The first is a knowledge of God's word. Faithfulness flows from a knowledge of God's special revelation of himself, the scriptures. Knowledge of God's word is essential to any definition of faithfulness but insufficient on its own. As Paul Tripp writes, "Bad things happen when maturity is more defined by knowing than it is by being...when the gospel of Jesus Christ gets reduced to a series of theological ideas coupled with all the skills necessary to access those ideas."¹²⁸ Knowledge is necessary but insufficient to capture all that faithfulness encompasses. The second aspect of a biblical definition of faithfulness relates to acting upon what one knows. Dennis Okholm and Kathleen Norris note,

Souls are not mass-produced...Each Christian disciple has specific needs, potential, temperament, intelligence, and gifts. And the leader of a spiritual community must employ wisdom, patience, good humor,

¹²⁷ 1 Cor. 4:1-2.

¹²⁸ Paul David Tripp, *Dangerous Calling: Confronting the Unique Challenges of Pastoral Ministry* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 42.

imagination, and a host of other qualifications and skills in assisting each one under his or her charge toward spiritual maturity.¹²⁹

Faithfully exercising their gifts means people apply their knowledge for the advancement of God's kingdom. Knowledge and active application go together. Any definition of faithfulness that lacks either is inadequate. As B. B. Warfield once wrote, "Recruiting officers do not dispute whether it is better for soldiers to have a right leg or a left leg: soldiers should have both legs."¹³⁰

The idea that gospel health involves the equipping of people to exercise their gifts is found in multiple places in scripture: the building of the temple in 1 Chronicles 21-27, the rebuilding of Jerusalem in Nehemiah, and in the early church in Acts 2. In each of these passages the people work together, respecting each individual's unique role in the work. Different people will have different degrees of knowledge, with differing degrees of giftedness and fruitfulness, requiring mutual respect.

Mutual Respect

Ephesians 4 helpfully describes what the Bible teaches on encouraging and equipping individuals to exercise their gifts. Paul writes,

[Christ] gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ,¹³¹

¹²⁹ Dennis Okholm and Kathleen Norris, *Monk Habits for Everyday People: Benedictine Spirituality for Protestants* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2007), 64.

¹³⁰ Benjamin B. Warfield, *The Religious Life of the Theological Student* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 1983), 1-2.

¹³¹ Eph. 4:11-13.

In this text, Paul identifies multiple roles and gifts, each with its unique contribution to the church's work. He states that maturity into the fullness of Christ is contingent upon people fulfilling their role and calling.

In 1 Corinthians 12, Paul uses the image of the human body to describe the nature of the church. Paul is not suggesting the church should attempt to become like a body, but rather that it is a body. He writes,

For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit. For the body does not consist of one member but of many. If the foot should say, “Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,” that would not make it any less a part of the body. And if the ear should say, “Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,” that would not make it any less a part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would be the sense of hearing? If the whole body were an ear, where would be the sense of smell? But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. If all were a single member, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, yet one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, “I have no need of you,” nor again the head to the feet, “I have no need of you.” On the contrary, the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and on those parts of the body that we think less honorable we bestow the greater honor, and our unpresentable parts are treated with greater modesty, which our more presentable parts do not require. But God has so composed the body, giving greater honor to the part that lacked it, that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together.¹³²

In verse 26, Paul emphasizes that whatever one part of the body experiences, the whole body experiences. Gospel health, therefore, includes deep respect for every part of Christ's body and a desire to help every part find its place in God's economy. In speaking of this capacity in church leaders, Chuck Miller writes, “God the Father as loving Creator impacts my leadership lifestyle by affecting how I value, care for, and live in God's

¹³² 1 Cor. 12:12-26.

creation – including the people He has lovingly crafted in His image and then entrusted to my care.”¹³³

Free to Fail and Change

In order for metamorphosis to take place, individuals must attempt faithfulness. Not every attempt at faithfulness will lead to success. Many times it will result in failing to achieve the goal. In 2 Corinthians, Paul recounts pleading with the Lord to remove an affliction. The Lord responds, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.”¹³⁴ Then Paul adds, “Therefore, I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong.”¹³⁵ In order for people to learn and exercise gifts, an individual and community must be willing to try and fail. This gospel principle—that God’s power is made perfect in weakness—is difficult for many followers of Christ to embrace.

In *Leading with a Limp*, Dan Allender explores this vulnerability from a leader’s perspective, writing, “to the degree you face and name and deal with your failures as a leader, to that same extent you will create an environment conducive to growing and retaining productive and committed colleagues.”¹³⁶ In *The Leadership Challenge*, James Kouzes and Barry Posner found that the best leaders were those who were learners.

They observe,

¹³³ Miller, *The Spiritual Formation of Leaders*, 107.

¹³⁴ 2 Cor. 12:9.

¹³⁵ 2 Cor. 12:9-10.

¹³⁶ Allender, *Leading with a Limp*, 2.

Life is the leader's laboratory, and exemplary leaders use it to conduct as many experiments as possible. Try, fail, learn. Try, fail, learn. Try, fail, learn. That's the leader's mantra. Leaders are learners. They learn from their failures as well as their successes, and they make it possible for others to do the same.¹³⁷

In *Daring Greatly*, sociologist and professor Brene Brown states that those who live “wholehearted” lives are those who let go of what others think of them, let go of perfection, and are willing to try and fail.¹³⁸ She writes,

Wholehearted living is about engaging in our lives from a place of worthiness. It means cultivating the courage, compassion, and connection to wake up in the morning and think, *No matter what gets done and how much is left undone, I am enough*. It's going to bed at night thinking, *Yes, I am imperfect and vulnerable and sometimes afraid, but that doesn't change the truth that I am also brave and worthy of love and belonging*.¹³⁹

Richard Foster picks up on the theme of vulnerability when he writes, “The desperate need today is not for a greater number of intelligent people or gifted people, but for deep people.”¹⁴⁰ Depth comes through taking risks, failing, and trying again. In order for growth and learning to truly take place, a church must have a culture where the members are free to fail while avoiding the promotion of a culture of failure.

Honest and Open Communication

James, Jesus' brother, writes,

For we all stumble in many ways. And if anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able also to bridle his whole body. If we put bits into the mouths of horses so that they obey us, we guide their whole bodies as well. Look at the ships also: though they are so large and are

¹³⁷ Kouzes and Posner, *The Leadership Challenge*, 20.

¹³⁸ Brene Brown, *Daring Greatly: How the Courage to Be Vulnerable Transforms the Way We Live, Love, Parent, and Lead* (New York: Gotham, 2012), 9.

¹³⁹ Ibid., 10.

¹⁴⁰ Richard J. Foster, *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth*, 3rd edition (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2002), 1.

driven by strong winds, they are guided by a very small rudder wherever the will of the pilot directs. So also the tongue is a small member, yet it boasts of great things.

How great a forest is set ablaze by such a small fire! And the tongue is a fire, a world of unrighteousness. The tongue is set among our members, staining the whole body, setting on fire the entire course of life, and set on fire by hell. For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and sea creature, can be tamed and has been tamed by mankind, but no human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison. With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse people who are made in the likeness of God. From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers, these things ought not to be so.¹⁴¹

Speech plays an essential role in following Christ, according to James. Pastor and scholar Sinclair Ferguson helpfully expounds upon this passage when he writes, “the tongue is the hinge on which the door into our souls swings open in order to reveal our spirit. In effect, our words are like so many media people rushing to file their reports on the condition of our soul.”¹⁴²

Theologian and author Paul Tripp says in *War of Words*,

Every day of our lives and every relationship is filled with talk... Words bring death, words bring life, you choose... Your words have direction to them, you have never spoken a neutral word. They are either moving in a life direction or a death direction... Words are God’s idea, and they belong to him... both the saddest and the most celebratory moments of your life have been accompanied by talk.¹⁴³

The apostle Paul gives this great warning about the negative power of speech in Galatians 5 when he writes, “if you bite and devour one another, watch out that you are not

¹⁴¹ James 3:2-10.

¹⁴² Sinclair Ferguson, *In Christ Alone: Living the Gospel Centered Life* (Lake Mary, FL: Reformation Trust Publishing, 2007), 175.

¹⁴³ Paul Tripp, “War of Words: Getting to the Heart for God’s Sake,” (Lecture, Desiring God 2008 National Conference, September 27, 2008), accessed August 28, 2014, <http://www.desiringgod.org/conference-messages/war-of-words-getting-to-the-heart-for-gods-sake>.

consumed by one another.”¹⁴⁴ To which Tripp observes, “We must never say that harsh, proud, unloving, ungracious communication is ever OK. It’s not OK. God has invested words with power and Paul says that people can be destroyed by what you say.”¹⁴⁵ There is power in words. In Ken Sande’s RW360 materials when discussing how to be “Other-aware and Other-engaging” he says, “S.E.R.V.E. Every Person You Meet.” S.E.R.V.E. is an acronym for smile, explore and empathize, reconcile, value, and encourage.¹⁴⁶ Of the five ways to serve others, four deal with speech. Words have power.

From the youngest age, people are captivated by words. If the statistics are true, that the average person speaks 25,000 words as day, or 175,000 words a week. If printed, that’s roughly 700 pages typed, double-spaced. Human beings use words to communicate because as the crown jewel of God’s creation, they are created in his image, bearing some of the marks of their creator, God. God spoke all things into being. God used speech to create all things. God designed words and speech to be agents of creation and life. Then, in John’s gospel, Jesus is called “the Logos” or “word.” John declares, “The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory as of the only Son from his Father, full of grace and truth.”¹⁴⁷

Since the fall, words can now bring death rather than life because of sin’s effects. Eugene Peterson paraphrases Proverbs 18:21, saying, “Words kill, words give life;

¹⁴⁴ Gal. 5:15.

¹⁴⁵ Tripp, “War of Words.”

¹⁴⁶ Ken Sande, “RW Acrostics in Action,” [rw360.org](http://rw360.org/rw-acrostics/), accessed July 22, 2016, <http://rw360.org/rw-acrostics/>.

¹⁴⁷ John 1:14.

they're either poison or fruit – you choose.”¹⁴⁸ For gospel health, words need to be used for life. A healthy, gospel community, “must be marked by a different language than the world exhibits...we must choose to speak redemptively. The sweetness and the strength of the gospel – the sweetness of grace, strength of truth – should flavor everything we say.”¹⁴⁹

In Deuteronomy 5, God gives his ninth commandment, “You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.”¹⁵⁰ John Ortberg helpfully explains the power of these words when he writes,

The Ten Commandments were never designed to be a stand-alone list of rules. They come within a relational context. They describe what living up to a certain value and a certain identity and a certain destiny looks like. In fact, in Judaism, they are not called the Ten Commandments. The Hebrew term is *aseret hadevarim*, which literally means “ten utterances” or “ten statements” because they were rooted in things that are meant to be in God’s kingdom. They flow out of how we were designed, who we were meant to be. We read them as “this is what you have to do,” but God was saying, “this is who you are.” That’s why we don’t so much break the Ten Commandments as we break ourselves when we violate them.¹⁵¹

Scripture emphasizes the significance of humanity having been created in God’s image and as such are the only creatures with the power of speech. As John Stott says, “Cows can moo, dogs bark, donkeys bray, pigs grunt, lambs bleat, lions roar, monkeys squeal and birds sing, but only human beings can speak.”¹⁵² As one author put it, “The gift of speech is unique to those who are made in the image of God, and it’s a gift that in many

¹⁴⁸ Prov. 18:21, *The Message*.

¹⁴⁹ Tullian Tchividjian, *Unfashionable: Making a Difference in the World by Being Different*, Reprint edition (Colorado Springs, CO: Multnomah Books, 2012), 135.

¹⁵⁰ Deut. 5:20.

¹⁵¹ Ortberg, 144.

¹⁵² John Stott, *The Message of Ephesians* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1984), 23.

ways reflects how God himself is a communicator...God has given words tremendous value and power. But because of sin, we abuse this gift, just as we abuse other gifts God gives us.”¹⁵³

What is said in a community and how it is said indicates the measure of gospel health a community possesses. The kind of speech that scripture requires for gospel health is marked by honesty, hope, and help.

Gospel healthy speech should be humbly honest. Only after people embrace gospel humility are they able to speak honest, life-giving words to others. Honest speech goes two ways. It does not simply mean to speak truthfully, though that is a component. It also means that a community learns to be true to their word. Honest speech means that a community speaks truthfully and is true to what is spoken.

Proverbs warns about several counterfeits to honest speech. They are called gossip, slander, spreading dissension, lying speech, and flattering words.¹⁵⁴ Avoiding these pitfalls and promoting honest speech does not simply happen. Communities must cultivate and nurture them. American theologian, Jonathan Edwards, beautifully illustrates cultivating honesty when he wrote the following three resolutions to cultivate gospel healthy speech in his own life,

Resolved, never to say anything against anybody except when it is acceptable to the highest degree of Christian honor and agreeable to the golden rule. Often, when I have said anything against someone, to judge it by this resolution. (#31)

¹⁵³ Tchividjian, *Unfashionable*, 133.

¹⁵⁴ Collins, *A Study Guide for Psalms and Wisdom Literature*, 82.

Resolved, in speaking narrations, to speak the pure and simple verity.
(#34)

Let there be something of benevolence in all that I speak.¹⁵⁵ (#70)

Honest speech will infuse hope into a community because the gospel brings hope. Hopeful speech is commonly called “encouraging speech.” Proverbs paints a picture of how every person longs for hopeful speech. Children long for it; employee’s long for it; adults long for it. Whether single, married, widowed, everyone desires to receive words that encourage. Author Tullian Tchividjian writes,

Understood biblically, real encouragement is the verbal affirmation of someone’s strength, giftedness, or accomplishment, along with the realization that God the Creator is the ultimate source behind whatever’s being affirmed...encouragement is something all human beings not only crave but in fact need, God intended us to feed on it. The reason we require it is that we’re images of God, designed to reflect him. So when others aren’t acknowledging God’s reflection in who we are and what we do – when we’re not being encouraged – it leads to a hardened heart, a saddened disposition, and a debilitated lifestyle; we lose our sense of what it means to be human. Some of the most tragically hardened and fruitless people...are those who have rarely, if ever, been encouraged. The secret to true encouragement is learning to see God’s reflection in others, not just in Christians but in everyone. Encouragement is noticing God’s reflection in other people’s strengths and gifts, then verbally affirming what we see. Since all human beings are made in god’s image, we all – believers and unbelievers alike – reflect God in unique ways.¹⁵⁶

Silence, therefore, is an inappropriate application. The practice of saying nothing does not bring life because it does not communicate hope. Individuals must speak and speak thoughtful words seasoned with prayer. Silence denies and suppresses the image of God.

¹⁵⁵ Jonathan Edwards, “Resolutions,” The Jonathan Edwards Center at Yale University, edwards.yale.edu, accessed July 22, 2016, <http://edwards.yale.edu/archive?path=aHR0cDovL2Vkd2FyZHMueWFsZS5lZHUvY2dpLWJpbi9uZXdwaglsby9nZXRVYmplY3QucGw/Yy4xNTto3NDoxLndqZW8=>.

¹⁵⁶ Tchividjian, *Unfashionable*, 137.

The solution is redemptive speech filled with empathy and care for the person being addressed.

Hopeful speech leads to biblical problem solving, produces a common sense of purpose and unity, cultivates greater openness about what people are thinking and feeling, and encourages growth in the community. A spirit of defensiveness and self-protection lacks teachability and will undermine open and honest communication.¹⁵⁷ Hopeful speech, instead, helps the community.

Constructive and kind speech helps others, and it is central to gospel health within a community. Reckless or ignorant speech, speech that promotes sin or mocks others, tears the community apart. Gospel healthy speech stirs in others a hunger for God and his glory. Dr. Jack Collins says before speaking, one should ask if the words are necessary, kind, and respectful.¹⁵⁸ Christians should ask if their words are helpful. Do they draw others to the great life giving one, Jesus? He not only has the words of life, he is the word of life. Proverbs 18:20 says that a person's speech produces a yield that satisfies. Hubbard and Ogilvie reflect upon Proverbs, saying,

Fruitfulness and productivity were featured as rewards of fine speech in a land that treasured its agricultural output and often pictured true success in terms of fruit-laden trees or well-stocked vines (see Ps. 1:3). Reliable speech was virtually a guarantee of financial stability since it contributed so much to the worker's success on the job.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁷ Tripp, "War of Words."

¹⁵⁸ Collins, *A Study Guide for Psalms and Wisdom Literature*, 81.

¹⁵⁹ David A. Hubbard and Lloyd J. Ogilvie, *Proverbs* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2002), 279.

The image is plain: a tree produces fruit consistent with its nature. If the roots are healthy and strong, it will produce big, juicy, delicious fruit. If however, the roots are malnourished or diseased, there will be no fruit on the tree.

Amy Carmichael, 19th century missionary to orphan's in India, described words in terms of sweet water flowing from the heart. She wrote, "A cup brimful of sweet water cannot spill even one drop of bitter water, however suddenly jolted."¹⁶⁰ Scholar David Hubbard observes a similar theme, "When we choose to speak redemptively – the way God intended – our words become a means of transforming grace. People encounter the grace of God as we give them a sense of how he is by the way we speak."¹⁶¹

Paul Tripp says,

Our words belong to the Lord. He is the Great Speaker. The wonder, the significance, the glory of human communication has its roots in his glory and in his decision to talk with us and allow us to talk with him and others... words do not belong to us. Every word we speak must be up to God's standard and according to his design. They should echo the Great Speaker and reflect his glory. When we lose sight of this, our words lose their only shelter from difficulty. Talk was created by God for his purpose. Our words belong to him.¹⁶²

Not only do our words belong to God, but in Christ, God is called the word. Tripp further explains,

The fact that the Word came in the flesh tells us something very significant about our trouble with talk: Our problem is not fundamentally one of ignorance or ineptness. Remember the words of James.... James's point is that our communication problems cannot be solved by normal human means. Changes in location, situation, education, training, exercise, or the nature of the relationship will not solve the problem. The tongue is

¹⁶⁰ Amy Carmichael, *If* (Fort Washington, PA: CLC Ministries, 1992), 7.

¹⁶¹ Tchividjian, *Unfashionable*, 143.

¹⁶² Tripp, "War of Words," 15.

humanly untamable! It is a powerful, restless evil that leaves all of us confounded.¹⁶³

Tripp goes on to address how the gospel restores speech,

The Word has come and brought with him everything we need to live a life of godly talk. Because he has come, we can have hope that our words will follow the pattern of the Great Speaker rather than the Great Deceiver. He has come to deliver us from the horrible damage of the Fall, where the wonderful gift of communication became a terrible world of trouble. Christ has come to tame what man will never tame. He has come to use for his purpose what seems unusable. He has come to endow us with glorious riches and incomparable power so that our tongues can be used as his instruments of righteousness. Our world of talk does not have to be a world of trouble for this one reliable reason: the Word has come.¹⁶⁴

Gospel health in a community reflects the life-giving power of speech.

Fiscal Responsibility

The final mark of a community moving towards gospel health relates to their view of possessions or fiscal responsibility. The Bible speaks of people primarily as stewards of their possessions, rather than owners. Stewardship calls people to fiscal responsibility because their resources have been entrusted to them by God. This leads to greater transparency about financial matters as people understand that they have been given money and possessions in order to do the masters business.

Perhaps the most formative biblical text, among the hundreds of texts, regarding fiscal responsibility is 2 Corinthians 8:9-15—9:6-7. Paul is writing to the church in the city of Corinth. Because of a threat on his life, Paul had to leave Corinth quickly without the opportunity to invite the church in Asia Minor to provide assistance to the church in Palestine. Paul makes his appeal through a letter instead of in person, writing,

¹⁶³ Paul David Tripp, *War of Words: Getting to the Heart of Your Communication Struggles* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2001), 37.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., 48-49.

⁹ For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich. ¹⁰ And in this matter I give my judgment: this benefits you, who a year ago started not only to do this work but also to desire to do it. ¹¹ So now finish doing it as well, so that your readiness in desiring it may be matched by your completing it out of what you have. ¹² For if the readiness is there, it is acceptable according to what a person has, not according to what he does not have. ¹³ For I do not mean that others should be eased and you burdened, but that as a matter of fairness ¹⁴ your abundance at the present time should supply their need, so that their abundance may supply your need, that there may be fairness. ¹⁵ As it is written, “Whoever gathered much had nothing left over, and whoever gathered little had no lack.”

⁶ The point is this: whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. ⁷ Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.¹⁶⁵

Paul builds the principles found in these verses upon two primary truths. First, the Lord entrusts possessions to people, but they do not own them. In Matthew 25, Jesus tells a parable wherein a property owner entrusts three servants with money, each with a certain number of talents. A talent was a monetary unit equal to about twenty years wages. When the owner returns, he praises the diligence of two of his servants who doubled the owner’s money. The owner then condemns the third for burying the money and not earning a yield with it. Gospel health leads communities to a greater sense that what they have is not their own but has been given to them for a season. Second, Paul roots his teaching in the character of the one who has entrusted people with gifts and talents. The Apostle Paul says that the master is overwhelmingly generous, and “though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich.”¹⁶⁶ In light of these two truths, a community seeking to pursue gospel health will seek to be

¹⁶⁵ 2 Cor. 8:9-15—9:6-7.

¹⁶⁶ 2 Cor. 8:9.

generous in their giving. They will see giving as an opportunity to share God's generosity with others. God's generosity is intended to make them cheerful, willing givers. When finances are marked by a spirit of generosity, cheerfulness, eagerness, and gratitude, transparency is a natural by product.

In *Monk Habits for Everyday People: Benedictine Spirituality for Protestants*,

Dennis Okholm writes:

Christian community's ultimate function is to shape individuals who, as disciples of Christ, are being formed into his image. In fact, the test of any religious community that claims to be a Christian community is the extent to which the individuals in it, through their life together, are being transformed into the likeness of the one whose body they eat and whose blood they drink.¹⁶⁷

The author of Hebrews says it in a similar fashion when he writes, "and let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near."¹⁶⁸

Scripture teaches what gospel health is and that a congregation moving towards gospel health is a congregation which has a humble dependence upon God's mercy. This humble dependence is marked by learning and growing, respect for every individual's place in God's economy, a culture in which there is freedom to try and fail, a commitment to honest and open communication, and fiscal responsibility. A fuller examination of systems theory is the third area of literature review but a brief examination of the systemic nature of congregations is necessary here.

¹⁶⁷ Okholm and Norris, *Monk Habits for Everyday People*, 37.

¹⁶⁸ Heb.10:24-25.

Congregations as Bodily Systems

The Bible uses at least two illustrations to describe the church: a bodily system and a household. Dr. Louis W. Sullivan, who served as the US Secretary of Health and Human Services, stated, “Personal responsibility, which is to say responsible and enlightened behavior by each and every individual, truly is the key to good health.”¹⁶⁹

Picking up on Dr. Sullivan’s comments, Peter Steinke writes,

Like healthy people, congregations promote their health through “responsible and enlightened behavior.” The people who are most in position to enhance the health of a congregation are precisely those who have been empowered to be responsible, namely the leaders. They are the chief stewards; they are the people who are willing to be accountable for the welfare of the congregation.¹⁷⁰

What does this healthy behavior look like? First Corinthians 12:12-26 thoroughly expounds upon what it means for the church to function as a body. Paul uses anatomy and physiology terminology to speak about the church. Though the study of anatomy and physiology was not yet discovered and Paul did not understand the lymphatic system, nervous system or the endocrine system, he did understand the body as a living system which is made up of many parts. These parts are both unique and interdependent.

Every Part is Unique

In 1 Corinthians 12:15-20, Paul emphasizes how various parts of the body each have a unique role. Individual uniqueness is a foundational truth to understanding the image of the church as a body. Individuals will not be able to carry out their specific

¹⁶⁹ Peter L. Steinke, *Healthy Congregations: A Systems Approach*, 2nd edition (Herndon, VA: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2006), xi.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

design if they are unaware of what part they play within the body. To do so, individuals must commit to becoming more self-aware over time.

Similarly, individuals will not carry out their design if they are discontent with what part they play or if they covet the role others play. Hands are wonderful things. They can type, play the piano, break a piece of wood, or caress someone's hair. But if that hand wants to be a foot and seeks to behave like a foot, difficulty arises. The hand's wonderful engineering and design would be lost if it sought to perform a different function from which it was made. Therefore, individuals would spend all their time walking on their hands. Or imagine a foot that wants to be a hand. Could it ever hope to play the violin? God uniquely designed each member of the body for its particular function. Or to put it another way, the eyes see the food; the hands pick it up; the mouth chews it; the swallowing mechanism swallows it; the stomach digests. Any failure by any of these parts and problems arise. God counts on every member of Christ's body to do their job.

If all Christians have been initiated into and overwhelmed by the Spirit through the work of Jesus the baptizer, if Jesus has made all Christians drink of the Spirit, it is legitimate to ask today whether the church as a whole or a particular local church or an individual member is genuinely experiencing what Paul is describing. It is certainly not pastorally sensitive to assume this to be happening, let alone "to tell" believers who know themselves to be spiritually inadequate that rivers of living water are pouring from them, to tell those who feel futile and fruitless in their Christian service that the outpoured energy of the Holy Spirit is freely at work in them.¹⁷¹

Many scholars have observed how American culture's love for independence and autonomy has shaped its communities. Patrick Deneen, professor of political theory at Notre Dame observes how changes in architecture highlight American's obsession with

¹⁷¹ David Prior, *The Message of 1 Corinthians* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1985), 211.

autonomy. One hundred years ago, Americans built houses with front porches and open living spaces where people lived their lives, not simply in the presence of their neighbors but with them.¹⁷² Homes are now built with back porches, fenced yards, garage doors that are only open as individuals come home from work and are closed immediately. An individual can go days and even weeks without seeing neighbors, let alone building a relationship with them. It would seem dangerous to talk about the uniqueness of every person in the church, except that they are unique parts of the whole. In addition to having a unique role to play, every part is deeply dependent on the rest of the body.

Every Part Is Dependent upon One Another

Paul begins, “For just as the body is one and has many members,”¹⁷³ Paul uses the image of the body to show that all of those who are united to Christ by faith, are part of one entity, they are interdependent. In Romans 12:5 he says that the church is, “though many, are one body in Christ, and individual members are one to another.” Regardless of what individuals’ particular spiritual gifts may be, their spiritual gifts belong with the rest of the body. There is one baptism and one body. Paul understands that baptism connects people to Christ because it is designed to be an outward sign of an inward spiritual reality that all being connected to Christ individually we are not interconnected to one another.

As one commentator wrote,

Paul is clearly referring to the way Christ...manifests himself by the Spirit to the world through his church. Bittlenger comments: “In order to accomplish his work on earth, Jesus had a body made of flesh and blood. In order to accomplish his work today, Jesus has a body that consists of

¹⁷² Patrick Deneen, “A Republic of Front Porches,” frontporchrepublic.com, March 2, 2009, accessed August 14, 2016, <http://www.frontporchrepublic.com/2009/03/front-porch-republic/>.

¹⁷³ 1 Cor. 12:12.

living human beings.” Paul is affirming both rich variety and the deep unity in Christ himself.¹⁷⁴

As is the case with the human body which grows and develops, people who have faith in Christ Jesus are to be growing. They experience the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit in their lives, making them grow and bear fruit. The body imagery teaches that in order for the body to be healthy all its parts need to be growing. As one scholar said,

We need...to point one another with expectancy to Jesus the baptizer as the person who longs to take us all deeper and deeper into the reality of the Spirit’s power and presence. It is not a question of one special experience to be imposed upon all; but it is a reality to be experienced, and that experience can be continuous and daily.¹⁷⁵

Paul speaks of the church as a body in light of these foundational truths: A body is living and is designed to be active. It grows in health as each part fulfills its designed purpose.

Steinke notes,

To address the question about health of a congregation, we need to have in mind some picture of what health means. Health is wholeness. Health means all the parts are working together to maintain balance. Health means all the parts are interacting to function as a whole. Health is a continuous process, the ongoing interplay of multiple forces and conditions.¹⁷⁶

A body has unique parts that are interdependent with each other.

In *How Your Church Family Works*, Peter Steinke notes,

A favorite axiom of system proponents is “the whole is greater than the sum of its parts.” Our bodies, for instance, are systems composed of many organs (lungs, heart, liver, pancreas, etc.). Together or as a whole, the body is greater than any separate organ. Likewise, a group of people is different from the individual actions of all the people combined. The

¹⁷⁴ Prior, *The Message of 1 Corinthians*, 210.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., 212.

¹⁷⁶ Steinke, *Healthy Congregations*, xi.

whole is a force in itself. It exerts a force greater than any of its composing pieces.¹⁷⁷

Dr. Paul Brand and Philip Yancey exemplify this reality in their book, *The Gift of Pain*.

The book catalogues Dr. Brand's work with leprosy patients and his ground breaking work in finding a cure. Dr. Brand discovered that those with leprosy where, "pain-deprived patients."¹⁷⁸ He found that leprosy actually attacked the nerves so that did not feel pain. Dr. Brand describes leprosy's effects, saying,

I rinsed out a cut on my hand and scrubbed it with soap...it hurt, but that was a good thing. The tenderness would make me take extra care. I would skip my weeding chores in the garden for a few days in order to give my injured hand a rest. Pain...gave me a great advantage over...leprosy patients. My wounds would likely heal faster, with less danger of complications, because I felt pain.¹⁷⁹

As with the body, when the church system fails to function, the result is deadly. A healthy body cleans itself, restores itself, and even cures itself. Within the church, the members are to serve one another as one body. Every member of the body is involved in some capacity. No member of the body is superfluous; each one has a function. With this in mind, God has designed each member of the body for its unique function.

Paul also describes the church as the bride of Christ. Collectively, individuals within the church make up the bride to whom Jesus has demonstrated his love. As a church grows in its understanding that it is loved as Christ's bodily bride, the church and its members are freed to fulfill their unique role within the body and for the bridegroom.

¹⁷⁷ Peter L. Steinke, *How Your Church Family Works: Understanding Congregations as Emotional Systems* (Herndon, VA: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2006), 4.

¹⁷⁸ Paul Brand and Philip Yancey, *Gift of Pain*, reprint edition (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1997), 219.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., 220.

For Christ loves “the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.”¹⁸⁰

Reformed University Fellowship talks of the church as “an organic organization or an organized organism.”¹⁸¹ By calling the church an organism, the nature of health is best understood in process terms. On this idea, Peter Steinke writes,

It is easy to impose institutional values on health, as reflected in the phrase, “healthy, growing churches.” An organic view, however, prevents us from imposing on health a meaning it does not have. Organic processes are not linear. They are not merely progressive or expansive. Some organic processes promote growth through decay, shedding, and breakdown. Some organic growth is downward – a deepening, a rooting, a maturing process. An organic view will not allow us to make health synonymous with enlargement and mass. Organic life comes in many sizes and shapes, all of which may be healthy.¹⁸²

The image of the church as a body teaches that every individual member has both unique role to play in the work of the church as well as a deep interdependence with the rest of the body. One of the other systemic image used to describe the church is the family. A brief survey of this system follows.

Church as Family

The ABC sitcom “Modern Family” is touted as an historic sitcom. In its first five seasons, it tied the 1990s comedy “Frasier” with the most Emmy wins by any sitcom in television history. The show seeks to depict the modern family and how parents and

¹⁸⁰ Eph. 5:25-27.

¹⁸¹ John Stone, “RUF Staff Training,” (Lecture, Atlanta, Summer 1999).

¹⁸² Steinke, *Healthy Congregations*, xii–xiii.

children relate between three families that are connected through marriage and divorce. As New York Times writer Bruce Feiler observes, “The creators of ‘Modern Family’ are tapping into a different, more self-regarding anxiety: less focused on how families interact with the outside world; more centered on how they function internally.”¹⁸³ The appeal of the show taps the human longing for family: a longing for a home in which one can be heard and understood; a longing for a family in which members are valued, loved, and protected; a longing to flourish.

Paul paints a picture of an ancient family in Galatians 4:1-7. The church as a family system is an idea that Peter Steinke and Edwin Friedman address extensively. In his book *How Your Church Family Works* Steinke writes, “The church is an emotional unit. The same emotional processes experienced in the family operate in the church.”¹⁸⁴ Edwin Friedman writes of the need of church leaders to understand this family system in *Generation to Generation*. He says,

all clergymen and clergywomen, irrespective of faith, are simultaneously involved in three distinct families whose emotional forces interlock; the families within the congregation, our congregations, and our own. Because the emotional process in all of these systems is identical...increased understanding of any one creates more effective functioning in all three.¹⁸⁵

As Jim Herrington, Robert Creech, and Trisha Taylor write in *The Leader's Journey*,

Whenever you engage in a relationship that is long-term, intense, and significant, you become emotionally connected to one another in a living system. Each person who is part of this interaction begins to affect, and be affected by, the anxiety and behaviors of the others. The better we understand the functioning and implications of a living system, the more

¹⁸³ Bruce Feiler, “What ‘Modern Family’ Says About Modern Families - This Life,” *The New York Times*, January 21, 2011.

¹⁸⁴ Steinke, *How Your Church Family Works*, xvi.

¹⁸⁵ Edwin H. Friedman, *Generation to Generation: Family Process in Church and Synagogue* (New York: The Guilford Press, 2011), 1.

effectively we undergo personal transformation and learn to lead with integrity... Understanding how people are enmeshed in a living system and how it affects both our congregation and us is vital to transformational leadership. The reason for this is simple: *leadership always takes place in the context of a living system, and the system plays by a set of observable rules*. If we are to lead in that context, we need to understand the rules.¹⁸⁶

This quote highlights that the church is a living system and that, “Relationship systems have a unique dimension. What most distinguishes relationship systems from other systems are emotional processes.”¹⁸⁷ When thinking about the church as a family, it is essential to be aware of how one’s family of origin shapes emotional health. In *The Leader’s Journey*, the authors go on to say,

The family is the fire in which our level of emotional maturity is forged... Since we learn from our family how to relate, we carry these same behaviors directly into the work system and congregation of which we are part. So does everyone else who is part of the system.¹⁸⁸

In Galatians 4:1-7, Paul summarizes two truths that he has been driving home in the letter. First, every person is born under the law.¹⁸⁹ Put another way, all humankind is born into a family of slaves. But for those who are reborn through faith in Christ, they are adopted into God’s family and declared to be sons and daughters.¹⁹⁰ The force of these words is most powerfully felt when one looks back to the end of chapter three, where Paul makes a key grammatical shift. In Galatians 3:25 he uses the pronoun “we” which

¹⁸⁶ Jim Herrington, Robert Creech, and Trisha L. Taylor, *The Leader’s Journey: Accepting the Call to Personal and Congregational Transformation* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2003), 29-30.

¹⁸⁷ Steinke, *How Your Church Family Works*, 10.

¹⁸⁸ Herrington, et. al., *The Leader’s Journey*, 34.

¹⁸⁹ Gal. 3:1-3.

¹⁹⁰ Paul’s declaration that all humankind are declared sons is an elevation of femininity. In ANE culture only sons had legal claim on the father’s inheritance. By only saying sons Paul is making the point that in the gospel women receive the same inheritance as men. They are viewed as “sons” with regard to their legal rights of inheritance. See Anthony Hoekema, *Saved by Grace* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1989), 185-187.

has a universal aspect. In verse 26, he shifts to “you.” Paul will continue to use the second person for the remainder of this section of Galatians. Paul wants the Galatians to feel the personal press in these verses. Paul reaches beyond purely theoretical discourse to grab his readers’ attention, as if he is saying, “Galatians, I am now talking about you, specifically!” Not everyone is in this family. scripture is clear that human beings are not born children of God but are adopted into God’s family. J. I. Packer in *Knowing God* says,

The idea that all are children of God is not found in the Bible anywhere... The gift of sonship to God becomes ours not through being born, but through being born again. “To all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God – children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or of a husband’s will, but born of God.” (John 1:12-13) Sonship to God, then, is a gift of grace. It is not a natural but an *adoptive* sonship, and so the New Testament explicitly pictures it.¹⁹¹

God purpose is to both redeem and to adopt, as Stott explains, “God’s purpose was not only to secure sonship by His Son, but to assure his people of it by His Spirit. God sent His Son that those who believe might have the status of sonship, and He sent His Spirit that they might have an experience of it.”¹⁹² Paul shows what God has done to make adoption possible, “... God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons.”¹⁹³ Redemption for those under the law and those redeemed receiving full rights as sons are essential truths of the Christian faith. By declaring that redeemed people have full rights of a son, the

¹⁹¹ J. I. Packer, *Knowing God*, 20th Anniversary ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 181-182.

¹⁹² John Stott, *The Message of Galatians*, Reprint edition (Downers Grove IL: IVP Academic, 1984), 197.

¹⁹³ Gal. 3:4-5.

church receives all Christ's rights and privileges as its own. Paul uses the image of changing families to describe this exchange. Ed Clowney observed,

The Lord has designed an order in his church for accomplishing the goals of worship, nurture and witness. That order is not the imperial structure of the Roman Empire, or...the Rotary Club, a labor union or a farmers' co-operative. Neither is it the hierarchical order of a business organizational chart. It is the order of the extended family, not under the direction of a patriarch, but served by a council of elders.¹⁹⁴

The church is the gathering of God's adopted children that make a new and welcoming family.

A New Family

Peter Steinke wisely observes,

Some may argue that the church's relationship system is different from the human interactions experienced elsewhere in our lives. There is the presence of the Holy Spirit and the power of the forgiveness of sin. Certainly both distinguished the church's life. But neither negates the reality of anxiety. The church is more than its emotional processes, but it is never less than these processes. Medieval theologian Thomas Aquinas stated, "Gratia non tollit naturam," which means "Grace does not abolish nature." Grace redirects human nature. Grace offers courage in the face of human reality. That's our hope.¹⁹⁵

The doctrine of adoption helps fully explain the reality that people become part of a new family through conversion. What is adoption? Sinclair Ferguson writes, "The notion that we are children of God, His own sons and daughters...is the mainspring of Christian living...Our Sonship to God is the apex of Creation and the goal of redemption."¹⁹⁶

Adopted sons and daughters do not become children of God in their nature but rather experience a change in status.

¹⁹⁴ Clowney, *The Church*, 224.

¹⁹⁵ Steinke, *How Your Church Family Works*, xiv.

¹⁹⁶ Sinclair B. Ferguson, *Children of the Living God* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1989), 6.

The cultural context for Paul's teaching on adoption is Roman law, which established a time for the coming of age for a son. A Roman child became an adult at the sacred family festival known as the Liberalia, held annually on the seventeenth of March. At Liberalia, the father formally adopted the son as his acknowledged son and heir, and the son received the toga virilis to replace the toga praetexta.¹⁹⁷ Until the Liberalia, a young child-heir was wealthy and powerful in principle, but in practice, he was no more than a slave. A Roman child-heir was a minor under guardians until fourteen years-old, and was still, to some degree, under trustees until age twenty-five. Only as an adult could the heir exercise complete independent control over the estate. Ferguson explains,

Adoption is not a change in nature, but a change in status. If we fail to see this truth, we will reject the power of our adoption...Adoption is a declaration God makes about us. It is irreversible, dependent entirely upon His gracious choice, in which He says: 'you are my son, today I have brought you into my family.'¹⁹⁸

Members of God's new family need to unlearn sinful patterns of response and put on a different way. As Steinke observes,

The church is not a family. Families are more committed and intense. Their relationships are repeatedly reinforced and deeply patterned. Nonetheless, the church is an emotional unit. The same emotional processes experienced in the family operate in the church, thus the use of the term "church family" in the title and text of the book. Looking at how the church family works as an emotional system.¹⁹⁹

At the end of Galatians 3, Paul observes how, in the former family, people sized up and judged one another. As a result, destructive patterns of relating marked this former

¹⁹⁷ James Montgomery Boice, *Galatians, Ephesians*, Expositor's Bible Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996), 65.

¹⁹⁸ Ferguson, *Children of the Living God*, 36.

¹⁹⁹ Steinke, *How Your Church Family Works*, xvi.

family and led to a host of deeper problems. The destructive patterns of relating to one another included avoiding conflict, triangulating, becoming overly sensitive, or taking criticisms personally. In this first family, some people are overly emotional, combative, and argumentative. For others, they respond to the challenges of life by becoming emotionally disconnected, cold, and inaccessible. These patterns result in deeper relational disconnectedness like fear, insecurity, and disdain. Because of original sin, no one has avoided these influences completely. People have all learned some unbiblical and destructive pattern from their family of origin. People must reflect on their family of origin, recognizing that what was learned at an early age still seeks to draw them back into slavery.

In contrast to this first family, this new family of the church is to be marked by imitating Christ. Imitation means Christ's character and course shape his family's actions and direction. Paul illustrates Christ's new family and its rules by writing the children of God are, being clothed with Christ."²⁰⁰ Paul's word was originally employed in the theater where it meant that one was identified with Christ on the world stage. When Jim Carey played his role of Andy Kaufman in *Man on the Moon*, he received a great deal of praise because he so embodied Andy Kaufman, it was unnerving to many. For the months that he filmed the movie, Carey acted like Kaufman on and off the stage. Carey's embodiment of Kaufman illustrates what it means to be clothed with someone else's identity.

Theologian and scholar Donald Guthrie described the relationship by saying,

The expression conveys a striking suggestion of the closeness which exists between Christ and the believer. Those who put on Christ can do no other

²⁰⁰ Gal. 3:27.

than act in accordance with the Spirit of Christ ... the metaphor conveys essentially a new kind of life. Everything is now related to Christ.²⁰¹

Imitating Christ means people seek to serve and minister to one another. They become vulnerable and courageous. In addition, this new family is committed to Christ's mission. They seek to align their purpose, priorities, and time to Christ's. The late Chuck Colson wrote, "Any genuine resurgence of Christianity, as history demonstrates, depends on a reawakening and renewal of that which is the essence of the faith – that is, the people of God, the new society, the body of Christ, which is made manifest in the world – the Church."²⁰²

Because members imitate Christ, the church thinks and acts in familial ways. For example, members of the family have a bold confidence. Ferguson said it this way, "Boldness – which would be sheer impudence in a neighbor – is the privilege of the children in the family."²⁰³ Or consider the way children approach their father. Dr. Martin Lloyd Jones writes, "Grown-ups may be standing back at a distance and being very formal; but the little child comes running, rushes right in, and holds on to his father's legs. He has a right that no-one else has...It is instinctive...we cry 'Abba, Father.'"²⁰⁴ Packer further explained,

The doctrine of our adoption tells us that the sum and substance of our promised inheritance is a share in the glory of Christ. We shall be made like our elder brother at every point, and sin and mortality, the double corruption of God's good work in the moral and spiritual spheres respectively, will be things of the past. 'Joint-heirs with Christ...that we

²⁰¹ Donald Guthrie, *Galatians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Pub Co, 1981), 110.

²⁰² Charles W. Colson and Ellen Santilli Vaughn, *The Body* (Dallas: Thomas Nelson, 1994), 32.

²⁰³ Ferguson, *Children of the Living God*, 66.

²⁰⁴ D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *The Sons of God: Exposition of Chapter 8:5-17* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1974), 243.

may be...glorified together' (Romans 8:17). 'Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it does not yet appear what we shall be; but we know that, when He shall appear, we shall be like Him' (1 John 3:2). This likeness will extend to our physical being, as well as our mind and character;"²⁰⁵

Packer continued,

If you want to judge how well a person understands Christianity, find out how much he makes of the thought of being God's child, and having God as his Father. If this is not the thought that prompts and controls his worship and prayers and his whole outlook on life, it means that he does not understand Christianity very well at all. [Adoption] is the highest privilege the gospel offers...that justification-by which we mean God's forgiveness of the past together with his acceptance of the future-is the primary and fundamental blessing is not in question...but...adoption is higher, because of the richer relationship with God that it involves.²⁰⁶

It is this new family that individuals become members of through faith in Christ. A family with rich benefits and redeemed behavior that the children of God put on in growing measure over the course of their faith journey.

Looking at the church as body and family draws out some of the inherent benefits as well as liabilities of each of these images. For example, the body image highlights the great truth that every individual has a part to play in the work of the church. All people have particular value and impact the rest of the body with their service. The medical research teaches that individuals who are active, physically and mentally, are healthier.²⁰⁷ A body must have a purpose and direction. The idea of the church as a body is intended to lead individuals to greater kingdom effectiveness.

²⁰⁵ Packer, *Knowing God*, 197.

²⁰⁶ Ibid., 182.

²⁰⁷ Andrea K. Chomistek, et. al., "Relationship of Sedentary Behavior and Physical Activity to Incident Cardiovascular Disease," *Journal of the American College of Cardiology* 61, no. 23 (June 2013): 2346–2354.

In the same way, church as family highlights the deep relationships that are to exist between its members. They are to know one another deeply and feel comfortable and accepted with one another. One of the dangers is that the church forgets its mission. Churches become in-grown and neglect the welcoming of neighbors and care for the stranger. Instead of bringing the gospel to the whole world, the church becomes a refuge from the world that is exclusive with inside jokes and insider knowledge that makes it an unwelcoming place. In Tim Keller's, *Center Church*, he notes,

A missional mind-set can and should pervade every area of the church. For example, let's consider what a missional small group [community group] could look like. It is more than just a group of people involved in a specific evangelism program (although that is a good thing). Rather, its members love the city and talk positively about it; they speak in language that is not filled with pious tribal or technical terms and phrases [churchy lingo], nor do they use disdainful or combative language. In their Bible study, they apply the gospel to the core concerns and stories of the people in their culture. This is a group obviously interested in and engaged with the literature, art, and thought of the surrounding culture, and they can discuss it appreciatively and yet critically. They exhibit deep concern for the poor, are generous with their money, model purity and respect toward the opposite sex, and show humility toward people of other races and cultures, as well as toward other Christians and churches.²⁰⁸

Healthy churches, like healthy bodies and healthy families, have a kingdom-mindedness that leads to ministry.

Examining what the scriptures teach about gospel health and how it speaks of the church as both a body and a family laid a foundation to explore the remaining areas of literature review. In order to explore moving a congregation towards systemic gospel health, a study of change theory is necessary. The next area of literature study relates to change theory as it relates to organizations.

²⁰⁸ Keller, *Center Church*, 260.

Change Theory

This review will first explore how the literature defines change. An examination of the change process and the six key components of fruitful change follows. This section will finish by examining the senior leader's role in any change process.

Definition of Change

In light of the many descriptions of change, it is necessary to begin this section with a definition of change from the literature. In Lyle Schaller's book, *The Change Agent*, he highlights why thoughtful change is critical. He writes,

Despite the claims of many, relatively little is known about how to achieve predictable change...The alternatives, however, are even more clearly unacceptable. One alternative is to sit back and await what tomorrow may bring without any planning or preparation. Another is to plunge in blindly and attempt to initiate change without bothering to try to learn from the experiences of others or from the observations of social and behavioral scientists.²⁰⁹

In Michael Fullan's book, *Leading in a Culture of Change*, he captures how difficult it is to define change. He rightly observes,

Change is a double-edged sword. Its relentless pace these days runs us off our feet...if you ask people to brainstorm words to describe change, they come up with a mixture of negative and positive terms. On the one side, fear, anxiety, loss, danger, panic; on the other, exhilaration, risk-taking, excitement, improvements, energizing²¹⁰

The broad types of change that people experience makes a definition difficult. Schaller identifies at least two different ways to categorize change. First, he breaks change down into three types: modernization, transformation, and survival adaptation.²¹¹ In the second

²⁰⁹ Lyle E. Schaller, *The Change Agent: The Strategy of Innovative Leadership* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1972), 11-12.

²¹⁰ Michael Fullan, *Leading in a Culture of Change*, Revised edition (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2007), 1.

²¹¹ Lyle E. Schaller, *The Change Agent: The Strategy of Innovative Leadership* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1972), 34.

approach, Schaller builds on Thomas Bennett's work in which he identifies four types of change:²¹² structural, technological, behavioral, or assumptive/valuative.²¹³ Schaller notes that the source of all change is either internally or externally motivated.²¹⁴ Within organizations, this is the difference between an internal reformer and an external revolutionary. Schaller concludes his discussion about the nature of change by proposing a third way. He writes,

The historical record is overwhelmingly on the side of the argument that ideas, innovation, and an openness to new approaches to problem-solving are far more influential forces...in the change process. Innovation constitutes an attractive third alternative to the traditional either-or approach of reform or revolution. Ideas are an essential and powerful force both in innovation and in preserving the status quo.²¹⁵

Innovation reveals that change needs to be approached as a process rather than a single act.

In *Leadership on the Line*, Ron Heifetz and Marty Linsky make the case that there are two types of change, or challenges, that take place within an organization. They call them technical and adaptive challenges, saying,

Leadership would be a safe undertaking if your organizations and communities only faced problems for which they already knew the solutions. Every day, people have problems for which they do, in fact, have the necessary know-how and procedures. We call these technical problems. But there is a whole host of problems that are not amenable to authoritative expertise or standard operating procedures. They cannot be solved by someone who provides answers from on high. We call these adaptive challenges because they require experiments, new discoveries,

²¹² Thomas R. Bennett, *The Leader and Process of Change* (New York: Association Press, 1962), 21.

²¹³ Schaller, *The Change Agent*, 35-38.

²¹⁴ Ibid., 39, 40.

²¹⁵ Ibid., 48.

and adjustments from numerous places in the organization or community. Without learning new ways – changing attitudes, values, and behaviors – people cannot make the adaptive leap necessary to thrive in the new environment. The sustainability of change depends on having the people with the problem internalize the change itself.²¹⁶

The quote emphasizes that adaptive change is more difficult and risky than technical change. Technical challenges are largely addressed with more training of key participants and/or better organizational policies or procedures. The greatest changes, or challenges, within an institution, like a congregation, are adaptive in nature. For this reason, adaptive change rather than technical change needs defining. Because adaptive change comes, “from numerous places in the organization or community,”²¹⁷ it is a collective process.

Various authors use various terms to describe adaptive change. John Kotter and Dan Cohen use the term “transform” to speak of organizational change.²¹⁸ In *Leading Congregational Change*, Jim Herrington and Mike Bonem call congregational change, congregational transformation.²¹⁹ They describe this process of congregational transformation as, “a complex set of challenges, steps, and leadership requirements that are associated with deep, systemic change effort in a...congregation.”²²⁰ Kotter writes that the change process, “produce[s] new ways of operating”²²¹ and goes on to state, “the

²¹⁶ Martin Linsky and Ronald A. Heifetz, *Leadership on the Line: Staying Alive through the Dangers of Leading* (Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 2002), 13.

²¹⁷ Ibid.

²¹⁸ John P. Kotter and Dan S. Cohen, *The Heart of Change: Real-Life Stories of How People Change Their Organizations* (Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 2012), xi.

²¹⁹ Jim Herrington and Mike Bonem, *Leading Congregational Change: A Practical Guide for the Transformational Journey* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000), xi.

²²⁰ Ibid., 12.

²²¹ Kotter and Cohen, *The Heart of Change*, xii.

core of the matter is always about changing the behavior of people, and behavior change happens in highly successful situations mostly by speaking to people's feelings."²²²

Because change is a process that deals with people's emotions, Michael Fullan observes in *Leading in a Culture of Change*,

Change is a leader's friend, but it has a split personality: its nonlinear messiness gets us into trouble. But the experience of this messiness is necessary in order to discover the hidden benefits – creative ideas and novel solutions are often generated when the status quo is disrupted.²²³

Heifetz, Linsky, and Grashow echo this idea in *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership*, where they describe the process of adaptive change as,

Working through an adaptive challenge will always involve distributing some losses, albeit in the service of an important purpose, the systemic dynamics that ensue, the politics of change, will have many unpredictable elements. The pathway for getting to an adaptive resolution will look a bit like the flight of a bumblebee, so that at times you will feel as if you are not even heading in the right direction. And the resolution might be quite different from what you first imagined.²²⁴

Adaptive change is a challenging type of change because it involves experimentation, emotions, unknown outcomes, and the path to resolution is not clearly defined.

Heifetz and Linsky describe leading adaptive change as moving a system towards thriving. They state, "Adaptive leadership is specifically about change that enables the capacity to thrive...thriving includes increases in...value, exceptional...service, high workforce morale, and positive social and environmental impact."²²⁵ The process of change is the next aspect that needs to be explored.

²²² Ibid.

²²³ Fullan, *Leading in a Culture of Change*, 107.

²²⁴ Heifetz, et. al., *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership*, 31.

²²⁵ Ibid., 15.

The Change Process

In *The Heart of Change*, Kotter asks,

Why is change so hard? Because in order to make any transformation successful, you must change more than just the structure and operations of an organization – you need to change people’s behavior. And that is never easy...Evidence overwhelmingly suggests that the most fundamental problem in all of the stages is changing the behavior of people.²²⁶

When exploring the process of change, understanding the place of emotions, urgency, conflict are key. As leaders understand these, they can then build a team, equip others to persist in doing the work.

Emotions

The change process begins with an acknowledgement that change is first and foremost emotional in nature. Kotter states, “People change what they do less because they are given analysis that shifts their thinking than because they are shown a truth that influences their feelings.”²²⁷ Weese and Crabtree echo Kotter’s findings in *The Elephant in the Boardroom*. They address leadership transitions writing, “Linda Karlovec, a psychologist who specializes in organizational therapy, argues that almost all resistance to organizational change is emotional, *though it is perceived to be rational*.”²²⁸ Because the process of change is fundamentally emotional, an individual must feel the need for change. Kotter calls this the “see, feel, change”²²⁹ cycle and describes it this way,

²²⁶ Kotter and Cohen, *The Heart of Change*, 7.

²²⁷ Ibid., 1.

²²⁸ Carolyn Weese and J. Russell Crabtree, *The Elephant in the Boardroom: Speaking the Unspoken about Pastoral Transitions* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2004), 13.

²²⁹ Kotter and Cohen, *The Heart of Change*, 7.

Significantly changing the behavior of a single person can be exceptionally difficult work...yet organizations that are leaping into the future...succeed [by] compellingly show[ing] people what the problems are and how to resolve problems. They provoke responses that reduce feelings that slow and stifle needed change, and they enhance feelings that motivate useful action. The emotional reaction then provides the energy that propels people to push along the change process, no matter how great the difficulties.²³⁰

Because emotions are foundational to the change process this can make the process unpredictable and undirected. In order to give the process direction and focus the second key component is urgency.

Urgency

The challenge for many eager and enthusiastic leaders is pacing the change. Ushering in change too quickly can burn people out or create an environment of fear. As Fullan writes, “If they [leaders] are in too much of a hurry, they will completely fail – you can’t bulldoze change.”²³¹ Leaders must keep the urgency of change while avoiding motivation by fear. Kotter and Cohen explain the danger of motivating by fear, saying, “Fear can produce movement. It can dynamite a cement wall. But we have yet to see great transformation launched with fear as the primary and sustaining force. Urgency sustains change.”²³² Because change is about changing behavior, it cannot be rushed.

In *Leading Congregational Change*, Herrington and Bonem describe a way that avoids fear and bull-doing: urgency. They describe urgency, saying,

Urgency elicits strong reactions, and in many cases the associated images are negative. The short answer is that urgency is absolutely necessary in congregational transformation. When used properly, urgency is a positive

²³⁰ Ibid., 7-8.

²³¹ Fullan, *Leading in a Culture of Change*, 9.

²³² Kotter and Cohen, *The Heart of Change*, 27.

driver for change. Creating urgency, as described in this model, refers to the energy and motivation for change that is generated by contrasting between an accurate perception of reality and God's ideal.²³³

In *Leading Change* and *The Heart of Change*, John Kotter identifies urgency as the first step towards successful adaptive change. Herrington and Bonem describe creating urgency as “creating creative tension.”²³⁴ They observe,

Change leaders must acknowledge that tension is a necessary part of the process...creative tension is exercised when change leaders paint two pictures clearly. The first picture is of God's vision for the congregation. The second is an accurate depiction of current reality...Out of this tension, the energy to drive the change process is produced...unhappiness is not an explicit goal of change, and not all unhappiness is a sign that creative tension is at work...but it is clear that creative tension generates some level of discomfort that drives the change process.²³⁵

To illustrate the importance of urgency for change, Kotter talks about making repairs on a newly purchased home. He states,

Anything that didn't get fixed within [the first] six months didn't get fixed five years later when I sold the house. Something like this can happen to companies too. A slow approach to achieving a vision can require an incredible amount of discipline inside a big fixer-upper. What can happen is that the organization just rolls a bit and then gets satisfied and stops.²³⁶

One of the challenges of the change process is striking the balance of sufficient urgency and pacing the work.²³⁷ Heifetz and Linsky state,

When you lead people through difficult change, you take them on an emotional roller coaster because you are asking them to relinquish something – a belief, a value, a behavior – that they hold dear. People can

²³³ Herrington and Bonem, *Leading Congregational Change*, 34.

²³⁴ Ibid., 107.

²³⁵ Ibid., 107-109.

²³⁶ Kotter and Cohen, *The Heart of Change*, 79.

²³⁷ Linsky and Heifetz, *Leadership on the Line*, 116.

stand only so much change at any one time. You risk revolt, and your own survival, by trying to do too much, too soon.²³⁸

Heifetz and Linsky say that leading adaptive change,

is not about meeting or exceeding your authorizers' expectations; it is about challenging some of those expectations, finding a way to disappoint people without pushing them completely over the edge...an authorizer is anyone who gives you attention and support to do your job of providing solutions to problems.²³⁹

They go on to state,

systems, organizations, families, and communities resist dealing with adaptive challenges because doing so requires changes that partly involve an experience of loss...what people resist is not change per se, but loss. When change involves real or potential loss people hold on to what they have and resist the change.²⁴⁰

Heifetz, et. al., writes, "Leadership can be understood, in part, as about disappointing your own people at a rate they can absorb, as you get them to face the need to make tough trade-offs."²⁴¹ Because change is first and foremost about emotions, the feelings of loss are powerful change killers.²⁴² The leader's responsibility is,

To help people navigate through a period of disturbance as they sift through what is essential and what is expendable, and as they experiment with solutions to the adaptive challenges at hand. This disequilibrium can catalyze everything from conflict, frustration, and panic to confusion, disorientation, and fear of losing something dear...The purpose is to make progress on a tough collective challenge...collective and individual disequilibrium is a byproduct generated when you call attention to tough

²³⁸ Ibid., 116-117.

²³⁹ Heifetz, et. al., *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership*, 26.

²⁴⁰ Ibid., 22.

²⁴¹ Ronald Heifetz and Marty Linsky, "Leadership on the Line: Staying Alive Through the Dangers of Leading - HBS Working Knowledge Archive - Harvard Business School," hbswk.hbs.edu, May 28, 2002, accessed February 3, 2016, <http://hbswk.hbs.edu/archive/2952.html>.

²⁴² Ken Blanchard, et. al., *Who Killed Change? Solving the Mystery of Leading People Through Change* (New York: William Morrow, 2009), 3.

questions and draw people's sense of responsibility beyond current norms...your goal should be to keep the temperature within what we call the productive zone of disequilibrium (PZD): enough heat generated by your intervention to gain attention, engagement, and forward motion, but not so much that the organization (or your part of it) explodes.²⁴³

Because adaptive change “challenges people's habits, beliefs and values,”²⁴⁴ change often results in conflict. Furthermore, maintaining a sense of urgency in the productive disequilibrium zone makes conflict certain in any change process. Conflict is the next component of change theory to be explored.

Conflict

If the process of change requires disequilibrium, conflict is inevitable. Herrington and Bonem state,

Through hundreds of conversations we came to recognize that change does not happen without conflict...The change process, by its very nature, creates conflict. A congregation with a high level of spiritual and relational vitality can accept change and can manage conflict in ways that give life. Conversely, a congregation with a low level of spiritual and relational vitality will tend to manage conflict in ways that preserve the status quo.²⁴⁵

Fullan also understands the danger of being inadequately prepared for the conflictual nature of the change process. He notes, “It is essential for leaders to understand the change process. Moral purpose without an understanding of change will lead to moral martyrdom.”²⁴⁶ Similarly, in *The 5 Dysfunctions of a Team*, Patrick Lencioni identifies a fear of conflict as one of the five major dysfunction of many leadership teams. He states,

²⁴³ Heifetz, et. al., *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership*, 28-29.

²⁴⁴ Heifetz and Linsky, *Leadership on the Line*, 30.

²⁴⁵ Herrington and Bonem, *Leading Congregational Change*, 7-9.

²⁴⁶ Fullan, *Leading in a Culture of Change*, 5.

“Teams that lack trust are incapable of engaging in unfiltered and passionate debate of ideas. Instead, they resort to veiled discussions and guarded comments.”²⁴⁷ When conflict arises, these dysfunctional teams become the primary opponents of healthy change. Instead, leaders can pursue healthy team dynamics amidst the conflict.

Team

Because change leads to loss and creates disequilibrium, the change process requires a team of individuals working together to ensure the process is successful. In *The Leaders Challenge*, Kouzes and Posner write that in order to lead change, an exemplary leader, “fosters collaboration by building trust and facilitating relationships”²⁴⁸ In Patrick Lencioni’s, *The Advantage*, he states that healthy cohesive leadership team members, “are open with one another, passionately debate important issues, and commit to clear decisions even if they initially disagree. They call each other out when their behaviors or performance needs correction, and they focus their attention on the collective good of the organization.”²⁴⁹ Kotter’s second and third steps of successful change involve building a guiding team and getting the vision right.²⁵⁰ Herrington and Bonam call these two steps establishing the vision community and determining the vision path.²⁵¹ Fullan notes that,

Successful organizations don’t go with only like-minded innovators; they deliberately build in differences. They don’t mind so much when others – not just themselves – disturb the equilibrium. They also trust the learning

²⁴⁷ Patrick Lencioni, *The Five Dysfunctions of a Team: A Leadership Fable* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2002), 188.

²⁴⁸ Kouzes and Posner, *The Leadership Challenge*, 26.

²⁴⁹ Patrick M. Lencioni, *The Advantage: Why Organizational Health Trumps Everything Else In Business* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2012), 18.

²⁵⁰ Kotter and Cohen, *The Heart of Change*, 6.

²⁵¹ Herrington and Bonem, *Leading Congregational Change*, 13.

process they set up – the focus on moral purpose, the attention to the change process, the building of relationships, the sharing and critical scrutiny of knowledge, and traversing the edge of chaos while seeking coherence. Successful organizations and their leaders come to know and trust that these dynamics contain just about all the checks and balances needed to deal with those few hard-core resisters who make a career out of being against everything.²⁵²

Pastor Larry Osborne reinforces this truth when he writes that it is his deep conviction, “that the health and long-term effectiveness of any ministry begins with the health and unity of its primary leadership teams.”²⁵³ In *Good to Great*, Jim Collins likens an organization to a bus and getting the right people in the right seats on the bus is critical for the organization to change and grow.²⁵⁴

These various descriptions highlight that the next step in the change process is to establish a team that is committed to a unifying vision and committed to one another. Once this team is in place, the next component of the change process is the equipping of others to carry out the change.

Equip

Those being invited to discover new ways of being which lead to greater life and vitality need to be equipped for the task. Effective equipping begins with educating individuals about the desired end, empowering them to act, and encouraging them along the way. Kotter describes these as communicating for buy-in, empowering action, and

²⁵² Fullan, *Leading in a Culture of Change*, 43.

²⁵³ Larry Osborne, *Sticky Teams: Keeping Your Leadership Team and Staff on the Same Page* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010), 19.

²⁵⁴ Collins, *Good to Great*, 47.

creating short-term wins.²⁵⁵ Heifetz and Linsky call these giving the work back.²⁵⁶

Kouzes and Posner note that one of the practices of exemplary leaders is the ability to enable others to act. They write, “To get extraordinary things done in organizations, leaders have to *enable others to act*.”²⁵⁷ They go on to say that the last of the five practices of exemplary leaders is that they encourage the heart of those they lead by recognizing, “contributions by showing appreciation for individual excellence [and] celebrat[ing] the values and victories.”²⁵⁸ Herringotn and Bonem identify two of these concepts as, “communicating the vision and empowering change leaders.”²⁵⁹ The challenge with equipping others to lead change is not sliding back after time. In order for change to last, there must be a deep resolve to not quit on the change. The leader and organization must persist in the change process.

Persist

From all that has been cited, it is clear that change is an ongoing process that ebbs and flows, and leaders must persist through this tide. In *Leading Congregational Change*, the authors state,

The change process never truly ends. The amount of energy that must be poured into the process may be less and the urgency level may decline after its initial peak, but a congregation that decides to rest on its laurels is taking the first step toward decline. This does not mean that the congregation can never pause and catch its breath...the art of leadership is knowing when to pause and when to press forward. Continually asking whether the vision is still right, determining whether reasonable progress

²⁵⁵ Kotter and Cohen, *The Heart of Change*, 6.

²⁵⁶ Linsky and Heifetz, *Leadership on the Line*, 123-139.

²⁵⁷ Kouzes and Posner, *The Leadership Challenge*, 20.

²⁵⁸ Ibid., 26.

²⁵⁹ Herrington and Bonem, *Leading Congregational Change*, 13.

is being made, and making sure that the process does restart after the pauses are high-leverage leadership challenges.²⁶⁰

Persistence is key. Kotter identifies the two final steps in successful change as not letting up and making the change stick.²⁶¹ Heifetz and Linsky talk about the ability to “hold steady”²⁶² amidst the change process.

In summary, the change process must account for emotional nature of change as is often expressed through conflict as the sense of urgency causes increased anxiety within the system. A leaders ability to navigate the conflict is contingent of her skill in building teams, equip the community, and persevering in the discovery of new ways of being that lead to greater life and vitality. The final aspect of change theory that needs to be addressed is the role the senior leader plays in the process.

The Role of the Senior Leader

Fullan posits, “The role of the leader is to ensure that the organization develops relationships that help produce desirable results.”²⁶³ This is a much more comprehensive task than simply managing change. As Warren Bennis and Burt Nanus state, “Managers are people who do things right and leaders are people who do the right thing.”²⁶⁴ In order to do the right thing of leading an organization to desirable results, the senior leader will engage in adaptive changes. Peter Steinke writes, “To recognize and treat a problem as an

²⁶⁰ Ibid., 93.

²⁶¹ Kotter and Cohen, *The Heart of Change*, 6.

²⁶² Linsky and Heifetz, *Leadership on the Line*, 140.

²⁶³ Fullan, *Leading in a Culture of Change*, 68.

²⁶⁴ Warren G. Bennis and Burt Nanus, *Leaders: The Strategies for Taking Charge*, 2nd edition (New York: HarperBusiness, 1997), 20.

adaptive challenge will rock the emotional boat...People don't want leaders to upset them with adaptive solutions that involve change, learning, loss and uncertainty."²⁶⁵ For this reason, the senior leader must be emotionally in tune and enthusiastically communicative.

Emotionally In Tune

The literature has already demonstrated that change is primarily an emotional process. Travis Bradberry and Jean Greaves use the overarching idea of emotional intelligence, or EQ, as the skills necessary for leaders to manage their emotions as well as to understand the emotions of those around them. They identify two core personal competencies, self-awareness and self-management, and two core social competencies, social awareness and relationship management.²⁶⁶ The two overarching categories are being in tune with oneself and with those involved in the change process.

In Tune with Self

Kouzes and Posner highlight the goal of leaders staying in tune with their own internal emotional state, explaining,

Leadership is a relationship. Leadership is a relationship between those who aspire to lead and those who choose to follow. It's the quality of this relationship that matters most when we're engaged in getting extraordinary things done. A leader-constituent relationship that's characterized by fear and distrust will never, ever produce anything of lasting value. A relationship characterized by mutual respect and confidence will overcome the greatest adversities and leave a legacy of significance.²⁶⁷

²⁶⁵ Peter L. Steinke, *Congregational Leadership in Anxious Times: Being Calm and Courageous No Matter What* (Herndon, VA: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2006), 128.

²⁶⁶ Bradberry, et. al, 24. Ken Sande, founder of Relational 360, expands this to six. He adds God awareness and God engaging. This reflects a more biblical worldview understanding of this field of study. Because this is a relatively young field of study, there is very little written on it. In light of the fact that this research study involved gospel change in congregations, these additional two categories seem well suited for this work.

²⁶⁷ Kouzes and Posner, *The Leadership Challenge*, 24.

In *The Failure of Nerve*, Edwin Freeman emphasizes the importance of leader being in tune with their internal emotional state. He describes his perspective this way,

My own understanding of the fact that leadership is essentially an *emotional* process rather than a *cognitive* phenomenon and my awareness of the vital importance of well-differentiated leadership for the functioning and survival of institutions...by *well-differentiated leader* I do not mean an autocrat who tells others what to do or orders them around, although any leader who defines himself or herself clearly may be perceived that way by those who are not taking responsibility for their own emotional being and destiny. Rather, I mean someone who has clarity about his or her own life goals, and, therefore, someone who is less likely to become lost in the anxious emotional processes swirling about.²⁶⁸

The ability of an individual to not “become lost in the anxious emotional process” is often called differentiation. Freeman defines differentiation as,

The lifelong process of striving to keep one’s being in balance through the reciprocal external and internal processes of self-definition and self-regulation. It is a concept that can sometimes be difficult to focus on objectively, for *differentiation* means the capacity to become oneself out of one’s self, with minimum reactivity to the positions or reactivity of others. Differentiation is charting one’s own way by means of one’s own internal guidance system, rather than perpetually eyeing the “Scope” to see where others are at. Differentiation refers more to a process than a goal that can ever be achieved.²⁶⁹

Many leaders struggle to remain well-differentiated during the change process because it involves conflict. In *The Five Dysfunctions of a Team*, Patrick Lencioni identifies one of the dysfunctions as a fear of healthy conflict. He writes, “It is key that the leaders demonstrate restraint when their people engage in conflict, and allow resolution to occur naturally...This can be a challenge because many leaders feel that

²⁶⁸ 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), 14.

²⁶⁹ Friedman, *Failure of Nerve*, 183.

they are somehow failing in their jobs by losing control of their teams during conflict.”²⁷⁰

As leaders become in tune with their own emotions, they become better differentiated and are better able to negotiate the challenges that come with change.

Differentiation requires the leader to be emotional healthy or mature. In *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality*, Pete Scazzero notes, “Emotional health...connects us to our interiors, making possible the seeing and treating of each individual as worthy of respect, created in the image of God and not just as objects to use.”²⁷¹ Brené Brown highlights the danger of failing to face emotions when she writes, “A lifetime of unexplored disappointments can make us bitter, and stored-up resentment is toxic.”²⁷² Similarly, Nelson Mandela is quoted as saying, “Resentment is like drinking poison and then hoping it will kill your enemies.”²⁷³ Kouzes and Posner highlight the importance of the leaders’ ability to be in tune with their interior life. They write,

Becoming a leader begins when you come to understand who you are, what you care about, and why you do what you do. This is a journey that all leaders must take. Your ultimate success...in light depends on how well you know yourself, what you value, and why you value it. The better you know who you are and what you believe in, the better you are at making sense of the often incomprehensible and conflicting demands²⁷⁴

²⁷⁰ Lencioni, *The Five Dysfunctions of a Team*, 206.

²⁷¹ Scazzero, *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality*, 47.

²⁷² Brené Brown, *Rising Strong* (New York: Spiegel & Grau, 2015), 142.

²⁷³ Ibid.

²⁷⁴ James M. Kouzes and Barry Z. Posner, *The Truth about Leadership: The No-Fads, Heart-of-the-Matter Facts You Need to Know* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2010), 32-33.

A leader's ability to be emotionally in tune with her environment requires her to be in touch with her own emotional estate. However, it does not stop there. A leader must also be in tune to the emotional state of those around her.

In Tune with Others

Kouzes and Posner make the case that what separates effective leaders from ineffective ones is how much they “really care about the people [they] lead... When you're in love with the people you lead, the products and services you offer, and the customers and clients you serve, you must pour your heart into it.”²⁷⁵ Daniel Goleman speaks of the leader's ability to be in tune with others as resonance. He says, “Resonance... refers to ‘the reinforcement or prolongation of sound by reflection,’ or, more specifically, ‘by synchronous vibration.’ The human analog... occurs when two people are on the same wavelength.”²⁷⁶ He goes on to state,

One sign of resonant leadership is a group of followers who vibrate with the leader's upbeat and enthusiastic energy... Gifted leadership occurs where heart and head – feeling and thought – meet. These are the two wings that allow a leader to soar... intellect alone will not make a leader; leaders execute a vision by motivating, guiding, inspiring, listening, persuading – and, most crucially, through creating resonance... leaders build resonance by tuning into people's feelings – their own and others' – and guiding them in the right direction.²⁷⁷

Goleman identifies the six basic leadership styles as visionary, coaching, affiliative, democratic, pacesetter, and commanding.²⁷⁸ He writes,

²⁷⁵ James M. Kouzes and Barry Z. Posner, *Encouraging the Heart: A Leader's Guide to Rewarding and Recognizing Others* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2003), 149.

²⁷⁶ Daniel Goleman, Richard E. Boyatzis, and Annie McKee, *Primal Leadership: Learning to Lead with Emotional Intelligence* (Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 2004), 20.

²⁷⁷ Ibid., 26-27.

²⁷⁸ Ibid., 55.

Resonance stems not just from leaders' good moods or ability to say the right thing, but also from whole sets of coordinated activities that comprise particular leadership styles. Typically, the best, most effective leaders act according to one or more of the six distinct approaches to leadership and skillfully switch between the various styles depending on the situation.

Four of these styles – visionary, coaching, affiliative, and democratic – create the kind of resonance that boost performance, while two others – pacesetting and commanding – although useful in some very specific situations, should be applied with caution.²⁷⁹

Goleman labels pacesetting and commanding as dissonant leadership styles because of their ability to generate dissonance when ineffectively applied.²⁸⁰ As leadership styles relate to change Fullan notes, “Authoritative [also called commanding] leaders need to recognize the weaknesses as well as the strengths in their approach. They need...to use all four of the successful leadership styles.”²⁸¹ Goleman writes, “Leaders who have mastered four or more – especially the resonance-building styles [authoritative, democratic, affiliative, and coaching] – foster the very best climate and business performance.”²⁸² Fullan observes,

The culture of change...is, by definition, rife with anxiety, stress, and ambiguity (and correspondingly with the exhilaration of creative breakthroughs). It should come as no surprise then that the most effective leaders are not the smartest in an IQ sense but are those who combine intellectual brilliance with emotional intelligence (EQ)...Underpinning the authoritative, affiliative, democratic, and coaching styles is high emotional intelligence. Low emotional intelligence is the hallmark of coercive and pacesetting leaders.²⁸³

²⁷⁹ Ibid., 53.

²⁸⁰ Ibid., 54.

²⁸¹ Fullan, *Leading in a Culture of Change*, 39-40.

²⁸² Goleman, et. al., *Primal Leadership*, 85.

²⁸³ Fullan, *Leading in a Culture of Change*, 71-72.

In *The Speed of Trust*, Stephen Covey states that trust is foundational to creating the kind of emotional resonance²⁸⁴ of which Goleman speaks. The leaders' ability to be in tune with the emotional climate of those they lead is correlated to trust. In their research, Kouzes and Posner found that the character trait most admired in leaders and looked for by those they lead is honesty.²⁸⁵ In *The Heart of Change* Kotter writes, "Honesty always trumps propaganda."²⁸⁶

Leaders' ability to be emotionally in tune with themselves and those they lead is essential but insufficient. Leaders must also be an enthusiastic communicator of the vision they are pursuing.

Enthusiastically Communicative

In Kouzes and Posner's research, they found honesty the most important characteristic in leaders by 85 percent of participants, but there were several additional desired characteristics identified. Seventy percent of participants found that the next most desired characteristic for leaders to possess was that they were forward-looking. This was followed immediately with a leader's ability to inspire, garnering 69 percent. Implicit in being forward-thinking and inspiring is the leader's ability to communicate powerfully where they are leading the organization. Kotter states, "Leadership needs to hold the primary responsibility for communication. There is no question there. It can't be assigned

²⁸⁴ Stephen M.R. Covey, *The SPEED of Trust: The One Thing That Changes Everything* (New York: Free Press, 2008).

²⁸⁵ Kouzes and Posner, *The Truth about Leadership*, 17.

²⁸⁶ Kotter and Cohen, *The Change of Heart*, 139.

to a communications staff. But we can help them by clearing the channels.”²⁸⁷ Fullan reinforces this when he writes,

Energetic-enthusiastic-hopeful leaders “cause” greater moral purpose in themselves, bury themselves in change, naturally build relationships and knowledge, and seek coherence to consolidate moral purpose... whatever the case, effective leaders make people feel that even the most difficult problems can be tackled productively. They are always hopeful – conveying a sense of optimism and an attitude of never giving up in the pursuit of highly valued goals. Their enthusiasm and confidence (not certainty) are, in a word, infectious, and they are infectiously effective,²⁸⁸

Kouzes and Posner identify the second of their five practices of exemplary leadership as inspiring a shared vision.²⁸⁹

The need for clear, effective, winsome communication cannot be overstated. In exploring why firms fail, Kotter identifies, “under communicating the vision by a factor of 10 (or 100 or even 1,000).”²⁹⁰ Leaders must learn to over communicate their message in a way that engages the mind and enlivens the heart.²⁹¹ Herrington and Bonem call communication, “an uninterrupted continuation of vision development.”²⁹² They say communicating the vision is

A comprehensive, intentional, and ongoing set of activities that are undertaken throughout the transformation process to make the vision clear to the congregation. The intent of the communication stage is to generate a high level of understanding and commitment to God’s vision for the congregation. Failure to effectively communicate the vision can

²⁸⁷ Ibid., 90.

²⁸⁸ Fullan, *Leading in a Culture of Change*, 7.

²⁸⁹ Kouzes and Posner, *The Leadership Challenge*, 26.

²⁹⁰ John P. Kotter, *Leading Change, With a New Preface by the Author* (Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 2012), 9.

²⁹¹ Kotter and Cohen, *The Heart of Change*, 7.

²⁹² Herrington and Bonem, *Leading Congregational Change*, 61.

temporarily stop or even permanently damage the entire transformation process.²⁹³

In *The Purpose Driven Church*, Rick Warren wisely states, “Vision and purpose must be restated every twenty-six days to keep the church moving in the right direction.”²⁹⁴ This restatement is one of the primary responsibilities of the senior leader. Senior leaders must be the biggest spokespeople and fan for the change they are leading.

This section has explored change theory by beginning with a definition of change theory. Identifying the five key component parts to any effective change followed. The last aspect explored the role the senior leader plays in the process. The final area of study that needs to be explored is systems theory.

Systems Theory

In Philip Douglass’s book, *What is Your Church’s Personality?* he explores the idea that churches are organic cultures, or systems, with a unique DNA.²⁹⁵ One might think that if a leader changes the culture that this will enable the change effort to take place with little effort. But Fullan writes,

In a change effort, culture comes last, not first...The logic is straightforward. If the culture is inward looking, risk averse, and slow, we’ll change that first. Then nearly any new vision can be implemented more easily. Sounds reasonable, but it doesn’t work that way. A culture truly changes only when a new way of operating has been shown to succeed over some minimum period of time. Trying to shift the norms and values before you have created the new way of operating does not work.²⁹⁶

²⁹³ Ibid., 62.

²⁹⁴ Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Church: Every Church Is Big in God’s Eyes* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1995), 111.

²⁹⁵ Douglass, *What Is Your Church's Personality?* 3.

²⁹⁶ Kotter and Cohen, *The Heart of Change*, 174.

Fullan shows that organizational culture plays an integral part in the change process.

Goleman states,

You can't ignore culture – and you can't hope to change it one leader at a time. By ignoring the big picture and focusing instead on developing leaders one by one...leadership fail[s] to bring about critically needed changes that would...[help]...organization[s to] succeed.²⁹⁷

The importance of culture cannot be underestimated. Steinke expresses this when he writes,

We must not neglect the power of the culture or “spirit” of a congregation...I...place more emphasis on the key role of “mood, tone, and spirit” in enhancing congregational health, not unlike what we’ve learned about the relationship between attitude and social connections and our health...I wonder if the “mood, tone, and spirit” of a congregation isn’t closely related to having a clear purpose, which in healthy congregations is a focus on mission. When life is meaningful, people have more energy – and hope.²⁹⁸

In Bowen Family Therapy, the concept that an organization, or institution, like the nuclear family, has a culture is referred to as systems theory. To begin this section with a definition of systems theory is helpful.

Systems Theory Defined

Herrington, Creech, and Taylor write, “Systems theory focuses on what man does and not on his verbal explanations about why he does it.”²⁹⁹ Steinke says,

System Theory is a way of conceptualizing reality. It organizes our thinking from a specific vantage point...Systems thinking deepens our understanding of life. We see it as a rich complexity of interdependent parts...To think systemically is to look at the ongoing, vital interaction of

²⁹⁷ Goleman, et. al., *Primal Leadership*, 232.

²⁹⁸ Steinke, *Healthy Congregations*, ix-x.

²⁹⁹ Herrington, et. al., *The Leader's Journey*, 29.

the connected parts. A favorite axiom of system proponents is “the whole is greater than the sum of its parts.”³⁰⁰

Steinke further explains,

Systems thinking is basically a way of thinking about life as all of a piece. It is a way of thinking about how the whole is arranged, how its parts interact, and how the relationships between the parts produce something new. A systems approach claims that any person or event stands in relationship to something. You cannot isolate anything and understand it. The parts function as they do because of the presence of the other parts. All parts interface and affect each other. Their behaviors are reciprocal to one another, mutually reinforcing. Thus change in one part produces change in another part, even in the whole. There is a “ripple” through the system.³⁰¹

Edwin Friedman adds that system thinking, “focuses less on content and more on the process that governs the data; less on the cause-and-effect connections that link bits of information and more on the principles of organization that give data meaning.”³⁰²

In the biblical literature review, two biblical images of the church—body and family—were explored. These images relate to systems theory. Ron Richardson uses another helpful image to describe the church. He likens the church to a mobile when he writes, “An alive, spirit-filled, well-functioning church, just like a mobile, allows people, like different parts of the mobile, to move closer together at one point and further apart at another.”³⁰³ This mobile is a living organization. Weese and Crabtree state this clearly when they write, “As a whole, the church is a living, breathing organism and experiences

³⁰⁰ Steinke, *How Your Church Family Works*, 3-4.

³⁰¹ Steinke, *Healthy Congregations*, 3.

³⁰² Friedman, *Generation to Generation*, 15.

³⁰³ Richardson, *Creating a Healthier Church*, 73.

all of the same emotions as an individual. At the same time, it is also an institution that experiences change at an organizational level as well.”³⁰⁴

Church as a Body

As was quoted earlier, Steinke explains, “Our bodies are systems composed of many organs (lungs, heart, liver, pancreas, etc.). Together or as a whole, the body is greater than any separate organ.”³⁰⁵ Talking about the church as a body is to speak of the church as an organism as well as an organization. In *Leading Change in the Congregation*, Gilbert Rendle writes that the congregation is an organism, “with interrelated and interconnected parts whose behavior is less causal than connected that naturally seeks balance or equilibrium and in which the parts and the whole interact.”³⁰⁶

Steinke similarly notes,

To talk about a healthy congregation is to talk about a congregation from an organic perspective. Only living systems are characterized by wellness or illness, soundness or injury, balance or disorder...thus health is the capacity for life, what an organism must do to persevere. Health is the ability of a living system to respond to a wide assortment of challenges to its integrity.³⁰⁷

When thinking about the church in organic terms, the literature provides a helpful definition of what it means for a church to be healthy. Steinke gives a comprehensive and robust definition of health when he writes,

Health is wholeness. Health means all the parts are working together to maintain balance. Health means all the parts are interacting to function as a whole. Health is a continuous process, the ongoing interplay of multiple

³⁰⁴ Weese and Crabtree, *The Elephant in the Boardroom*, 15.

³⁰⁵ Steinke, *How Your Church Family Works*, 4.

³⁰⁶ Gilbert R. Rendle, *Leading Change in the Congregation: Spiritual & Organizational Tools for Leaders* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2007), 55.

³⁰⁷ Steinke, *Healthy Congregations*, xii.

forces and conditions. Health is not the absence of disease. Health and disease are not opposites...Disease disrupts the body's balance. By doing so, disease provokes the healing capacities of the body to restore the very balance disease has disrupted.³⁰⁸

Steinke then identifies what he calls “ten principles of health,”³⁰⁹ stating that “A healthy congregation is one that actively and responsibly addresses or heals its disturbances, not one with an absence of troubles.”³¹⁰ This definition highlights the process nature of health. Steinke goes on to say, “Health is a process, not a thing or a state. It is ongoing, dynamic, and ever changing. Health is a direction, not a destination, a once-and-for-all property.”³¹¹ In the same way the human body is always fighting germs and bacteria in an effort to maintain health, so too is the church always fighting off infection. Steinke notes, “The immune function, determining what does or does not benefit the congregation, is the task of leadership. Good leadership provides good immune functioning...Similarly, healthy congregations develop an immune system. They do not permit pathogens to inflict harm on the community.”³¹²

Church as Family

In addition to speaking of the church as a body, the scriptures talk about it as a family. As it relates to systems theory, people's family of origin plays a major role in how they act and why. Rob Richardson observes that,

Whatever aspect of ministry we are engaged in, family systems theory understands that we are inevitably involved, at many levels, in the

³⁰⁸ Ibid., xi-xii.

³⁰⁹ Ibid., 15.

³¹⁰ Ibid., 13.

³¹¹ Ibid., 27.

³¹² Ibid., 96.

emotional systems of all the people we work with, and that this involvement must – most essentially – include our own emotional system.³¹³

Herrington, Creech and Taylor note, “Bowen observed that when we leave the family of origin and find a spouse, we are likely to marry a person whose degree of emotional maturity matches our own.”³¹⁴ They elaborate, saying, “The family is the fire in which our level of emotional maturity is forged...Since we learn from our family how to relate, we carry these same behaviors directly into the work system and congregation of which we are part. So does everyone else who is part of the system.”³¹⁵

A person’s family of origin wires their emotional electrical system. As Herrington, Creech, and Taylor observe,

A family operates in a pattern consistent with a few observable principles. Since we learn from our family how to relate, we carry these same behaviors directly into the work system and congregation of which we are part. So does everyone else who is part of the system. Understanding these principles and developing a capacity to observe them in action is an important first step.³¹⁶

In light of this truth, the church is the confluence of multiple family systems, with varying degrees of emotional maturity. Ron Richardson rightly states,

Very little attention has been paid to how our emotional system, our level of emotional health, and our unresolved attachment with family affect our ministry...Health means specifically the degree of emotional well-being and the level of emotional maturity that allows pastors to engage in the relational aspects of ministry more competently. It is how well pastors can manage themselves while actively relating to church members, especially

³¹³ Ronald W. Richardson, *Becoming a Healthier Pastor: Creative Pastoral Care and Counseling* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004), 3.

³¹⁴ Herrington, et. al., *The Leader’s Journey*, 34.

³¹⁵ Ibid.

³¹⁶ Ibid.

during times of higher anxiety, so that the goals of ministry can be fulfilled.³¹⁷

This highlights that one of the great challenges for the leader of any system is to elevate the emotional health of the system, which is the next area of focus. In order to do this, leaders must be conscious of their part in the system, the role anxiety plays, and the power of triangulation. Each of these will be explored separately.

The Differentiated Leader

In *Leading Through Conflict*, Mark Gerzon identifies systems thinking as the second tool leaders need in order to think, “about *all* the pieces to the puzzle.”³¹⁸ In the literature review of change theory, the authors of *The Leader’s Journey* were quoted as saying, “Whenever you engage in a relationship that is long-term, intense, and significant, you become emotionally connected to one another in a living system.”³¹⁹ Steinke says, “Congregational leaders are the key stewards of the congregation as a unit in itself. They, by virtue of their positions in the system, can most promote congregational health.”³²⁰ For this reason, it is critical that a leader remain a non-reactive or a non-anxious presence within the system. Steinke warns, “Reactivity suspends, corrupts, or inhibits community – even if prayer opens and closes a meeting.”³²¹

³¹⁷ Richardson, *Becoming a Healthier Pastor*, 3-4.

³¹⁸ Mark Gerzon, *Leading Through Conflict: How Successful Leaders Transform Differences into Opportunities* (Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 2006), 53.

³¹⁹ Herrington, et. al., *The Leader’s Journey*, 29.

³²⁰ Steinke, *Healthy Congregations*, 28.

³²¹ *Ibid.*, 92.

In order to function this way, the leader must remain well-differentiated.³²²

Differentiation has already been discussed but a more lengthy examination of it is necessary at this point as it is key to system theory thinking. In *How Your Church Family Works*, Steinke says, “Self-differentiation means ‘being separate together’ or ‘being connected selves.’ It is a life-long learning process, never attained, and always tested. Self-differentiation never happens in isolation. It requires other people.”³²³ Brene Brown simply says, “When we stop caring what people think, we lose our capacity for connection. But when we are defined by what people think, we lose the courage to be vulnerable.”³²⁴ Steinke expands on differentiation, writing,

Self-differentiation in emotional processes refers to the amount of self-available to an individual, such as an individual’s overall maturity, level of functioning, and the degree of responsibility for self. It is the capacity to choose a course of direction and to stay the course when reactive people want to reroute you. It is the ability to stay focused on your own functioning while being aware of others. Self-differentiation is the ability to stand up and be counted in matters of principle and belief and yet remain with family and community. It is the ability in anxious circumstances to regulate one’s own reactivity by thinking. Differentiation is to take a position in the midst of emotional forces and still remain in touch with others. In an emotional system, the leader’s self-differentiating capacities greatly influence the entire organization.”³²⁵

Herrington, Creech, and Taylor define differentiation as, “the ability to remain connected in relationship to significant people in our lives and yet not have our reactions and

³²² Friedman, *Failure of Nerve*.

³²³ Steinke, *How Your Church Family Works*, 12.

³²⁴ Brown, *Rising Strong*, 245.

³²⁵ Steinke, *Healthy Congregations*, 102.

behavior determined by them.”³²⁶ When discussing the concept of differentiation, Burns, Chapman, and Guthrie observe,

When we talked about this idea, most pastors admitted that it is easier to talk about it than to do it.

Differentiation is a tricky concept for pastors who genuinely want to care for others...the self-care management of emotions requires an ability to have what used to be called an attitude of *disinterest*. This doesn't mean a lack of care and concern (*uninterested*); rather, it means the capacity to be engaged (interested) without being absorbed or aligned with the interest. This is differentiation.³²⁷

Edwin Freedman honestly writes,

Differentiation is the lifelong process of striving to keep one's being in balance through the reciprocal external and internal processes of self-definition and self-regulation. It is a concept that can sometimes be difficult to focus on objectively, for differentiation means the capacity to become oneself out of one's self, with minimum reactivity to the positions or reactivity of others. Differentiation is charting one's own way by means of one's own internal guidance system rather than perpetually eyeing the “scope” to see where others are at. Differentiation refers more to a process than a goal that can ever be achieved. When people say, “I differentiate from my wife, my child, my parent,” that proves they do not understand the concept.³²⁸

When leaders do not practice differentiation, Herrington, Creech, and Taylor warn that they may become enmeshed with or distant from members of the system,

Leaders struggle with finding a way to disengage the system sufficiently to foster their own personal health and growth, without cutting off from the congregation the person is called to lead. The challenge is always to stay in the system yet do the right thing. 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

³²⁶ Herrington, et. al., *The Leader's Journey*, 18.

³²⁷ Burns, et. al., *Resilient Ministry*, 74.

³²⁸ Friedman, *A Failure of Nerve*, 183.

with the leader or the majority, and to remain a calm presence when the anxiety rises.³²⁹

In wrestling with the idea of differentiation, the literature uses terms like enmeshing, fusing, closeness, distancing, and separateness. Ron Richardson observes, “Fusion and differentiation are not the same as togetherness and individuality, nor are they the same as emotional closeness and distance. Fusion and differentiation are about emotional process in relationships.”³³⁰ Herrington, Creech, and Taylor state,

Understanding how people are enmeshed in a living system and how it affects both our congregation and us is vital to transformational leadership. The reason for this is simple: *leadership always takes place in the context of a living system, and the system plays by a set of observable rules*. If we are to lead in that context, we need to understand the rules.³³¹

Steinke supports their findings on the difficulty of remaining well-differentiated when he says, “The tension between separateness and closeness – are endless. Murray Bowen introduced the term self-differentiation to depict the capacity of maintaining the two forces in balance.”³³² Steinke then sums up these two challenges this way,

In relationship systems, two equal dangers exist. We can succumb to the distancing principle or the dissolving principle. The distancing threat, for example, is insisting on having one’s way (1 Corinthians 13:5). The relationship is hindered. People are cut off from one another. The dissolving threat is to fuse with another, forcing the other to be like oneself.³³³

³²⁹ Herrington, et. al., *The Leader’s Journey*, 46.

³³⁰ Richardson, *Creating a Healthier Church*, 81.

³³¹ Herrington, et. al., *The Leader’s Journey*, 30.

³³² Steinke, *How Your Church Family Works*, 12.

³³³ Steinke, *Healthy Congregations*, 90.

In *Generation to Generation*, Edwin Friedman sums up the dance of differentiation as, “The trick...is to be able to differentiate self and still remain in touch.”³³⁴ Leaders’ ability to know themselves and navigate between the Scylla and Charybdis of distancing and enmeshing is key to systemic health. It is what enables leaders to control the emotional temperature, or anxiety, in a system. This is the next concept to explore.

The Non-Anxious Leader

Anxiety rises and falls within congregational systems. Edwin Freeman identifies the five characteristics of anxious systems as: reactivity, herding, blame displacement, quick-fix mentality, and a lack of well-differentiated leadership.³³⁵ In the literature, anxiety within a system is defined as, “our response to threat, whether real or perceived. The response is physiological; it is chemical...this capacity has been hardwired into our brains and bodies by our Creator.”³³⁶ Herrington, Creech, and Taylor emphasize the importance of leaders being able to think systems as it relates to anxiety. They state,

To think in a different way about how people in a living system affect each other. This way of thinking requires learning to recognize how anxiety holds chronic symptoms in place, and how each person in the system has a role to play in keeping things in balance. This is called thinking systems (that is, thinking from a systems point of view). It requires the leader to surrender the thoroughly ingrained tendency to accept cause-and-effect thinking, diagnosing people, and place blame. Leaders often work in just this way, identifying the problem as “out there”- in the external environment or in the behavior of people within the organization. This kind of linear, cause-and-effect thinking keeps them

³³⁴ Friedman, *Generation to Generation*, 229.

³³⁵ Friedman, *A Failure of Nerve*, 54.

³³⁶ Herrington, et. al., *The Leader’s Journey*, 35.

from seeing their own part and leaves them virtually powerless to effect change, since changing others is ultimately impossible.³³⁷

They go onto to describe two types of anxiety, one is acute and the other chronic, “Acute anxiety is our reaction to a threat that is real and time-limited...with chronic anxiety, the threat is imagined or distorted, rather than real. Consequently, it is not time-limited; it does not simply go away.”³³⁸ They go onto to write,

When chronic anxiety permeates the system, the push towards togetherness discourages dissent. Feelings become more important to the group than ideas. The system consistently chooses peace over progress, comfort over experimentation, and the security of the port over the adventure of the open seas. Black-and-white, all-or-nothing thinking marks the system. The overall effect of this togetherness is to create a vicious cycle...increased anxiety produces increased reactivity, which leads to increased herding, resulting in increased anxiety, and so on. In an anxious system, the herding instinct takes over.³³⁹

The reason anxiety does not simply go away is because people are emotionally wired together. Herrington, Creech, and Taylor observe,

We are emotionally wired together in systems such that we react to one another, often without even being aware that we are doing so...we can observe human wired-togetherness in a family, workplace, or church. When anxiety rises, we become rather predictable. Our thinking becomes less clear and more reactive...In a living system, whenever a problem is chronic, just about everyone has a part to play in keeping it going.³⁴⁰

It is important to understand that the goal is to respond to anxiety in the healthiest way, not to eliminate it from the system, which is impossible. Learning to identify a rise in anxiety and respond, rather than becoming reactive, is key. Herrington, Creech, and

³³⁷ Ibid., 50.

³³⁸ Ibid., 35.

³³⁹ Ibid., 63.

³⁴⁰ Ibid., 31.

Taylor note that, “the word serious is heard a lot in an anxious system. An anxious system is highly reactive.”³⁴¹

Reactivity can be detected when there is an absence of play and joy in the system. Steinke goes on to liken the leader’s response to anxiety to the immune systems response to infection. He writes,

In a congregation, reactivity may take the form of compliance or rebellion, attack or withdrawal, tantrums or apathy. The type of virus is essentially unimportant. What counts is the immune response – clear convictions leading to thought-out positions, specific goals guiding decisions. *If leaders are as anxious and reactive as the people they serve, those served will not be served well.*³⁴²

In conclusion, Herrington, Creech, and Taylor rightly state,

According to systems theory, two variables work in tandem in every emotional system, governing its function. One is the level of emotional maturity of the people in the system and of the leadership in particular. The other is the level of anxiety and tension to which the system is subject. The greater the level of emotional maturity in a system, the better equipped it is to handle a spike in the level of anxiety when one comes. The higher the level of emotional maturity, the lower the level of constant and chronic anxiety.³⁴³

The Bowen Center strikes a hopeful note when they state,

When any key member of an emotional system can control his own emotional reactivity and accurately observe the functioning of the system and his part in it, and he can avoid counter-attacking when he is provoked, and when he can maintain an active relationship with the other key members without withdrawing or becoming silent, the entire system will change.³⁴⁴

³⁴¹ Ibid., 63.

³⁴² Steinke, *Healthy Congregations*, 102.

³⁴³ Herrington, et. al., *The Leader’s Journey*, 33.

³⁴⁴ The Bowen Center, “The Bowen Center - Training - Postgraduate Program,” thebowencenter.org, accessed September 18, 2014, <https://www.thebowencenter.org/pages/postgradprog.html>.

A review of the literature on the topics of differentiation and anxiety reveals some of the complexity of systems theory. A third and final aspect of systems theory which is critical to systemic health is the concept of triangulation.

Triangulation

Within a system, one of the most common reactions to anxiety or change is the triangulation of emotional relationships. Ron Richardson writes in *Creating a Healthier Church*, “The concept of the triangle is one of the most important contributions of systems theory.”³⁴⁵ In *Becoming a Healthier Pastor*, he goes on to define triangles as, “the basic molecules of emotional systems. Organized around a family’s emotional sensitivities, they are always present...they are the way people in systems attempt to get a better level of emotional safety. Over time they become automatically repetitive or fixed, and...patterns become predictable.”³⁴⁶ While Peter Steinke identifies triangulation as one of the four viruses related to anxiety,³⁴⁷ the authors of *The Leader’s Journey* note, “triangles, like anxiety or the togetherness force, are an aspect of human behavior that is neither good nor bad. They just are. Triangles are in themselves neutral; they exist as a part of human behavior.”³⁴⁸ Triangles are a fundamental part of what it means to be relational beings.

Learning to understand how triangles work is a bit more challenging. For example, in *Generation to Generation*, Edwin Friedman identifies seven laws that govern

³⁴⁵ Richardson, *Creating a Healthier Church*, 115.

³⁴⁶ Ibid., 97.

³⁴⁷ Steinke, *Healthy Congregations*, 61.

³⁴⁸ Herrington, et. al., *The Leader’s Journey*, 53.

all emotional triangles³⁴⁹ while in *Failure of Nerve* he identifies five.³⁵⁰ What is clear, however, is who is most impacted by triangles. Steinke observes, “The individuals in any system who are most likely to be triangulated are those who are in the responsible or vulnerable position.”³⁵¹ In a congregational system, this is most often the senior leader. Friedman emphasizes this point when he writes,

For leaders, the capacity to understand and think in terms of emotional triangles can be the key to their stress, their health, their effectiveness, and their relational binds. Almost every issue of leadership and the difficulties that accompany it can be framed in terms of emotional triangles, including motivation, clarity, decision-making, resistance to change, imaginative gridlock, and a failure of nerve.

Emotional triangles thus have both negative and positive effects on leaders. Their negative aspect is that they perpetuate treadmills, reduce clarity, distort perceptions, inhibit decisiveness, and transmit stress. But their positive aspect is that when a leader can begin to think in terms of emotional triangles and map out in his or her mind (or even better, on paper) diagrams of the family or organization, such analysis can help explain alliances and the difficulties being encountered in motivation or learning.³⁵²

Triangles become a way for leaders to think about relationships within the organization and especially the leadership team. Because triangles are opposed to change,³⁵³ thinking systems and watching process³⁵⁴ are critical to any congregational change.

³⁴⁹ Friedman, *Generation to Generation*, 36–39.

³⁵⁰ Friedman, *A Failure of Nerve*, 2007, 206.

³⁵¹ Steinke, *How Your Church Family Works*, 54.

³⁵² Friedman, *A Failure of Nerve*, 206.

³⁵³ Steinke, *How Your Church Family Works*, 56.

³⁵⁴ Herrington, et. al., *The Leader's Journey*, 49.

In this review of systems theory, a definition was given followed by a brief review of understanding the church as both a body and a family. The last area explored was leaders' role in systems theory and their ability to remain well differentiated, to deal with anxiety within the system, and to be conscious of triangulated relationships.

Summary of Literature Review

In this chapter's literature review, one can see how change theory and systems theory are critical in a church leader's ability to move a congregation to systemic gospel health. By exploring a biblical definition for gospel health, one observes how much change must take place within individuals as well as the system itself. The study of change theory gives a road map to what senior leaders must do in order to move a congregation toward systemic gospel health. Finally, the biblical images of the church as a family and body help frame the study of systems theory as it relates to the church. This review identified several key concepts that profoundly affect any change effort by the senior leader.

The next chapter will provide a description of the study method that was used to conduct this research. It will give a description of the way the participants were chosen as well as the demographics of the congregations where they serve. Finally, the next chapter will address the way the data was gathered and analyzed.

Chapter Three

Methodology

The purpose of this study is to explore how senior pastors can deliberately move the congregation toward systemic gospel health. In order to do this, a qualitative research method will be used, since qualitative research focuses on “understanding the meaning people have constructed...how people make sense of their world and the experiences they have in the world.”³⁵⁵ It is the ideal research method to use for this study. The study’s purpose was explored through the following three research questions:

1. How do senior pastors describe systemic health?
2. What does the pastor believe to be some of the unique challenges that hinder systemic health?
3. How do senior pastors cultivate systemic health within their congregations?

Design of the Study

In order to explore the experience senior pastors had as they sought to move their congregations toward systemic gospel health, an interpretive comparative qualitative case study method was used. Sharan Merriam writes, “Qualitative researchers are interested in understanding how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences.”³⁵⁶ In order to explore how senior pastors deliberately move the congregation toward systemic gospel health, the researcher

³⁵⁵ Sharan B. Merriam, *Qualitative Research: A Guide to Design and Implementation*, 3rd ed. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2009), 13.

³⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 5.

asked pastors to reflect on their experience. In Sharan Merriam's book, *Qualitative Research*, she notes, "Qualitative research is a means of answering questions so you must first look with a questioning eye to what is happening."³⁵⁷ This method is designed to understand the point of view of pastors as they reflect on and evaluate the part they play in moving their congregation toward systemic gospel health.

The goal of qualitative research is to acquire a greater depth of understanding through analyzing the data gathered through observation and interviews. Merriam wrote that qualitative research seeks to "understand situations in their uniqueness as part of a particular context and the interactions there. This understanding is an end in itself...to understand the nature of that setting."³⁵⁸

The qualitative research approach will be used as opposed to another approach, such as the quantitative research model. Merriam writes, "Data conveyed through words have been labeled qualitative, whereas data presented in number form are quantitative. Qualitative data consists of 'direct quotations from people about their experiences, opinions, feelings, and knowledge' obtained through interviews."³⁵⁹ Because qualitative research is inductive, placing a heavy emphasis on "experience, understanding, and meaning making,"³⁶⁰ it leads to deeper understanding. The characteristics of qualitative research have been delineated as, "focus[ing] on understanding the meaning of

³⁵⁷ Ibid., 17.

³⁵⁸ Ibid.

³⁵⁹ Ibid.

³⁶⁰ Ibid.

experience, the researcher as the primary instrument of data collection and analysis...the process is inductive and rich description characterizes the end product."³⁶¹

A qualitative research model is the appropriate model for exploring how senior pastors can move their congregation towards systemic gospel health. Specifically, the multisite case study method will be used. A case study can be defined as, "an in-depth description and analysis of a bounded system...a single entity, a unit around which there are boundaries."³⁶² The benefit of using a case study method is the "bounded" nature of study by which the researcher, "can 'fence in' what [she is] going to study."³⁶³ Merriam notes, "Qualitative case study is valued for its ability to capture complex action, perception, and interpretation."³⁶⁴ She continues,

Determining when to use a case study as opposed to some other research design depends upon what the researcher wants to know...for 'how' and 'why' questions the case study has a distinct advantage...because qualitative case studies are particularistic, descriptive, and heuristic, a researcher might choose this approach to illuminate a phenomenon.³⁶⁵

In the current research, the phenomenon is systemic gospel health.

By using the multisite case study method, the researcher was able to construct a portrait of each congregation and "readers can learn vicariously from an encounter with the case through the researcher's narrative description (Stake, 2005)."³⁶⁶ As Merriam

³⁶¹ Ibid., 19.

³⁶² Ibid., 40.

³⁶³ Ibid.

³⁶⁴ Ibid., 44.

³⁶⁵ Ibid., 45.

³⁶⁶ Ibid., 51.

observes, “The individual cases share a common characteristic or condition. The cases in the collection are somehow categorically bound together.”³⁶⁷ As result, cross-case analysis between the cases enabled the researcher to find common principles used by both pastors.

In using interviews, the pastors were able to articulate what they found both effective and ineffective in moving their congregation toward systemic gospel health. Their experiences help bring greater clarity to where the church can improve and build on those actions that have proved fruitful. By interviewing other staff, spouses, and lay leaders, the researcher gained a multi-textured description from several vantage points. The richly descriptive answers given by interviewees give fullness to the research that a quantitative method would not accomplish. Quantitative studies lose some of the rich, holistic aspects of the data and as a result, devalue this research project. As Merriam writes, “Words and pictures rather than numbers are used to convey what the researcher has learned...these contribute to the descriptive nature of qualitative research.”³⁶⁸

Though a deductive and statistical approach is well suited for a quantitative research method, it is less effective in mining all the valuable data gained in this project. The complexity of leading a congregation toward systemic gospel health has many active components. This makes using an inductive mode of analysis ideal for this kind of research. In qualitative research, The researcher is seeking to “gather data to build concepts, hypothesis, or theories rather than deductively testing hypothesis.”³⁶⁹ To this

³⁶⁷ Ibid., 49.

³⁶⁸ Ibid.

³⁶⁹ Ibid.

end, the qualitative model fit the research needs best, and therefore is the model to use for this project.

Participant Sample Selection

For this project, the researcher will examine two different churches or cases. The reason they were chosen is because in both cases, the senior pastor deliberately led the congregation toward systemic gospel health over the course of several years. Both put into action a clearly thought out plan for creating systemic gospel health. In one case, after conducting ministry in a less healthy way for several years, the senior pastor deliberately set out to create a healthy gospel culture. In the other case, the pastor came to an existing church which had become unhealthy, and he led it towards greater gospel health. In the first case, three individuals were interviewed while in the second case, five interviews were conducted. At the second church, the senior pastor, his spouse, a staff member, a lay leader, and a congregant—all of whom were present throughout the change process—were interviewed. This allowed the researcher to see the change from the primary perspectives in each case.: from the vantage point of those closest to the process, spouse and staff member, as well as those who experienced the change in their capacity of leading a particular ministry area. Finally, by interviewing a congregant who experienced the process of change moving towards systemic gospel health the researcher gets the best bird's eye view of the process.

The two case churches have varied demographics. One is set in an urban context in a large city in the Northeast. It was planted within the last twenty-five years and has only had one senior pastor. Among the congregation, there are multiple ethnic groups present and several foreign languages spoken. The second church was started forty years

ago and had two pastors prior to the pastor interviewed for this project. The church is situated in an affluent suburban community in the Midwest, and the congregation is fairly homogeneous. The two congregations share a common evangelical faith but come from very different theological traditions and denominations. By choosing two fairly diverse cases, the researcher can identify principles that transcend theological convictions as well as ethnic, cultural, economic, and sociological issues like income level, location, and education. Finally, the size of the congregations vary because the researcher believes that gospel health is not contingent on a particular church size or threshold.

Data Collection

There were a total of eight interviews conducted. In the first case, each interview was done on-site, in-person, and over the course of several days. In the second case, weather prevented traveling to conduct the interviews in person. As a result, all but one interview was conducted via FaceTime. Though the researcher was unable to conduct the interviews in person, he was able to benefit from seeing facial expressions and body language during this interviews. The last interview was done over the phone. Each interview was approximately one hour in length and was recorded with a digital voice recorder in a comfortable private setting on the church campus.

In gathering the data, the researcher used the semi-structured interview protocol. There are generally three types of interview structures recognized in the field of qualitative research. They are highly structured, semi-structured and informal. The semi-structured type was chosen for this research project because it gives more freedom to the researcher to direct the interview and gain further relevant data rather than the highly-structured or formal type which is generally used in job interviews or filling out

marketing surveys. The semi-structured protocol gives focus and direction to the interview while also allowing for more spontaneous follow-up questions. The informal or unstructured protocol, though more conversational, would have been difficult to use to answer the specific research questions for this study.

Using the research questions to guide these discussions, the interviewees reflected on their understanding of systemic gospel health, what they believed hinders it, and how the senior pastor has sought to move the congregation towards systemic gospel health. The semi-structured protocol allowed both the interviewer and the interviewee the opportunity to better understand their experiences and express their perspective.

Data Analysis

Once the eight interviews were conducted using a portable digital recorder, the data was transcribed using Dragon Dictate software. Once the data was transcribed, the constant comparative method was used to analyze the data and develop a theory as it unfolded. 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 overall object of this analysis is to identify patterns in the data.”³⁷⁰ Each interview was compared first to the other interviews from their case and then to those of the other case. Points of continuity and variance were noted and common ideas were highlighted while common themes as well as unifying results were recorded.

Once the data was cross-examined, it was then coded and verified. The effectiveness of this approach to data analysis is contingent on the researcher's

³⁷⁰ Ibid., 30.

knowledge of the data and his ability to understand and evaluate the participant's experience. Merriam states that the goal of analyzing the data using the constant comparative method is, "to seek patterns in the data."³⁷¹

Researcher Position

There are several areas of biases that affect the research stance in this project, either hindering or helping the research. Merriam notes, "case studies are limited...by the sensitivity and integrity of the investigator...[who] is left to rely on his or her own instincts and abilities throughout most of this research effort."³⁷² The first bias is that the researcher is a pastor and has served for over fifteen years within the denomination from which one of the case studies is found. In addition, the researcher shares the evangelical convictions of both cases. As a result, the project is written from the perspective of an insider attempting to critically understand the system of which he is a part. Third, the researcher is currently serving a church that is in the process of moving towards greater systemic health. This makes it difficult for him to be objective when interviewing the participants and allowing their stories to be heard rather than reading his story into theirs. Finally, the researcher has committed his life and energy to vocational ministry in the local church. For that reason, he is predisposed to want the church to successfully engage the great commission. This hinders his ability to objectively assess whether or not the cases are modeling gospel health.

Of course, there are also many benefits to being an insider. As an insider, the researcher understands much of what the leaders are trying to see happen within their

³⁷¹ Ibid., 18.

³⁷² Ibid., 52.

respective congregations. He understands, in a general way, what they are trying to model and where they are trying to move their congregation. As an insider, the researcher is acutely aware of the joys and challenges of leading congregational change. The process is one which ebbs and flows, changing week by week. Finally, because the researcher is an insider, there is a depth of passion for this topic that leads to a desire to dig deeply in order to apply his findings within his own context.

Study Limitations

Due to limited time and resources, only eight participants will be interviewed for this project. Though the researcher has attempted to interview participants from the major perspectives, it is not an exhaustive list. In using the case study method, the scope is narrowed greatly, making it difficult to overgeneralize the findings. The two churches that were selected are both over 750 members, possibly making some of the findings difficult to transfer to smaller congregations. Since both cases are churches, the findings will be limited to leading a local congregation. Though there are many leadership principles that are transferable across vocations, readers must critically evaluate whether the conclusions reached from this research would be transferable to their particular context outside the church.

In addition to the limitations of the research itself, some of the limitations relate to using the multisite case study method. Merriam identifies and responds to five misunderstandings about case studies,

1. General knowledge is more valuable than context-specific knowledge.
2. One can't generalize from a single case so a single case doesn't add to scientific development.
3. The case study is most useful in the first phase of a research process; used for generating hypotheses.

4. The case study confirms the researcher's preconceived notions.
5. It is difficult to summarize case studies into general propositions and theories.

In response to these charges she offered the following restatements:

1. Universals can't be found in the study of human affairs. Context-dependent knowledge is more valuable.
2. Formal generalization is overvalued as a source of scientific development; the force of a single example is underestimated.
3. The case study is useful for both generating and testing of hypotheses but is not limited to these activities.
4. There is not greater bias in case study toward confirming preconceived notions than in other forms of research.
5. Difficulty in summarizing case studies is due to properties of the reality studied, not the research method.³⁷³

This chapter described the methodology that was used in this interpretive comparative qualitative case study approach of how a senior pastor deliberately moves their congregation toward systemic gospel health. The design of the study, including sample selection, data collection, and data analysis methods were outlined. In addition, the position of the researcher with his biases and the limitations of the study were identified.

The next chapter will explore the senior pastors in the two cases described the process of moving their congregation toward systemic gospel health. The interview data will be analyzed for patterns and themes designed to answer the research questions of chapter one.

³⁷³ Ibid., 53.

Chapter Four

Findings

This study was designed to explore how senior pastors can deliberately move the congregation toward systemic gospel health. Interviews were conducted with the research subjects from two congregations that met the criteria outlined in Chapter Three. The study's purpose was explored through the following three research questions:

4. How do senior pastors describe systemic health?
5. What does the pastor believe to be some of the unique challenges that hinder systemic health?
6. How do senior pastors cultivate systemic health within their congregations?

The following chapter outlines the data collected through the interviews with participants in Pastor John's and Pastor Steve's churches. Pastor John leads a congregation located in a suburban community, and Pastor Steve serves a congregation located in an urban context. All names and identifies details have been changed to protect the participants' identities.

Defining Systemic Health

The first research question deals with how the senior pastor understands the systemic nature of congregations as well as what it means for a congregation to become a healthy system. A staff member who worked with Pastor John captured the systemic nature of congregations,

A lot of times we think about a church as being just what's being taught on Sunday morning from the pulpit. And that's certainly really significant. That's...when we're thinking about a church. We're like, "I go that

church. It's Pastor John's church, and he's a good preacher."...But a church, really to be a church...is so many other aspects and so many important parts...It's the tenor of the conversations after the service, before the service. It's the way that the church greets new people. It's the attitude that the church has towards its community. All those things are part of it. It's what's being taught with the children. Are we teaching them moralistic gospel? Children, do this, don't do that. That kind of thing. [The church is] greater than themselves...and what you teach the kids. [It's] systemic, it's...the ethos, as Phil Douglas... talk[s] about [in his book *What is Your Church's Personality?*]

A lay leader who has served with Pastor John for over twenty years said,

The word "systemic" has come to mean some different things than it meant in my earlier days when I was at MIT...systemically, and "gospel" linked together – sort of linked – I think what motivates it has to be placed at the Holy Spirit's end, Who He has given – Who God has given to His own, and the outworking of that Spirit within the people produces gospel both spoken and lived...God has blessed the church with wonderful preaching and relatively peaceful process, and it's a happy church. And lot of that's due to Pastor John and his leadership.

This staff member and lay leader captured the idea that a congregation is a system that has its own personality. A congregation has a unique temperament that both shapes the leadership and the senior leader shapes.

When asked to define "gospel health," Pastor Steve quickly admitted, "I find it a very loaded term." When asked to define systemic health, he used five areas of emphasis to provide a full and textured definition. He described them as, "Slow-down spirituality...integrity in leadership...beneath the surface discipleship...emotionally healthy skills and our theology of marriage and singleness." Pastor John had a more expansive definition of systemic health. He said,

The simplest way I can describe it is...living for Christ so that others might live – it's a broader life in Christ. It's experienced in three fundamental aspects: grace, connection, and calling. And for me, the way I look at the church is the macro – wider church – is really the same as how I look at myself. In other words...the way I wanted to see the church become was the kind of place and community where people had received

the resources and the relationships to be transformed from a baby so to speak – a seeker to someone who’s a multiplier.

The majority of those interviewed talked about health as a process to participate in rather than a goal to be attained. Central to this process is the ongoing nature of seeking health. In evaluating where the church had moved over his tenure, Pastor John said, “[In the beginning] I ended all hard conversations because in the first part [of my pastorate]...all we had was hard conversations that were unhealthy. So I kind of made [being nice]...our only [church] value... [Now] I’ve got to be a little more intentional... [To] have hard conversations.” A lay leader at the church where Pastor John serves stated,

I think, health is never losing sight of how you still need to grow. It’s great to have an appreciation for how you have grown, but you don’t want to get complacent because there’s a lot of future growth still to be pursued until the day we die. But trying to keep that in the forefront, not as a way of beating yourself up, but as saying, “What’s the next challenge that the Lord has given us to take on so that we can grow even healthier?”

Another pastor on staff with Pastor John described the process as turning dials. As the congregation is growing more healthy he said, “It seems like now things are a lot more complicated. It takes a lot more – to make a change, you have to do a lot more – you have to change a lot of things in order to bring about the change...I think we need to continue to focus on relationship, like people matter and connection is important.” These comments point to how health is not a destination to which a congregation arrives but rather an ongoing process which is never complete. Agreeing, Pastor John commented on handing leadership of the congregation onto the next generation, saying, “The generational thing is big to us. We’re trying to figure out...how you’re going to transition

from Boomer leadership...to the next.” No system “arrives” at health, it can only grow healthier.

The participants who are connected to the congregation where Pastor Steve serves spoke of changes in process terms also, though the church is a very different demographic. Pastor Steve said, “It was always an invitation. I said, ‘We’re all on a journey.’...It has been a 17 year journey [now].” A staff member who has served with Pastor Steve from the beginning of the church’s life, described the beginning of their journey toward gospel health as, “A five to seven year process of trying to change the culture...Pastor Steve did come back and say, ‘I’m not sure that I still fit in this culture. But this is what I’m going to do. This is how I’m going to lead. So we need to figure it out.’ It took five to seven years.”

That same staff member currently oversees several younger staff members who have been at the church less than five years. His work with them has reinforced his understanding of the ongoing process of growing healthier. In talking about learning to apply basic principles of gospel health, which he referred to as “big rocks,” he has been reminded that many times these “big rocks” have to be revisited. He said,

The thing is, you never get the big rocks. You think you do, but you don’t...I meet with several of the staff. Some guys have been on staff a couple years now, and...When you sign on and say you’re going to be a staff, you have a staff Rule of Life. One of the key things is knowing yourself, knowing your own passions, and do those passions line up with the needs that we have here in our ministry so that you’re serving out of your passion. And also [that] you develop healthy rhythms, weekly rhythms like Sabbath and rest, and a number of the guys that I’m talking to haven’t done that yet. I’m like, I thought we took this...rock...And now we’re back. Oh, we didn’t take this rock...you don’t arrive, and I think one of our challenges now is to continue to be very clear with, if you are on staff, you have embraced these practices.

As a system seeks to grow healthier, it is constantly revisiting foundational principles to ensure that individuals are applying what they have already been taught. In a healthy system, there are always areas, new and old, in which people need to grow and change.

The research clearly outlines how the senior leader's integrity is critical to creating a healthy system. As quoted earlier, Pastor Steve identified "integrity" as one of the five components of systemic gospel health. In talking about his own story he said,

I had to get my life in order. I had to get new ways of rhythms...I had to make some major shifts. I stopped doing a bunch of things but focused on others. And I was leading out of my own journey. So I was inviting people to go on a journey [with me]...You can only take them where you've gone.

Similarly, Pastor John said, "The way I look at the church is...the same as how I look at myself." Mark articulated how Pastor John's health has affected his ongoing, personal growth, "I have seen...him [Pastor John] grow in the Lord since he's been here...and I have to put that as a highlight...how he has infused the church with a desire to share with others their life-precious faith hoping that they come to the same life-precious faith." Because of this connection, the integrity of senior leaders is essential to their ability to lead a congregation toward health.

From the interviews, there were three areas that most powerfully reflected the senior leader's pursuit of personal integrity: self-understanding, marriage health, and a humble posture. Each will be explored separately.

Knowing Oneself

In Bradberry and Greaves' *Emotional Intelligence 2.0*, they identify self-awareness as one of the four primary emotional intelligence (EQ) competencies. Becoming self-aware goes far beyond an awareness of one's external person. Self-

awareness is about having a deep understanding of one's self and senior leaders' ability to know themselves is essential for systemic gospel health. As Pastor Steve said, "I'm on this journey. The staff are with me, I think, as much as possible. I'm doing therapy. I'm doing a lot of work...I'm on a deep, inward journey, out of which I'm leading. I felt called by God to stay here."

This journey resulted in Pastor Steve becoming more differentiated from the ministry and other ministry leaders. He began to resist the impulse to become enmeshed with other staff members. Michael described Pastor Steve's journey, saying, "Pastor Steve comes from all this insecurity, so letting people go was his issue... [He] had to decide [if] this is how he was going to be. Does this community want to embrace – Pastor Steve?... [He finally said], 'Even if there's only four people here, this is what I'm doing. This is who I am.'" Another staff member said, "Just to see Pastor Steve doing that...was speaking a lot [to] me, personally. Because this person that was all wishy washy [Pastor Steve] – that was my impression of him... [was] now...leading, he's really taking care of us, and he's moving us to something." Since Pastor Steve had planted the church, he had to undo a lot of unhealthy patterns in order for the church to grow healthy. As a result, his radical personal transformation led to radical congregational transformation. The congregational change flowed from his growing knowledge of himself.

Pastor John's story differs slightly from Pastor Steve's. Pastor John came to an unhealthy church that needed to change in some significant ways toward gospel health. However, Pastor John had some degree of self-awareness when he arrived. His comments showed that, when he came to the church, he had a sense of who he was and where he was going. In talking about the process of coming to First Presbyterian, he said,

I'm a [big city] guy..., I was becoming more myself...the challenge for me [in my previous church] was I realized that...I was going to take the church where I was going to want to go – a little more contemporary, a little more relational – I know that half the church was going to be really uncomfortable. It was going to really split the church. And I was like, “I don't know if it's worth that.” So I tried to sort of go for a couple of years...I never doubted I could take the church in Lincoln somewhere. I just thought, if I take it somewhere, it probably is going to be hard on them...before [I wanted to] please everybody...and that made sense when I was 27. But now...if you want to go from 200 to 500, you're going to have to pick and do – you're going to have to put drums in. You can't just have folk guitar – you're going to have to say we're something this way or not...and I just thought, “They're going to hate me for this.” And I don't know if I was ready. I knew they weren't ready.

Over the course of his first ministry position, Pastor John grew more self-aware. The depth of his self-awareness grew through his participation in things like Sonship and regular counseling.

In both churches, the senior leaders were growing more and more self-aware over the course of their whole ministry, and their self-awareness lead to several significant changes in the life of the churches. Three of these changes include an increased measure of transparency from the pulpit, the ability to genuinely love staff and leaders, and a growing comfort to say no.

Pastor Steve talked about how he began to preach differently. He said,

I'm going to lead out of brokenness...leading out of brokenness was really a big shift for me. Not inappropriately, but being honest with people. It was really big.

We're taught – share out of your brokenness, it makes people connect with you, it's an illustration for the sermon. It's very different than really doing it. That's really different. I mean really being honest. And I told the church, the whole church, my marriage is broken...there was integrity and honesty. If everybody left, they left.

Several staff members and lay leaders confirmed Pastor Steve's observations. The way they described the change was as a shift away from emphasizing man's role in advancing the kingdom to emphasizing human frailty. One staff member captured it this way,

It definitely shifted from, "We're going to take the kingdom. We're going to conquer the city...We've got it"...and then it shifted to [we are] broken. "We are a community of broken people." And so his preaching goes from the Kingdom of God...where we're the movers and shakers of the world, to we're broken people who are simply here to try to figure out our lives...Pastor Steve had struggled prior to that, I think, to preach with integrity. But going through the process, he really started to preach with integrity. In other words, he spoke what he was struggling with that week, with appropriateness.

Another staff member said,

For me, it went from general to specific in the sense that it's me. I need to change for me to be able to impact people around me. So if I don't change, and I'm not going to be able first of all, to love myself well, then love my spouse, love my neighbors. So it went from conquering the whole world, which I think is still part of the whole thing, but doing it from a healthy point of view. So it suggests I need to learn about me, love myself, love my spouse, and out of that – and love God, of course, is the first – but then you love others. And then just start listening to the person...Be present with the person.

For Pastor Steve, this change in preaching was in stark contrast to how he had preached previously. His honesty in the pulpit had a ripple effect in the lives of his hearers. His vulnerability pushed congregants to wrestle with their need to grow in gospel health individually and corporately.

Pastor John described the way his preaching changed. Though his change was not as seemingly dramatic as Pastor Steve's, Pastor John and his hearers still noticed the difference. He said,

I started confessing from the pulpit. I started saying stuff like, "I'm a sinner." People were like, "Well, I don't know."...but it was healthy for me because I was so used to being the perfectly performing pastor...I wanted to change that in a healthy way right off the bat. I had that vision.

It kind of happened with Sonship...I remember – when I was first here...preaching [and] I said [in a sermon], “I got a call this week from somebody in the church. I was supposed to go to the hospital to visit them.” I picked a guy who was in the congregation and I said, “Mark, I’ll tell you this, too, when I got that call, I didn’t want to go visit you.” I started getting real.

This vulnerability began to free others to grow in gospel health. Pastor John’s wife said,

I love his vulnerability in the pulpit...he’s really honest about his weaknesses and failures. And that takes that whole pedestal thing away...I don’t know if it was just...those years of kind of hitting the wall, but it takes me off the pedestal, too. I love that. Starting from a lower point is lovely.

A lay leader who witnessed Pastor John’s change process described his preaching in these words,

When he first came, he was always a great preacher. But he never really talked about his family much when he first came, but now, increasingly, he’ll bring in illustrations from his own family experience with his wife and the kids and then also with his extended family – his relationship with his mom, his dad, his siblings. It’s not like he talks about those things all the time, but he talks about them a lot more than he used to. And you can see that his own understanding of those things and the impact that they’ve had on him over the years has grown. And so he’s become more...accessible as a whole. Not intellectually, but emotionally. And because of that, I think it’s increasingly become a healthy integration of his fine grasp of the theology and being able to relate it to him as a person, his family as a family unit.

One of the pastors on Pastor John’s staff described how his preaching led to change in individual lives and also change in the congregation’s systemic climate. He said,

I guess the other thing to emphasize would be Pastor John’s...Sunday morning messages and the way that he leads up front is one that’s filled with grace...It’s authentic. It’s really engaging with Scripture personally, sharing that in a side-to-side manner, not in a top-down manner. And relating to the congregation in a way that really brings home the gospel. So I think that’s been really vital in terms of the ethos of a gospel church that’s systemically filled with gospel living.

When the senior leaders grow in knowledge of themselves, another area where their growth brought change was their ability to love and serve others. Before pursuing self-awareness, Pastor Steve had created a church culture that was unrelenting for the staff. The staff had used names like “No Life Fellowship” to describe the church. One staff member said, “in a sense, you could say [there was a] complete unawareness among the staff of what was happening in each of our individual lives and what we were really experiencing.” He went on to say that staff members neither felt cared for nor known by Pastor Steve. He shared about a leadership meeting in which,

The guy who was leading the Spanish-speaking congregation threw his briefcase down on the table [and yelled], “You don’t know me. You don’t know anything about me. You don’t know anything about our people.” It was just a real sense of disconnect...among...people who were meeting together because we were all focused on the goal, the prize, and the mission.

Furthermore, one long time staff member said, “Nobody could leave. It was one of the things. It was – if you left, that was wrong. It was, ‘Why? Why are you leaving? How could you leave?’ There was a sense that you must stay.”

However, as Pastor Steve began to know himself, he began to invest in the staff. He began to love and serve them like he had not done previously. Once Pastor Steve began to do the hard work of growing in self-awareness, his approach toward all the leaders changed. One staff member said that now, “Pastor Steve and his wife were really investing in our lives...as a couple. And for me, that was when I really started thinking that, ‘Yes, he really has changed. Something is changing.’ It took me...five years to realize that.”

Pastor John had a slightly different struggle. He described himself this as someone who was everyone's "buddy." As a result, he would become enmeshed with people rather than maintain differentiation. He observed,

This enmeshment thing was constantly getting me because people would idolize me, and then I had people who would abuse me, meaning use me up. I'd be burned out. I didn't know how to not answer the phone at that time. Didn't have an answering machine. Didn't know about that. So I had no boundaries. I was just worn out.

Pastor John had to learn is that his relationship with the staff has had to shift away from being buddies and friends to him accepting his changing role within the organization. He said,

For the last five or six years, I've owned being the father of this place and moving toward grandfather. In other words, I...always led as a big brother. Mike and I, David and I, I'm their big brother. I'm like, "Hey, what do you think?" But I was clearly the leader, but I was always the big brother. And so every new staff person, I became good friends with them, became their big brother. John's the big brother that runs the business, whatever. Then all of a sudden at one point...I remember saying to a staff member, "Oh, da-da-da-da," and she goes, "You remind me of my dad." And that was about seven or eight years ago, and I was like, "That's crazy." And then it was, "No, it's not crazy." I'm really the age of her dad...and then I realized I'm not a big brother anymore...and that's not a bad thing, necessarily. But I wanted to be young, cool, hip forever... [But that] wasn't true, but I thought that. Now all of a sudden it's like now I'm actually really enjoying being a father.

Pastor John described how he first began to care well for others because of his marriage. With his relationship with his wife, Pastor John began to develop the emotional depth needed to love others well.

As these senior leaders grew in self-awareness, they also became able to say "no."

Pastor Steve said, "I had to get my life in order." The shift took place for Pastor Steve after a sabbatical, which is itself an act of saying no. Prior to that sabbatical, the church had planted, "eight churches in the first nine years. It was crazy." When he came back

from sabbatical, he actively sought to slow the church's pace. He said, "I had to get a new ways of rhythms. [I started only working a] five and a half day week. I had to make some major shifts. I stopped doing a bunch of things but focused on others."

In Pastor John's congregational context, saying no began by cancelling several ineffective church wide activities. He described it this way,

I told several [confidants] I'm going to cancel the Wednesday night prayer meeting because nobody comes, and the only ones who come hate it. And we're going to take that energy and we're going to put it into developing eventually small groups. But we're going to give the leadership guys more energy to focus on leadership and then getting out and ministering to people in their own lives. Just changing the whole thing.

In both cases, cancelling personal or systemic activities resulted in some people becoming angry with the senior leader. Because both pastors were growing in self-awareness, they had a growing sense of confidence that these were the right decisions in the long run, regardless of the immediate negative impact. Time proved them right in many of the things to which they said no. The leader's growing self-knowledge had many effects on each system but these three—preaching, loving others, and learning to say no—were three of the most significant. The second place that the integrity of the senior leader manifested itself was in the health of his marriage.

Growing Marriage

In both cases, the senior leader had a crisis within their marriage relationships which exposed their weaknesses and led them to pursue greater gospel health. In the case of Pastor Steve, he almost lost his marriage. Pastor John's situation was not as severe but it was equally powerful and significant. As previously stated, Pastor Steve identifies a "theology of marriage or singleness" as one of the marks of systemic health. He

explained people's state of singleness or marriage as their primary calling. As a result, Pastor Steve said,

You lead out of your marriage. It's very important to us...your marriage is your loudest gospel message. It's an icon – basically it's your first ambition. Your union with Jesus has got to be a union with your spouse. And you're not going to have a transformed church without transformed marriages. So it's not about having a stable marriage or simply a committed marriage, but a passionate marriage. God's love for us is passionate. It's not just loyal. It's not just stable, it's passionate. It's a dancing God. We need to cultivate marriages and sexuality in our marriages as leaders that reflects the passion of when we were engaged. And that's a sign and a wonder to our church because people look at us, and they get a taste of what the love of God is. There's no relationship on earth like marriage.

As it relates to pursuing systemic gospel health, Pastor Steve highlights how senior leaders who do not leading out of their marriages will hinder systemic health. There is perhaps no single relationship that has a greater impact to promote or prevent gospel health within a system than the senior leader's marriage relationship.

Pastor Steve candidly spoke about his marriage, saying,

My story is I almost lost my marriage. My wife would not have divorced me because we loved each other, but my family – she could have had an affair. Who knows what would have happened? I married a great woman, thank God, but I realized, “Oh, my God. The most precious thing in the world to me –my wife and my kids – I have four boys. My whole family could have blown up.

This led Pastor Steve to begin the difficult process of learning to make his marriage his first priority. Pastor Steve began to be honest about the state of his marriage. He said, “I told the church...my marriage is broken... [But] I am working on it. We really want to lead out of our marriage... [With] integrity and honesty.” From the staff's perspective, they began to see changes in Pastor Steve's marriage. For one, they began to see Pastor Steve's wife more engaged in the church's work again. One staff member said,

Pastor Steve and his wife were trying to discover themselves and were into the marriage thing because they had started to realize that their leadership of the church, [had to] come out of a healthy marriage. And they did not have a healthy marriage before the first sabbatical...then after...something was new...because we never saw his wife around for the last year before the sabbatical. She was done. She told Steve, “You are not [honest]”...She didn’t want to come to a church that would not be truthful...we [the staff] were guinea pigs for their marriage exercises. It was great and wonderful.

As Pastor Steve and his wife worked on their marriage, they brought what they were learning to the rest of the staff. As Pastor Steve pursued gospel health within his marriage, he has become committed to only hiring individuals who are pursuing that health for their own marriage. Now Pastor Steve is very clear, “If your marriage isn’t doing well, you can’t work here. If you’re not invested, if your spouse feels neglected, and if you’re not leading out of your marriage, I’m not going to have you on staff.”

Pastor John’s story of growing healthier within his marriage is very similar, though not as dramatic. Early on in ministry, he realized the importance of the marriage relationship. He observed a close friend in ministry whose marriage was difficult. He saw how that affected this pastor’s ability to lead and serve. Pastor John concluded,

You marry the wrong person, I don’t care how smart you are, and it doesn’t work. And I watched that, and it was like. “Note to self. The wife matters.” That was like, “The wife matters.”...the guy was a great PCA leader guy – he would have had a tremendous impact...in the end, when you marry the wrong person, it’s a big problem.

For the most part, Pastor John thought about health in terms of a married couple’s ability to minister together. He and his wife worked well as co-laborers in ministry, but he was not thinking about the deeper aspects of marriage. That growth came later as he began to realize that simply being good “co-laborers” is an incomplete view of the marriage relationship. In talking about his own growth in gospel health as a husband, Pastor John described what was modeled for him as,

My dad is a classic builder...Hard-working, emotionally unavailable, rarely involved in my life. Work hard, be a good man [son]...Study hard, graduate, do what you want to do. But no involvement at all in my life. Spiritually, none. My family is not Christian at all...not personally involved. And so I thought that was normal. I thought that was the way – and especially as I became more involved in the masculine Reformed faith thing...an emotional need, I just didn't even know what that was. Mind, heart, that stuff. Mind leads to heart. Just do the right thing, know the right stuff, and you're going to be fine. My marriage is the greatest educator of my whole life...and that was gradual. My wife is so sweet. She gradually began to find her voice and speak into my life like, "You know, it would be neat if you could be attentive to me at all."

The first sign that a healthy marriage includes more than being co-laborers came to Pastor John when he was in his mid-thirties. He recounts a conversation he had with his wife about teaching on marriage together. As he told it,

I was like, "Honey, I think we ought to do marriage seminars together." We're sitting there together at night, and I'm like, "Maybe we should do marriage seminars together." And my wife turns to me, and she says these words, "What would we say?" And I remember going, "I got all kinds of things." I started saying, "We can talk about this, and –" And she looked at me, and she said, "Really?" And I was like, "Oh. She's trying to say something to me."

The next sign came when Pastor John wanted to throw a birthday party for his wife.

Pastor John went on to explain what his wife said when he told her what he wanted to do for her,

My wife just turned 40, and I was like, "I'm going to throw a secret party, a surprise party for her." And then I thought, "Nah, she doesn't like surprises. So you know what, I'll ask her. 'What do you want for your 40th? What do you want to do?'" It'll be fun –She says, "I want to be alone for a couple days." And I was like, "What?" She said, "I just need to get away from you and the kids. I just need space." "I'm sorry, what'd you say?" And that really hurt me. And part of it was for her, she was just drying up. And again, mother of three kids, you could blame it on that. But that was a wake-up call to me. It was like, "I'm not really a resource to my wife, really." I mean, I did stuff with her but I'm actually a drag on her.

Pastor John began to realize that the way he related to his wife was as a “benevolent dictator.” He describes it this way,

What happened was I was sort of in one sense a benevolent dictator to my wife...I was a nice guy to her. [My wife and marriage were] a colony in my life. I need to pay a little more attention to her. I need to cultivate that nation. And I thought a couple little improvements and all of a sudden we’re going to be doing better... And then she began to say, “I’m not doing well,” I began to...realize it wasn’t like that. I couldn’t just fix her or make her happy.

Pastor John calls this realization his “emotional health awakening.” During this time, he began to see that marriage is designed to be so much richer and deeper than simply serving side-by-side. He said,

We started going to counseling together. And then we started applying some of the Sonship things...I used to think that I had one or two problems in our marriage that once I fixed them, we’d have a perfect marriage...And I recognized pretty early [on] that I had an anger issue and I had a preoccupation issue. I got that. I wasn’t very attentive, and then when I got frustrated, I...was more critical and difficult under pressure. But once I got those two things – I could be a little more attentive to her, and I could not be so edgy when I was tired then I would be perfect and she would be happy. And I told her later, it’s so funny. It’s like a Pharisee. I thought I had one or two sins. I realized, honey, I was really not a very good husband in a lot of ways. I really was a sinner in all these ways against you. And we started laughing together, and we said – that I’ve realized I’m a sinner, it’s been so nice because I realize it’s not one thing I can perfect. I’m going to need grace all the time in my marriage. And we started laughing...And I said, “I’m not very good,” and eventually I got to the place where I could say, “You’re not very good, either.” It was all of a sudden a freedom to not be carrying her emotional weight, which I didn’t know how to do or I didn’t know what to do... [I would say], “Feel better. Feel better. Don’t feel sad.” [Or I would try to] distract her. That didn’t work so well...So the emotional health awakening came at the tail end, which allowed me to say, “You’re really broken, John. And you’re broken in a way that you didn’t even know about. There’s a whole reservoir of emotion that you have never integrated...you’re broken because there are dead zones in your whole heart that you didn’t even know about.”

In addition to Pastor John’s growth, his wife was growing as well. She described the “birthday” event, saying,

For my 40th birthday I asked for two nights alone somewhere, a personal retreat. And I wouldn't have made it without that. I think I was really running out of steam and not quite sure – not thinking there was really an option to run out of steam and still be able to have the church function in the way it needed to. I didn't feel like it was me against the church, but I did – I was very conscious of when I needed something from John, that that was pretty much always going to take him away from someone else or something else, so there would be unmet needs. And some of them were not small ones...I think that personality-wise that always ran through my filter, and I would think, should I ask for more time or more whatever. So a lot of that was me not realizing that I had a voice and that God was really sovereign even if I made waves and interrupted his productivity or even messed up some kind of church growth. So I think that two night retreat really helped. And then I think I realized I needed counseling because I saw the problem that I didn't have a voice, but I wasn't able to get that voice. So that was really helpful to hear someone say to me, "It's OK to make waves. It's not that you're doing something wrong by making waves." And then to have John come also and join in the counseling was really good. I felt more empowered by that. I would say it still is not an easy thing for me to demand what I need. I don't think that ever will be, probably.

As she began to grow in self-awareness, Pastor John's wife began to speak up and talk more honestly with him. At one point she said to him, "I don't blame the church anymore...for your schedule or for your busyness." Pastor John went on to say,

She just finished up by saying, "If you'd gone into anything, you'd have been this way." And of course, that was helpful for us. Helpful for me, helpful for her. That's why we really never hated the church...we were like, "It's me. It's my performance, broken personality and history. It's not the church, really." It may have contributed to it, but it's not – I would have done it if I'd worked for IBM or if I had worked for a seminary. And I had to learn to come to grips with that.

All of this growth within their marriage flowed out into the congregation. As one of Pastor John's lay leaders said,

In many ways, I think the healthier his relationship with his wife has gotten, the healthier his relationship with the church has gotten. And he had become a more complete man in that sense. And of course, I think that's the key to the healthy family. Not the only thing, but without it, it's hard to have a healthy family. If you don't have a good healthy

relationship between mom and dad, it's pretty tough to produce a healthy family.

Both senior leaders described how they began to embrace the limits that their marriage place on their ministry. These limits are not bad, but they are real. As both senior leaders became in tune with their wives' needs, they grew in their ability to lead and serve the church with greater levels of gospel health. Pastor John said, "Now I'm starting to get it. I'm seeing her. I'm seeing me. And now I'm seeing our leadership that way, and I'm realizing that some guys are never going to get on board. Some guys, it'll take time...so I'm negotiating relationships with more emotional intelligence."

Humble Dependence

The final way the senior leader's integrity was expressed was in their growing dependence upon the Lord. In both congregations, the senior leader experienced significant loss personally and professionally. As has already been discussed, Pastor Steve nearly lost his marriage. He also experienced a split in his congregation at the same time. The result for Pastor Steve was a renewed sense of trust in God's word and God's leading of him personally. When he came back from sabbatical, he told people,

I don't care if you like [this model for gospel health], but it's biblical...I kept refining and refining the theology...I do believe this is fundamentally a theology. It's a theological paradigm. It is. And if you believe it, my thinking is, then you do it, no matter what it costs you. That's my conviction. I don't care. I don't care if you don't want to. It's the Scripture.

Pastor Steve's dependence upon the Lord is most clearly seen in how he let go of his primary focus—numbers and externals. Prior to the journey toward gospel health, the numbers largely drove Pastor Steve. One of his staff workers said that during the church's early years, Pastor Steve's attitude was, "We're going to go from 100 to 500 to

10,000...This thing is going to explode, so everybody get ready.” Repeatedly, Pastor Steve said that once he came back from his first sabbatical, he no longer cared how many people came to the church. He said, “If everybody left, they left. There was a real sense of idolatry of numbers...but it really died in 2000.” He said,

When it comes to the church and numbers, the problem isn't that we count, it's that we have so fully embraced the world's dictum that bigger is better that numbers have become the only thing we count. When something isn't bigger and better, we consider it —and often ourselves — a failure. What we miss in all this counting is the value scripture places on internal markers. What constitutes failure in the eyes of the world isn't always a failure in the kingdom of God...If everybody leaves the church, it's OK...I was so tired of seeing the ugly side. I said, “I don't want to do this anymore. I do not want to do churches that way. I don't.” So I really was OK if the church went down to one person, I was going to do this. And I was really prepared. I didn't care about numbers any more.

Pastor John faced opposition almost immediately when he arrived at the church, forcing him to rely upon the Lord. A member of the committee that called Pastor John as the new pastor turned against him within months of his arrival. As Pastor John recounted,

We had eight elders...Two of them hated me from the word go. When I say hated me – the one guy on the session, within three weeks of me being here, came to me...He basically pulled me aside and said, “I don't really like what you're doing.” I was sharing with the elders behind the scenes what I was going to do and what I did. He said, “I don't feel good.” I said, “What don't you feel good about?” He goes, “I think you're insincere. I don't think you're really a Christian.”

This same leader went on to file an ecclesiastical judicial case against Pastor John which sapped time and resources from the church for nearly four years. The case was eventually dropped but not before this quarrelsome elder created suspicion about Pastor John's ministry within the church and the presbytery. Pastor John describes how the presbytery committee wanted to talk with him. When the committee chairman voiced some disagreement with the elder who brought charges,

The guy snapped...The part of him that they had never seen that I saw lots of times, it was God's grace. He just blew...the chairman called me on the phone an hour later and said, "I want to apologize to you. I totally missed this whole thing." And the rest of the guys got word of it from him. He said the whole thing's going to be dropped. So it was a really painful but then vindicating moment.

This situation led Pastor John to depend upon the Lord for vindication and care.

Years later, Pastor John faced a harder, more personal session. Pastor John's child battled depression for several years. He and his wife did not talk with many people about it in an effort to protect their child's privacy. During this period, Pastor John felt his need for God's grace like he never had previously. He said, "That was a totally helpless feeling where we went, 'OK.' And to watch God deliver. That was life-changing for our ministry, I think. That's not at all the reason for it. It was all about – I say that – I really think it's given us strength in our ministry. It really was the worst time of our life."

For both of these senior leaders, they grew in humble dependence upon the Lord through difficulty and adversity. As Pastor John said, it has given "strength" to his ministry. In this section the integrity of the senior leader and how it has shaped the systemic gospel health of the congregation has been explored. The next area to address is leadership dynamics and how they impacted the congregations movement toward systemic gospel health.

Leading Change

Integrity of the senior leader is one of the major findings that contributes to a congregational system growing in gospel health. A second significant piece is the senior leader's grasp of systems theory and how to lead change. Both senior leaders understood that they were seeking to change more than externals. As Pastor Steve said, "You're changing culture and language." In discussing leading systemic change in the interviews

three key components were identified: the nature of the leadership structure, the leader's ability to build healthy leadership teams, and the leader's ability to manage the change process. Each of these will be explored separately.

Leadership Structure

The two churches differ significantly in their leadership structure. The church Pastor John serves a Presbyterian church that has an ecclesiastical structure. Presbyterianism is a form of church polity in which a group of elders leads the local congregation. These individual congregations are connected to one another through an ecclesiastical body called a presbytery. The presbytery is the gathering of the elders of the local churches in a particular geographical area. As a Presbyterian minister, or teaching elder, Pastor John is called to serve the church by a vote of the congregation. In his case, the process of coming to the church was a forecast of the challenges ahead. He described the situation this way,

I was the second pulpit committee. The first pulpit committee called a minister...he came into town, and...the vote was 72 percent in favor. He looked at that and said, "Holy cow. They don't even know me and already 28 percent hate me." But it was nothing about him. And so he turned them down, which totally shocked them. And so the church went for another six months to a year, formed a second pulpit committee, and...I was the one they picked. And I remember all through the process they said, "If we pick you, will you say yes? Because we can't afford to pick someone and have them turn us down. And initially I said, "I don't know, but let's see. I'll be honest with you as we go along."... [When the vote was taken] I was elected with 100 percent of the vote, which to them was considered the greatest miracle in the history of the church. But again, the church was desperate.

In Presbyterian polity, the minister leads the congregation alongside unpaid lay leaders called ruling elders. The congregation also elects ruling elders. They are congregation members who are not employed by the church, but they lead and shepherd

the congregation alongside the pastor. In addition, there is another group of lay leaders called deacons who oversee the church's mercy ministry, but they do not have a shepherding role. The congregation also elects deacons. Their role in the system tends to have less impact as that of ruling elders. The final group of formal leaders Pastor John interacts with is the church staff. The elders hire the staff, including some of the pastoral staff. Once an assistant pastor has been serving for several years, the elders can initiate making the minister an associate pastor. This would require the congregation to vote for the minister to become an associate. It also requires a vote of the congregation to dissolve the pastoral relationship. Because the congregations have to vote for a pastor to become an associate, they are often cautious to do so. There are multiple, formal leadership groups with which Pastor John has to navigate as a leader.

Pastor Steve functions in an organizational structure that, on paper, looks similar to Pastor John's. Pastor Steve has lay leaders called elders who help him lead the church, and the elders hire a church staff. However, his structure differs significantly from Pastor John's in two specific ways: Pastor Steve was the church's founding pastor, and his wife was on the church's staff. First, Pastor Steve holds formal and informal authority within the system as the founding pastor. Because of Pastor Steve's position, he has the ability to direct the staff and church with greater autonomy than Pastor John. Pastor Steve hired the majority of staff who walked through the systemic changes with him. In fact, in the interviews with Pastor Steve, lay leaders, and staff, they hardly mentioned the elder's role in the change process. Pastor Steve spoke as if the most significant group of formal leaders he had to work with was his staff. When talking about the change process, Pastor Steve repeatedly said, "We did it very slowly. Basically it was just us [he and his wife],

and then we started with our core staff at the time.” In the midst of this change, there was very little turnover among the staff. He said, “I lost one or two staff, but for the most part, 99 percent of the church loved it...people’s logic even changed. But I was feeling my way because it was whole new territory.” Pastor Steve held the most power in the system. As a result, implementing systemic change was not as challenging for him as for Pastor John. He was able to make changes unilaterally. One staff member said,

The staff meetings were very...goals oriented, this is where we are going, this is where we are moving. We need to fulfill all the things we have planned... [When Steve came back from sabbatical] the staff meeting went from, “We’re going to grow to 10,000 in two or three years,” to a CTR - Community temperature reading. “How are you doing?”... “What do you mean, how am I doing?”... Some people never fully got it, I don’t think. They thought, “I’m in a staff meeting. I expect that we’re going to be doing work, not talking about how I’m doing.” So it was awkward.

The second significant difference between the two structures is related to the members of the staff. In Pastor Steve’s system, his wife was a member of the pastoral staff, and she brought a twofold positive effect. First, as has already been discussed, the health of the senior leader’s marriage relationship is essential for moving the system toward gospel health. By having his wife on staff, Pastor Steve was able to leverage the growing health of his marriage in specific ways with the staff. As previously noted, one staff member said,

Pastor Steve and his wife were trying to discover themselves and were into the marriage thing because they had started to realize that their leadership of the church, [had to] come out of a healthy marriage. And they did not have a healthy marriage before the first sabbatical...then after...something was new...because we never saw his wife around for the last year before the sabbatical. She was done. She told Steve, “You are not [honest]”...She didn’t want to come to a church that would not be truthful...we [the staff] were guinea pigs for their marriage exercises. It was great and wonderful.

Pastor Steve's marriage has continued toward greater health, which has helped to accelerate the change process throughout the system. The second positive effect was that Pastor Steve already had an ally in leadership that shared his vision of systemic gospel health. He had someone else advocating for and modeling the change he was promoting. Because of the leadership structure at Pastor John's church, he was not afforded the opportunity to put his wife in a position to have as much formal power as Pastor Steve.

Something as basic as leadership structure can hinder or help the change process. Both Pastor Steve and Pastor John's church structures have strengths and weaknesses but regardless of their differences, every leadership structure impacts a leader's ability to change their system. The second key component to leading systemic change is the development of the leadership team.

Leadership Team

To institute systemic change in a congregation, the leadership team and how it relates to the senior leader plays a key role. In the interviews conducted for this project, three findings arose regarding the leadership team's role. The first relates to the senior leader's ability to put together a good leadership team. The second relates to how the leadership team interacts with one another and works together. The final finding that came out of the interviews was the way in which the senior leader changed the nature of selecting new leaders.

Hiring Good Staff

As has already been mentioned, Pastor Steve had virtually no turnover among staff as he began to change the system. Pastor John, on the other hand, had to build a staff

team as part of the change he led. The individuals connected to Pastor John's church mentioned his ability to pick good staff. One person said,

Pastor John's really great at choosing staff, and so it's all been great...more so than any church that I've ever heard of, the staff is cohesive and unified. And he spends a lot of time with them as a manager even though it takes time away from the congregation. So I think that's cool. That's been cool to watch.

A lay leader at Pastor John's church also emphasized,

If I had to point to one huge thing that I think has been a talent that's really helped Pastor John out – and this doesn't have to do just with the elders. It has to do with picking staff members who are good fits for the role. In other words, they have talents and skills – the idea of talents, skills, and passions that are a good fit for the role that we need filled. But they're also good team players. And he has this natural ability to size up people from a selection standpoint and pick the right people for the right roles. And that's hugely important. Bringing basically healthy people into those roles – and if you don't have basically healthy people to start with, it's really tough to create that systemic health in the larger organization.

The pastor whom Pastor John hired first said, "John's really gifted at selecting talent." He articulated that what Pastor John, "has done well...is really to put people in the right lanes to help them to really focus on things that they really do well. And not to ask people to do things that are really in their back end. One thing that has helped this congregation in their selection of staff is that a seminary, which shares similar convictions as those of the church, is located less than ten miles from their property." This staff member continued,

I definitely think that's an advantage. I do. To have the seminary here. I've never hired anyone substantial on staff because I've looked at their resume. That's really hard to do, I think, just from a resume kind of initial. I would say that's definitely an advantage, and we've benefited from that, having the ability to vet people over time and to see how they work on the team, see how they connect. That's how we hired Mike Rooney. That's how we hired George Carson. That's how we hired almost everybody on pastoral staff. Al Stevens grew up in the church. Barbara Rush, our youth leader. So I think that's definitely [helped].

Staff Relationships

In addition to the important role staff selection plays in moving a congregation toward systemic gospel health, the nature of the staff relationships themselves are also key. Prior to Pastor Steve's movement toward gospel health, the church staff functioned in a disconnected way. As a staff member said that there was, "A real sense of disconnectedness among [the staff] because we were all focused on the goal, the prize, and the mission. And who are you? It doesn't really matter, as long as you're doing your job and I don't have to worry about your area. I'm doing my thing. People call it silos."

Pastor Steve began to take a real interest in the staff. One way he did this was to start staff meetings with something he calls a "Community Temperature Reading" or CTR. Using the CTR individuals begin to share their hopes, desires, excitements, concerns, and complaints. The staff, however, was not allowed to share solutions. As a result, the staff began to know one another and share in each other's life. As a by-products of sharing, the emotional intelligence of every staff member was elevated. To use Jim Collins language from *Good to Great*, the flywheel began to turn in a healthier direction.³⁷⁴

Those connected to the church where Pastor John serves commented on his emotional intelligence. Pastor John continued to grow in his emotional intelligence and one of the ways his strong EQ manifest itself is through team ministry. As his wife said, "I feel like he's a good team kind of guy. He can do it by himself...but with each staff person that was added...it became more fun for him. They could laugh more and bounce ideas off each other."

³⁷⁴ Collins, *Good to Great*, 174-178.

Other interviewees clearly emphasized how much time Pastor John invests in his staff. He views them as family. One staff member shared how they sought to be involved in one another's life. He described it this way,

We're committed to the relational connections within the staff team, and we have been over the years. And so we have...our linking times. We have dinner together...For many years, every week we would have dinner together as a staff team and families. So that's maybe one unique thing that we've been really involved in people's lives. And Pastor John and I kind of model that. Our families are very close, but we're not a closed circle. It's not like he is my only friend, and – it's open. We have a unique relationship, but it's not an exclusive kind of thing. I think that's been important. Having relational time, and being committed to the relational time with the staff team and their families has been really important for us over the years. So really trying to develop that family kind of culture where people are known and cared for and we're celebrating birthdays together. We celebrate kids' birthdays and those kinds of things. That has been important...we went from every week – when our staff thing was smaller, every week our families would get together for dinner. And then it turned into every other week kind of thing...I think that was significant.

A lay leader who has witnessed the change process also articulated how the staff's closeness has positively changed the church, affecting the whole system. His significant insight shows how the senior leader's marriage affects the church system and the congregation. This lay leader said,

When I think of a healthy family, I think of fully functioning individuals working and living together in a way that allows them to be who they are and contribute in a meaningful way [creating] a satisfying environment where everybody can feel respected, known, valued, needed, those kinds of things...I do think of the parallel of a church as a community and healthy family, obviously led by the dad...I would say one of the biggest things that Pastor John does is that the environment that he creates in the church is a reflection of...the increasingly healthy way that he and his wife have learned to relate together over the years in their marriage. I've seen that unfold in how Pastor John leads as a person, how he relates to the congregation from the pulpit, and how he relates to his staff members individually.

It's that family analogy that comes to my mind. Two healthy leaders – and in this case, I don't think you can separate the senior pastor from his

relationship with his wife. And because they have a healthy relationship, they begin to increasingly understand the nature of a healthy relationships formed with other people...in the case of the senior pastor, staff – both pastoral staff and lay leaders in the church. And if those relationships are healthy, that in turn models a healthy relationship for other people in the broader church community. And I think that's what in large part has happened at the church.

Another pastor on staff described the same dynamic, saying,

We also have done large group fellowship events about four times a year. And especially on two of those – our Fall Festival and our Christmas Party – we do goofy stuff. We have skits. We have games that we do, group games and stuff like that. Being able to laugh together as a congregation, for them to be able to see Pastor John get some shaving cream all over his face or goofy stuff like that. I think that's been a really important thing, too. Being able to have fun together...I think that's been important.

In both congregations, the interviewees clearly articulated how the staff is aligned with the movement toward systemic gospel health. As the staff grows closer and shares more of their lives together, they are changing the culture of the churches.

Cultivating Confidants

While cultivating a leadership team, the senior leaders also pursued a close confidant who advocated for change. These confidants shared the senior leader's vision of where they wanted to take the congregation. The confidants functioned as additional change agents, multiplying the senior leader's ability to make the necessary changes. In addition, these confidants also share the senior leader's burdens. They were individuals with whom the senior leader could share his heart.

In Pastor Steve's situation, the most obvious confidant was his wife. Because he sought to implement in the church what he had implemented within their marriage, she became his primary confidant. Pastor John's situation was slightly different. He had sought to protect his wife from some of the challenges he was experiencing in the church

but her perspective was that there, “were some elders really in there with him, cheering him on and upholding him in a good way.” Pastor John said,

I had two guys who were my big cheerleaders. Tim Bauer...and Jeff Michaels...The problem with Tim is that Tim was a tremendously powerful leader, but he had no following in the church. And the reason he didn't have a following – and it's surprising to say that – but because he was too powerful...And then Jeff was the other...and he was a fire-breather. He was so excited about what God was doing, the grace awakening and the contemporary. The problem with Jeff was he wanted to go 100 miles an hour, and I was trying to say to him, “We have to work in process. We have to bring people along, and it's going to take a little bit.” He would be...in those Heifetz terms, he was my ally...these guys were my allies.

These confidants and allies enabled the senior leaders to have the bandwidth to push the system toward gospel health. These allies fought for and with the senior leader. The importance of these relationships was critical.

Facing Opposition

When building a health leadership team, each senior leader faced opposition. They identified potentially unhealthy leaders and limited their role and influence. Because of the power that Pastor Steve possesses within his system, he would let staff go who were not cultivating gospel health as they had defined it. He said,

I let somebody go because of – their ministry was flourishing and their marriage just wasn't. The marriage wasn't. I let her go. If your marriage isn't doing well, you can't work here. If you're not invested – if your spouse feels neglected, and you're not leading out of your marriage, I'm not going to have you on staff. If you're so busy building your ministry that you're not having a deep walk with God, you're not going to be on staff, either. If you're not sabbathing, you're not going to be on staff. Not because I'm legalistic, because of the fact that it's a reflection of the fact that your life's probably out of control. If your life's out of control, how the heck are you going to lead anybody else to have a life in Jesus? It's not possible. You can't bring them where – that's why it's out of your life is the depth of our church.

Pastor Steve's ability to make these types of leadership decisions has helped the change process move in a positive direction.

Pastor John had a more challenging road. Because of the leadership structure at the church where Pastor John serves, he does not have the same level of autonomy that Pastor Steve possesses. He talked about the difficulty of removing unhealthy leaders and said,

I knew within three weeks this guy needed to be kicked off the elder board after I got there. It took me four years to get him off...my two allies saw it right away. They were telling me, "Get rid of him." I said, "That's not easy. I can't shoot him."...the other four guys have to see it before I can do it. I had to wait till they got it.

Pastor John described the leadership situation when he first arrived at the church, saying,

So we got eight guys. Two of them hated me from the word go...the one guy on the session, within three weeks of me being here, came to me...pulled me aside and said, "I don't really like what you're doing."...I said, "What don't you feel good about?" He goes, "I think you're insincere. I don't think you're really a Christian."...I said, "You think I'm insincere?" I said, "What would you like me to do to convince you?" And he was like, "I just don't" So I could tell it just wasn't going to go anywhere with him. And he was my number one antagonist – and he had another guy who was sympathetic, and they were my antagonists. They tried to stop everything. And they leaked stuff to a section of the congregation. For the next three or four years I had constant warfare with that group.

Pastor John's solution was both technical and adaptive.³⁷⁵ On the technical side, he set term limits for the ruling elders who were being nominated and elected by the congregation. On the adaptive level, Pastor John renewed the emphasis on an elder candidate's character. Specifically, he began to say that if a man was argumentative, then he was unfit to serve. As a result, the church began to nominate elder candidates with

³⁷⁵ Heifetz and Linsky, *Leadership on the Line*, 13.

higher EQs while simultaneously weeding out individuals who had under developed emotional lives. As Pastor John described it,

I set new standards for what leaders were going to be. And when I set new standards...I basically said, "Let's look at 1 Timothy 3...The Lord's bondservant must not be quarrelsome." And I said, "This is a qualification for elder..."because our meetings degenerated into fights all the time...If everything is about quarreling, we're never going move forward..."...so guys rotated off.

One elder described the difference,

Picking different people on the session, has made it a lot easier for us to be honest with each other, to be open with each other, to disagree in a civilized kind of a way when we do disagree on things, which is not terribly often, but occasionally we do, and we know how to handle that now. I think as Pastor John has grown, it's made him a better listener to what we're saying and what we're feeling, so we feel more responded to by him.

These actions resulted in a group of elders who are growing in gospel health themselves as they seek to lead the congregation in the same way. Again, this elder said, "As Pastor John has become more integrated in his person, he's asked us to do things that are about personal integration...things focused on helping us be more open with each other and more integrated as individuals. So he'll spend time focusing on that kind of stuff."

Repeatedly, interviewees described how difficulty helped lead the staff and elders to greater health. One long standing elder said that these losses have led to more honesty and humility among the elder board. He said,

The other thing that I think has been real healthy is the fact that the staff and elders have had to work through a number of crises – and I'm talking about personal crises...working through the hard stuff together and being able to share where you were hurt, where you were disappointed, and...the fact that we worked through those kinds of things together – that made us more humble as a group of people. That made us more open to each other's imperfections. That made us less quick to judge other people. So I think the way we've worked through hardships by talking about them directly, talking about how we've been hurt by them and saying, "How do

we move forward?” I think successfully working through those hardships has been a big thing as well.

As Pastor John said,

That’s been a healthy thing...What I love about our session now – this is the change in our session – we have all these wounded healers. All these guys who have really been through it. Just like our story, they’ve been through it. So they’re redemptive, they’re forceful, and they’re able to kind of say, “Let me tell you a little bit about what I’ve gone through,” and it’s powerful. It shows up all the time.

Achieving this level of vulnerability with the leadership team took years. Pastor John worked to develop the kind of leadership culture that he is trying to create for the whole congregation. Pastor Steve worked more than a decade to change the way the leadership team interacted. It has not been a quick process for either leader.

Managing the Change Process

The third and final key component that needs to be discussed relates to senior leaders’ ability to manage the change process within their system. Though every system is unique and every change process is unique, there are four commonalities in both churches that arose from the interviews. First, both leaders were familiar with systems language and thinking. In addition, both senior leaders understood and practiced self-management during the change process. The last two common denominators were the leaders ability to manage the rate of change and the knowledge of what to changes to implement and when.

Systems Language and Thinking

Pastor Steve spent years learning about system’s theory with the intention of applying it within the church. He said, “I’ve got my doctorate in marriage and family. D. Min. with the goal of applying it to leadership in this. So we developed eight specific

skills honed over years. But to understand how we transformed the culture here, you have to understand the skills.” The eight specific skills address things like active listening, clean fighting, and what he calls “climbing the ladder of integrity.” He slowly used these skills to change the way the system operated.

Pastor John’s knowledge of systems was more intuitive in the early years. He remembered reading an essay by Gordon McDonald on leadership in which McDonald said,

Break up the church into three groups... “Very difficult people. Very nice people. Very important people.”...he said, “Most pastors spend too much time with the very difficult people. They think they’re going to persuade them. They think they’re going to win them over.” He said, “It’s not going to work. And they spend too much time with very nice people. They’re people you like to get along with. But they don’t really help build the church. They’re just not going to do.” And then he said, “You’ve got to train the people who are going to help build the church.”...I remember this story. Gordon McDonald said, “I remember sitting in an office with the person who was chewing me out. And I looked at him and I nodded and smiled, and I started thinking about something else for the next half an hour.” He said, “That was one of the most successful things I’ve ever done.” And that was so helpful to me. First time I’d ever read anything about antagonists. So my antagonists – I would feel hurt by that in the past. I started basically not worrying about what they said at all...But the difficult [thing for me]...was...I always thought the hardest cases I needed to love best, win the argument with – depending on the personality. [But] I didn’t have much success doing that in my previous church or here.

Once Pastor John had systemic categories, he adapted to thinking systemically about the congregation. When he read Edwin Friedman’s *Generation to Generation* for the first time, he said,

“I can’t believe it. This is exactly what has happened to this church.” And I started putting people’s names – it’s like, “That’s that person. Oh, my goodness.” It’s like a family of a rebellious teenager who’s doing everything they can to make sure this rebellious teenager doesn’t get out of control, but then he his. He’s controlling the whole family. And it’s like, “Wow.” And the way that you win is not through persuasion. That was a huge – “What? What do you mean?” Oh, yeah. It’s through

differentiation, boundaries. All of a sudden, I realized that's why I won against that guy. Because I stopped arguing with him... I think that Friedman and others are making such a big point that's so hard. If you don't put boundaries and differentiate in a way, you're never going to be able to make change.

Both leaders understand congregation's systemic nature and seek to leader their respective congregations toward systemic health.

Self-Management

The second key to managing systemic change deals with leaders' ability to manage themselves within the process. Pastor Steve practiced his previously mentioned "healthy skills," helping him remain well differentiated during difficult meetings. The first and second skills, clarify expectations and stop mind-reading, require the leader to slow down and think deeply before speaking. The third skill, exploring what is going on beneath surface emotions, cultivates self-reflection. The fourth and fifth skills are fighting clean and listening actively. As Pastor Steve began to put these skills to work, he was able to maintain a non-anxious presence in leadership meetings and with the congregation.

For Pastor John, he too was considered to be a non-anxious presence among his leadership. A pastor on his staff said,

One of the things I think that Pastor John does a really good job in, [and]...that was really important, especially back then, was being a non-anxious presence. In the midst of financial struggles, in the midst of relational strain, in the midst of the congregation going – not showing up, or whatever. He would be a person of calmness. He was calm about it. And he was trusting. He was like, "It's going to work. I don't know how, but it's going to work out." I think that was a very important leadership role that he played...When people are freaking out. When we lost key donors, he remained calm [expressing the belief] that God was going to provide. [He would say,] "We don't know how. We're going to be faithful with what God provides and make good choices." I think that was a key leadership move that he practiced back then and now.

Both leaders turned the heat down when change created emotional heat and anxiety. By providing a non-anxious presence, Pastor John and Pastor Steve guided the system to a new place with a minimum of negative impact on the system.

Pacing Change

Both senior leaders skillfully managed the change process by pacing the change. They kept careful watch on the rate at which they changed the system as well as what they chose to change. Pastor Steve talked about how slowly he introduced change. Steve said, “We just do things really slow, and before we put a product out there we want to really make sure it’s worthy of being out there. So we don’t do a lot of stuff.” Practically, Pastor Steve would seek to embody the change and then introduce it to the key staff members. He described how “we did it very slowly. Basically it was just us, and then we started with our core staff at the time...So it was slowly – do it with our staff and introduce them to what I was learning. Books we’re reading. It was very intentional. Intentional in the sense that I was sharing my life. “

The staff members at the church Pastor Steve serves confirmed his slow pace of change. They talked about the change in terms of the first “five to seven years,” focusing on exploring family of origin issues and one’s marriage. Then, the second “five to seven years” of change was about slowing down and Sabbath rest. After more than ten years, the congregation was beginning to implement the skills that Pastor Steve had personally been working on for over a decade. As one lay leader said,

The second sabbatical was about the Emotionally Healthy Spirituality. So Steve and his wife were more in contact with their feelings. And I think that’s when...the whole church was starting to really embrace the Emotional Health stuff. So then everything started... the church, the small groups, we were doing all that...so the shift then happens where now, as I

realize that I as a person [have value, that] I'm valued and I'm significant, and the people around me are valued and significant. I value them for who they are, not for what I need from them or what they can do for me or the community. It was kind of scary in a sense because it's a little bit easier, I think, to establish a sense of community through fear or through manipulation.

For Pastor John, there were some changes that he made immediately when he arrived. They were changes to the church's rhythm, but they set the stage for the more significant changes he led. He described the early changes,

Barna had ten characteristics of churches that were dead. And our church was nine of the ten. The only thing we weren't is we weren't in a bad neighborhood. He said "declining neighborhood." All of the other nine, we were that. And so the first thing I did structurally [was killed some things]...we have a Sunday morning, Sunday School Sunday morning, Sunday night church that only 25 people came and judged the others who didn't, they hated coming. We had a Wednesday night prayer meeting that was attended by five people. And the five people who came always said, "Why aren't the elders here? Why aren't the people here?" And the whole thing was miserable...we didn't have small groups, and we didn't have any kind of energy. So I said, "I need to streamline this."...I started meeting with a mentor and good friend every month...I remember telling them I'm going to cancel the Sunday night service. I'm going to cancel the Wednesday night prayer meeting because nobody comes, and the only ones who come hate it. And we're going to take that energy and we're going to put it into developing small groups. But we're going to give the leadership guys more energy to focus on leadership and getting them out and ministering to people in their own lives. Just changing the whole thing. And my mentor said, "Brother, you're going to get hammered. You're going to get killed for doing that." And I said, "I think it's the right move" ...I was reading books...and one author said make changes gradually....And the other guy said change everything right away because you'll never have more power than your first 100 days idea. And so I flipped a coin and went with that. And I changed it all within a few months. I really took time to try to sell it. People were mad at me. But I had reasons. I told them.

Pastor John sought more significant systemic change on the elder board. Those changes are still ongoing, but his first significant step toward gospel health took more than four years. Pastor John described the situation on the elder board,

One of my allies didn't understand institutional change because he comes from old money and also runs a business. He was a sole proprietor of a business. He was used to making executive power decisions. And he looked at me like, "You're the pastor. You make the calls, and I'll follow you. Be decisive." And that was helpful, but then again...the other guys were like, "What the heck are you doing?" They didn't look at it that way. And the two antagonists were like, "We don't agree with anything you say." And then the four guys in the middle were all just nice guys, and they just wanted everybody to get along, which of course that's the one thing they couldn't do...so it's a classic Friedman moment, whenever there was discord. And this is where I was...introduced to Friedman. Maybe four years in – and all of a sudden, it's like, "Holy cow. I have a guy who is articulating what happened." Our church was a classic adaptation to the weakest elements. The reason people were so tenaciously clinging to our church community – it now makes sense. I always wondered, "Why did all the power people leave?" Because it didn't matter. It wasn't life or death to them. The people who stayed at the church, this was their only place. This was all they had. They had no identity personally. Their families were in tatters...everything about them was in ruins.

As Pastor John gained greater clarity about the systemic dysfunction in the leadership, he slowly took actions to confront the ruling elder that had been so contentious. When the man was re-nominated, Pastor John and the whole session met with him, and

I looked at him, and I said, "Look, I'm going to shoot straight with you. I don't think you're fit to be an elder." And I said, "I think you're quarrelsome. And...I said, "I think the rest of the guys have an opinion about that, too." And he said, "I'm not interested in what anybody else thinks." He got up and walked out. And the three or four nice guys in the middle – it was such validation. It was that great change moment. They would always say, "John, I know you're having trouble getting along with Ryan. He's difficult for you. But he's a good guy." They couldn't differentiate from him. And it was – when that moment happened – when he wouldn't listen to what input they were going to have – and I'm not so sure all of them would have voted against him. Many of them would have... [But] for him not to listen to those other guys. He got up and closed the notebook and walked out. It was a codebreaker. They couldn't believe it. It was – what I'd seen, they actually saw for the first time. So from then on, it was like, "John sees things ahead of time." They really gave me a lot of leadership credibility.

To took many years for John to change the system in adaptive ways. One of the elders who has served with him through all these changes described Pastor John this way,

John had to be very patient in setting a direction for the church, being consistent with it, handling people's objections, and not directly, but indirectly saying, "This is where we're headed, and we need you guys to get behind it." And a lot of people dragged their feet for quite a period of time until eventually, all the feet-draggers were removed.

The substantial, adaptive change that both leader's implemented took years to work into the respective system. Patience and perseverance were key qualities of both leaders as they sought to lead their congregations to systemic gospel health.

Findings Summary

The purpose of this study was to explore how a senior pastor can deliberately move the congregation toward systemic gospel health. In order to address the purpose of this study, multiple leaders and staff from two different congregations were interviewed. The study's purpose was explored through the following three research questions:

1. How do senior pastors describe systemic health?
2. What does the pastor believe to be some of the unique challenges that hinder systemic health?
3. How do senior pastors cultivate systemic health within their congregations?

The findings above have shown that for the senior pastor to move the congregation toward systemic gospel health, the senior leaders' must pursue personal integrity, grasp systems theory as it relates to the leadership teams, and cultivate an awareness of the nature of the change process.

The next chapter discusses the results and recommendations from both the literature review and this chapter's findings. In addition, some further suggestions will be

offered that may prove helpful to further equip senior leaders to deliberately move their congregations toward systemic gospel health.

Chapter Five

Discussion and Recommendations

The purpose of this study was to explore how senior pastors can deliberately move a congregation toward systemic gospel health. In Chapter Two, the literature review identified the role systems theory and change theory play in helping leaders understand the challenges of moving a congregation towards systemic gospel health. Chapter Three explained the research method and participant selection for this project. The following research questions guided interviews with participants from two churches:

7. How do senior pastors describe systemic health?
8. What does the pastor believe to be some of the unique challenges that hinder systemic health?
9. How do senior pastors cultivate systemic health within their congregations?

Chapter Four reported the significant findings with regard to the senior leader's role in leading their congregation towards systemic gospel health.

This chapter presents the conclusions of this study. The research confirmed the central role the senior leader plays in leading a congregation toward systemic health. This chapter will discuss four areas that are central to the leader's ability to lead systemic change. The first relates to the leader's integrity. The second and third present how leaders think about the congregation and change. The fourth details the role fellow change agents play in moving a congregation toward systemic gospel health. This chapter will conclude with a summary of recommendations for ministry practice and possible further research.

Summary of Study

This study responded to the 21st century church's need for a new approach to ministry wherein ministry leaders can cultivate and sustain fruitful ministry in local churches. The demands placed on ministry leaders have lead to a problematic burnout rate among pastors. As Chapter One mentioned, the percentage of pastors struggling with depression, obesity, and other stress-related health problems is higher than the national average. Ministry's low pay and high demands make it a uniquely stressful calling. In addition, local churches struggle to find a path out of the numbers-oriented success model of ministry toward a model that leads to greater gospel health. Pastor and author, Tim Keller, summarizes the dynamic well,

The church growth movement has made many lasting contributions to our practice of ministry. But its overemphasis on technique and results can put too much pressure on ministers because it under-emphasizes the importance of godly character and the sovereignty of God. Those who claim that “what is required is faithfulness” are largely right, but this mind-set can take too much pressure off church leaders. It does not lead them to ask hard questions when faithful ministries bear little fruit. When fruitfulness is our criterion for evaluation, we are held accountable but not crushed by the expectation that a certain number of lives will be changed dramatically under our ministry.³⁷⁶

In agriculture, fruitfulness depends upon the whole plant's health. The same holds true for the church. Congregations—as a whole—must grow in gospel health if they are to be fruitful. The pastor's ability to lead in that pursuit requires a personal pursuit of gospel health.

In order to explore how senior pastors can deliberately move the congregation towards systemic gospel health, the case study approach was used. I interviewed the

³⁷⁶ Keller, *Center Church*, 13.

senior pastor of two different churches as well as their spouse, staff, and lay leaders. In these interviews, I sought similarities between each senior pastor's actions to move the congregation toward gospel health. I then compared those actions with what the literature said about leading systemic change. I focused on the transferable skills and practices the senior pastors demonstrated during the change process.

Both senior leaders articulated four skills that the literature supported. First, the pastors emphasized the importance of personal growth and growth within their marriages. Pursuing gospel health within their lives and within their marriages allowed the pastors to lead the congregation toward systemic gospel health. Second, both leaders discussed how learning to think systemically about the congregation and their relationships within it gave them clarity and discernment in their leadership. Third, both pastors had a working knowledge of the critical aspects to change theory. Finally, both the literature and interviews focused upon the importance of having at least one co-laborer in the work of change. A co-laborer partners with the senior leader to help a congregation move to a healthier place. This kind of systemic change is not simply technical in nature, but it is adaptive.³⁷⁷ The research clearly emphasizes that adaptive change cannot be done alone. Adaptive change is a team sport. A discussion of each of these four areas will follow.

³⁷⁷ Linsky and Heifetz, *Leadership on the Line*, 13.

*Integrity*³⁷⁸

The literature and the interviewees frequently mentioned the word, “integrity.”

Dallas Willard said that the soul seeks harmony, connection, and integration. In *Soul Keeping*, John Ortberg connects the idea of integrity to people’s soul. He writes,

That is why *integrity* is such a deep soul-word. The human soul seeks to integrate our will and our mind and our body into an integral person...your soul is what integrates your will (intentions), your mind (your thoughts and feelings, your values and conscience), and your body (your face, body language, and actions) into a single life...psychology has focused on the self, and self carries a totally different connotation than soul. To focus on my soul means to look at my life under the care and connection of God. To focus on myself apart from God means losing awareness of what matters most.³⁷⁹

Integrity means more than simply doing what’s right. Rather, integrity is a deep alignment throughout one’s personhood, which encompasses a person’s complete humanity. Integrity is being rightly aligned so that people are able to do right. When Jesus gives the two great commandments in Matthew 22, he is calling men, women, and children to be fully integrated human beings in their service to him, others, and themselves. Integrity is what people pursue in order to “love God,”³⁸⁰ and it is what enables someone to “love their neighbor as their self.”³⁸¹ Personal integrity, according to Jesus’ definition, is about the leader knowing who they are and what they are called to do at this moment. Pastor Steve identified “integrity” as one of his five emphases for gospel

³⁷⁸ This was what I found so challenging with this research. As I grew in my conviction of the importance of personal integrity, marital integrity and the practice of slowing down, I was in the midst of violating all three in an effort to complete this dissertation. I had to act without integrity, without margins and without slowing down in order to complete this work.

³⁷⁹ Ortberg, *Soul Keeping*, 43.

³⁸⁰ Matt. 22:37.

³⁸¹ Matt. 22:39.

health. Author Pete Scazzero notes, “Emotional health...connects us to our interiors, making possible the seeing and treating of each individual as worthy of respect, created in the image of God and not just as objects to use.”³⁸²

This idea of integrity has to do with leaders’ ability to have a settled conviction about who they are and where they are headed. Unsurprisingly, integrity is essential for systemic gospel health. One of the things that makes integrity challenging is that developing personal integrity is not a linear process. The timeline is not clearly defined, and the destination is even fuzzier. In both congregations, the senior leader was on a personal journey to grow in his discovery of who God has made him to be and what God has called him to do. Developing a depth of integrity requires time for reflection upon God, themselves, their gifts and their calling. Out of this deep reservoir of contemplation, they lead their congregation. Both of these leaders discovered the importance of reflection on their own.

Often times, ministerial candidates have a naïveté that because they have responded to God’s call to ministry, they now know themselves. The idea is that because I know what I am going to do in some general sense, I know who I am. This naïveté views integrity in terms of doing rather than being. The problem is that it limits personhood to the will. Candidates do not understand that the self, or soul, is more than what they do. Nor does this naïveté recognize that as people grow, they change. Both senior leaders understood integrity as having a deep sense of conviction about who they are as individuals and what God is specifically calling them to do in this season and in

³⁸² Scazzero, *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality*, 47.

this place. That calling develops as they grow. Those changes may be minor, like leading a new ministry initiative, but those changes may lead them far afield from where they started right out of seminary.

Integrity is about coming to grips with one's personal story. This sense of personal identity is the result of self-examination and working through the depths of one's heart. As Scazzero wrote,

Most of us, in our more honest moments, will admit there are deep layers beneath our day-to-day awareness... [In looking at an iceberg] only about 10 percent of an iceberg is visible to the eye. This 10 percent represents the visible changes we make that others can see. We are nicer people, more respectful. We attend church and participate regularly. We "clean up our lives" somewhat – from alcohol and drugs to foul language to illicit behavior and beyond. We begin to pray and share Christ with others. But the roots of who we are continue unaffected and unmoved.³⁸³

Integrity is the journey of discovering what is beneath the surface. As Pastor Steve reflected upon leading the congregation towards systemic gospel health, he said, "You can only take them where you've gone." By looking beneath the surface, leaders learned about themselves and why they did what they did. Both of them talked about how their family of origin impacted them. They both talked about going to regular counseling—personally and with their spouse. As Pastor John said,

My dad is a classic builder...Hard-working, emotionally unavailable, rarely involved in my life. Work hard, be a good man [son]...Study hard, graduate, do what you want to do. But no involvement at all in my life. Spiritually, none. My family is not Christian at all...not personally involved. And so I thought that was normal. I thought that was the way – and especially as I became more involved in the masculine Reformed faith thing...an emotional need, I just didn't even know what that was. Mind, heart, that stuff. Mind leads to heart. Just do the right thing, know the right stuff, and you're going to be fine. My marriage is the greatest

³⁸³ Ibid., 17.

educator of my whole life...and that was gradual. My wife is so sweet. She gradually began to find her voice and speak into my life like, “You know, it would be neat if you could be attentive to me at all.”

A staff member who works with Pastor Steve said, “Pastor Steve comes from all this insecurity, so letting people go was his issue...”

When leaders have a growing sense of personal integrity, they manage relationships with greater effectiveness because they are well-differentiated. True and lasting differentiation builds upon the foundation of integrity. In *The Failure of Nerve*, Edwin Friedman says,

My own understanding of the fact that leadership is essentially an *emotional* process rather than a *cognitive* phenomenon and my awareness of the vital importance of well-differentiated leadership for the functioning and survival of institutions...by *well-differentiated leader* I do not mean an autocrat who tells others what to do or orders them around, although any leader who defines himself or herself clearly may be perceived that way by those who are not taking responsibility for their own emotional being and destiny. Rather, I mean someone who has clarity about his or her own life goals, and, therefore, someone who is less likely to become lost in the anxious emotional processes swirling about.³⁸⁴

Friedman continues, “Differentiation means the capacity to become oneself out of one’s self, with minimum reactivity to the positions or reactivity of others.”³⁸⁵ For both Pastor John and Pastor Steve, leading with integrity was central to how they related to everyone within the system as well as led systemic gospel change.

The senior leaders also spoke about how personal integrity relates to their marriages. If the senior leader is married, as was the case in these case studies, I found that the most important relationship for the system’s health was the leader’s marriage.

³⁸⁴ Friedman, *A Failure of Nerve*, 14.

³⁸⁵ Ibid., 183.

Pastor Steve said that we “lead out of our marriage.” While this may seem obvious, ministry leaders often neglect their marriages. Blind to his marital problems in his ministry’s early years, almost losing his marriage opened Pastor Steve’s eyes.

By prioritizing their marriages in their heart and their schedule, the senior leaders were indirectly moving the system toward gospel health. Prioritizing their marriages meant more than simply making time for their wives. For Pastor Steve it meant learning to be present, practicing what he called “incarnational listening.” For Pastor John, prioritizing his marriage meant learning to attend to his wife. It is important to note that none of this appear to be formal, organizational leadership, but marriages played an essential role in the cultivating the leader’s integrity. How lay leaders and staff universally commented on the importance of the senior leader’s marriage relationship surprised me. As the staff and leadership watched the leader’s marriage grow and change, they also became healthier.

In both cases, the senior leader’s spouse had always engaged in ministry. For both leaders, they were attracted to their spouse because they were great partners in ministry. The senior leaders saw their marriage primarily in terms of a partnership for effective ministry. As they experienced greater depth of integrity, they learned how to love and cherish their spouse. Pastor John explained how the integrity in his marriage came as he became “a resource” of gospel truth and nourishment for his spouse. Some traditions make more of an effort to evaluate a couple’s fitness for ministry in the candidating process.³⁸⁶ While this initial assessment is an excellent place to start, an ongoing evaluation process which helps ministry leaders stay in tune with their marriage’s and

³⁸⁶ Mission to North America and Reformed University Fellowship both have rigorous assessment programs in which the candidate and spouse both go through a series of evaluations before being placed.

family's ever-changing needs could prove fruitful. This process could take the form of receiving coaching or regular counseling.

The stigma associated with receiving counseling in some parts of the evangelical church poses a challenge. In many churches, if the pastor and his spouse receive regular marriage counseling, it could negatively impact the ministry. In addition, the cost of counseling prohibits many ministry couples. Helping churches and ministries overcome these two hurdles gives ministry couples the opportunity to develop marital integrity, one of the key components of personal integrity for the leader.

From the literature and the interviews, two things surfaced that had a profound impact on the development of personal integrity for the senior leader. The first was learning to slow down. "Slow down spirituality" was one of Pastor Steve's five aspects of gospel health. The literature addressed the leaders' need to slow down in order to process their emotions as well as what is happening within the system. The second thing that impacts the development of personal integrity was experiencing suffering and loss both personally and professionally. In both churches, the senior leader and his family endured significant suffering and loss through the process of leading their respective congregations toward systemic gospel health. If leaders pursue health for a system, suffering will be a part of the journey. If leaders seek health, they and their family will experience difficulty. If leaders want to avoid pain and suffering for themselves or their family, they will not be able to lead a congregation towards systemic gospel health. The nature of the gospel is such that this should come as no surprise. Gospel health is about following Christ in order to become more and more like him, the suffering servant. The only path to gospel health goes through the valley of the shadow of death.

Systems Thinking

The second key finding in the literature and interviews was the senior leader's ability to think about the congregation in systemic terms. As an ordained member of Pastor John's staff said,

A lot of times we think about a church as being just what's being taught on Sunday morning from the pulpit. And that's certainly really significant. ...But a church, really to be a church...is so many other aspects and so many important parts...[It's] systemic, it's...the ethos, as Phil Douglass...talk[s] about [in his book *What is Your Church's Personality?*].

Goleman stated,

You can't ignore culture – and you can't hope to change it one leader at a time. By ignoring the big picture and focusing instead on developing leaders one by one...leadership fail[s] to bring about critically needed changes that would...[help]...organization[s to] succeed.³⁸⁷

A congregation's culture is its unique emotional systemic identity. Leaders who understand a system's culture are able to lead it more effectively to gospel health. As Steinke said,

We must not neglect the power of the culture or “spirit” of a congregation...I...place more emphasis on the key role of “mood, tone, and spirit” in enhancing congregational health, not unlike what we've learned about the relationship between attitude and social connections and our health...I wonder if the “mood, tone, and spirit” of a congregation isn't closely related to having a clear purpose, which in healthy congregations is a focus on mission. When life is meaningful, people have more energy – and hope.³⁸⁸

Because the pastors thought systemically, they had an idea of where the congregation was and the congregation's specific needs for moving toward greater gospel health.

Herrington, Creech, and Taylor explain how “*leadership always takes place in the*

³⁸⁷ Goleman, et. al., *Primal Leadership*, 232.

³⁸⁸ Steinke, *Healthy Congregations*, ix-x.

context of a living system, and the system plays by a set of observable rules. If we are to lead in that context, we need to understand the rules.”³⁸⁹ Murray Bowen similarly wrote,

When any key member of an emotional system can control his own emotional reactivity and accurately observe the functioning of the system and his part in it, and he can avoid counter-attacking when he is provoked, and when he can maintain an active relationship with the other key members without withdrawing or becoming silent, the entire system will change.³⁹⁰

Because leadership is about relationships, understanding the congregation as an emotional system enabled both leaders to navigate the change process. As Kouzes and Posner wrote,

Leadership is a relationship. Leadership is a relationship between those who aspire to lead and those who choose to follow. It’s the quality of this relationship that matters most when we’re engaged in getting extraordinary things done. A leader-constituent relationship that’s characterized by fear and distrust will never, ever produce anything of lasting value. A relationship characterized by mutual respect and confidence will overcome the greatest adversities and leave a legacy of significance.³⁹¹

It is the senior leader’s job, “to ensure that the organization develops relationships that help produce desirable results.”³⁹² In both churches, the senior leader understood relational dynamics well enough that they navigated the complexity of relationships with effectiveness. As Pastor John’s wife said, “he’s a good team kind of guy.” Herrington, Creech, and Taylor rightly state,

³⁸⁹ Herrington, et. al., *The Leader's Journey*, 30.

³⁹⁰ The Bowen Center, “The Bowen Center - Training - Postgraduate Program,” thebowncenter.org, accessed September 18, 2014, <https://www.thebowncenter.org/pages/postgradprog.html>.

³⁹¹ Kouzes and Posner, *The Leadership Challenge*, 24.

³⁹² Fullan, *Leading in a Culture of Change*, 68.

According to systems theory, two variables work in tandem in every emotional system, governing its function. One is the level of emotional maturity of the people in the system and of the leadership in particular. The other is the level of anxiety and tension to which the system is subject. The greater the level of emotional maturity in a system, the better equipped it is to handle a spike in the level of anxiety when one comes. The higher the level of emotional maturity, the lower the level of constant and chronic anxiety.³⁹³

Pastor John developed his knowledge of systems thinking more intuitively in the early days of his ministry. In contrast, Pastor Steve pursued a Doctor of Ministry in Marriage and Family counseling. Regardless of how they acquired the knowledge, both thought systemically about their congregations. Both learned how to remain emotionally connected to their people without becoming enmeshed. As Herrington, Creech, and Taylor wrote,

Leaders struggle with finding a way to disengage the system sufficiently to foster their own personal health and growth, without cutting off from the congregation the person is called to lead. The challenge is always to stay in the system yet do the right thing. 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 or the majority, and to remain a calm presence when the anxiety rises.³⁹⁴

As the senior leaders in this study developed more personal integrity, they were able to remain more differentiated, which enabled them to be a non-anxious presence during periods of high anxiety. All of these concepts – seeing the congregation as a living system, differentiation, and becoming a non-anxious presence – were essential to help the pastors lead their congregation toward gospel health.

³⁹³ Herrington, et. al., *The Leader's Journey*, 33.

³⁹⁴ Ibid., 46.

Change

The third finding from the research is that both senior leaders had an understanding of the change process. How they managed the pace of change revealed their understanding. Peter Steinke highlights the challenge of leading change when he wrote, “To recognize and treat a problem as an adaptive challenge will rock the emotional boat...People don’t want leaders to upset them with adaptive solutions that involve change, learning, loss and uncertainty.”³⁹⁵ Both Pastor Steve and Pastor John understood this concept, and they paced the rate of adaptive change. To use Heifetz and Linsky’s words, they understood leading change as “disappointing your own people at a rate they can absorb, as you get them to face the need to make tough trade-offs.”³⁹⁶

Because change is first and foremost about emotions, the feelings of loss are powerful change killers.³⁹⁷ The leader’s responsibility is,

To help people navigate through a period of disturbance as they sift through what is essential and what is expendable, and as they experiment with solutions to the adaptive challenges at hand. This disequilibrium can catalyze everything from conflict, frustration, and panic to confusion, disorientation, and fear of losing something dear...The purpose is to make progress on a tough collective challenge...collective and individual disequilibrium is a byproduct generated when you call attention to tough questions and draw people’s sense of responsibility beyond current norms...your goal should be to keep the temperature within what we call the productive zone of disequilibrium (PZD): enough heat generated by your intervention to gain attention, engagement, and forward motion, but not so much that the organization (or your part of it) explodes.³⁹⁸

³⁹⁵ Steinke, *Congregational Leadership in Anxious Times*, 128.

³⁹⁶ Ronald A. Heifetz, and Martin Linsky, “Leadership on the Line: Staying Alive Through the Dangers of Leading - HBS Working Knowledge Archive - Harvard Business School,” [hbswk.hbs.edu](http://hbswk.hbs.edu/archive/2952.html), May 28, 2002, accessed February 3, 2016, <http://hbswk.hbs.edu/archive/2952.html>.

³⁹⁷ Ken Blanchard et al., *Who Killed Change? Solving the Mystery of Leading People Through Change* (New York: William Morrow, 2009), 3.

³⁹⁸ Heifetz, et. al., *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership*, 28-29.

Both of the senior leaders pursued change with patience. Pastor John took four years to have healthier elders on his session. Pastor Steve took five to seven years to implement the first several aspects of his definition of gospel health, primarily leading out of one's marriage. Fullan explains why pacing the change is so important,

In a change effort, culture comes last, not first...The logic is straightforward. If the culture is inward looking, risk averse, and slow, we'll change that first. Then nearly any new vision can be implemented more easily. Sounds reasonable, but it doesn't work that way. A culture truly changes only when a new way of operating has been shown to succeed over some minimum period of time. Trying to shift the norms and values before you have created the new way of operating does not work.³⁹⁹

Both pastors understood the emotional nature of change and the need for urgency, which is counterbalanced with pacing the change, a mix of art and science. Their artistic actions involved the way they intuitively navigated challenging relational dynamics. Their scientific actions included changes to their respective organizational structures through things like term limits or beginning every meeting with a Community Temperature Reading.

Co-Laborers

The final quality that both congregations had in place as the senior leaders moved the congregation toward system gospel health was that the senior leader had co-conspirators in the change process. Pastor John talked about two guys who “were his big cheerleaders,” and Pastor Steve had his wife as his primary support. In the literature,

³⁹⁹ Kotter and Cohen, *The Heart of Change*, 174.

Heifetz and Linsky talk about having confidants and allies⁴⁰⁰ as a leader make adaptive changes to an institution. In *The Leaders Challenge*, Kouzes and Posner write that leaders of change, “foster collaboration by building trust and facilitating relationships”⁴⁰¹ In Kotter’s, *The Heart of Change*, his second and third steps of successful change involve building a guiding team and getting the vision right.⁴⁰² Herrington and Bonam call these two steps “establishing the vision community” and “determining the vision path.”⁴⁰³ Both senior leaders had formal teams in place, but these close, co-laborers enabled the senior pastors to persevere and lead the change.

Discussion and Recommendations

In this section, we have seen how pastors effectively move congregations toward systemic gospel health think systemically by growing in personal and martial integrity. In addition, the pastors have the ability to think about the congregation in systemic terms and are knowledgeable about the elements of change theory. Finally these leaders always had at least one co-laborer among the leadership who was helping lead the change process. The next section recommends some areas of further study that may be considered.

⁴⁰⁰ They define allies as, “people who share many of your values, or at least your strategy, and operate across some organizational or factional boundary.” Confidants, “have few, if any, conflicting loyalties... can do something that allies can’t do. They can provide you with a place where you can say everything that’s in your heart, everything that’s on your mind.” *Leadership on the Line*, 199.

⁴⁰¹ Kouzes and Posner, *The Leadership Challenge*, 26.

⁴⁰² Kotter and Cohen, *The Heart of Change*, 6.

⁴⁰³ Herrington and Bonem, *Leading Congregational Change*, 13.

Recommendations for Further Research and Practice

This study examined the senior leader's role in leading a congregation towards systemic gospel health through a case study model. The nature of the case study model has limitations and more work could be done on developing a more robust definition of gospel health. Here are some suggestions for possible areas of further study.

The first area is training candidates for ministry in systems thinking and change theory. One aspect would be exploring the most effective way to equip leaders over many years to navigate the challenges of leading systemic gospel change.

Another area that would be worth exploring is how much training pastors get in the area of creating a personal integrity development plan. A study in this vein would explore how seminarians understand the development of an integrated soul throughout a lifetime of ministry. One aspect of this could be studying the impact of divorce within a person's family of origin with divorce. Exploring what can be done to help leader's process the specific consequences of divorce and how to deal with ongoing effects on one's leadership.

A third area worth further exploration is how senior leaders can identify and develop co-laboring relationships. This could examine the effectiveness of cultivating those relationships in the organization as well as outside of it. Could peer group gatherings help senior leader's negotiate the challenges of leadership more effectively.

A fourth area to explore is how different generations respond to change. Do they have the ability to endure faster paced change? What is the rate that is optimal? A similar study could be done distinguishing between rural and urban churches. Are urban centers

less change averse? How does the transient nature of urban areas affect the system as well as change?

A final area that would be a fascinating study would be to explore the impact a healthy system has on unhealthy senior leaders. Historically, there are many examples of congregations that “trained” their minister over the course of the pastor’s ministry. This would be more challenging work but if the senior leader can have such a profound impact on the system, systems theory seems to also imply that the system has the power to change the senior leader.

Final Summary

The purpose of this study was to explore how senior pastors can deliberately move the congregation toward systemic gospel health. In Chapter Two, the literature review identified the role systems theory and change theory play in helping leaders understand the challenges of moving a congregation towards systemic gospel health. Chapter Three explained the research method and participant selection for this project. Interviews were conducted with the research subjects from two churches using the following three research questions:

1. How do senior pastors describe systemic health?
2. What does the pastor believe to be some of the unique challenges that hinder systemic health?
3. How do senior pastors cultivate systemic health within their congregations?

The study has shown that for senior leaders to move a congregation toward systemic gospel health, they must be working on personal integrity. Focusing on personal growth gives leaders credibility, an understanding of the change process, and an understanding of

emotional systems thinking. In addition, the senior leader must have at least one co-laborer with them in the change process.

Leading a congregation toward systemic change is no easy task. In one sense, it might be easier for the senior pastor to focus solely on external indicators like attendance and giving to measure the congregation's health. However, if senior leaders desire gospel fruit, they must focus on cultivating all four areas this study has identified. They must work towards change within individuals as well as changes in the system. This is a much more labor-intensive endeavor but the fruit of which is more beautiful and lasting. As Jesus reminds all those who follow him,

Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bare fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.⁴⁰⁴

May pastors learn to lead their congregations to abide in Christ more and more. In doing so we will experience what Paul told the church in Corinth, “And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.”⁴⁰⁵

⁴⁰⁴ John 15:1-5.

⁴⁰⁵ 2 Cor. 3:18.

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