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Serving Under the Toxic Leader:
Practicing Self-Differentiation in the Christian Organization

By
Kelly H. Dehnert

A Dissertation Submitted to
the Faculty of Covenant Theological Seminary
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Ministry

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Covenant Theological Seminary

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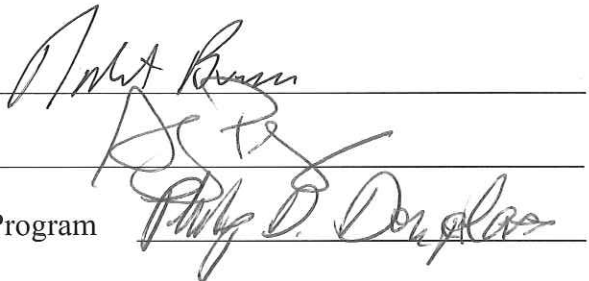
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Abstract

The literature has given little attention to the confusion and emotional trauma Christian employees experience because of conflict with harmful supervisors who profess faith in Jesus Christ. There is inadequate scholarship addressing conflict resolution within power structures in the Christian workplace. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to explore how employees of Christian organizations practice self-differentiation while interacting with supervisors who exercise toxic leadership.

Four research questions guided this study: (1) What are the biblical-theological principles employees of Christian organizations use to frame their practice of self-differentiation while interacting with toxic supervisors? (2) What are the challenges employees of Christian organizations face when practicing self-differentiation while interacting with toxic supervisors? (3) What is the impact on Christian organizations of employees practicing self-differentiation while interacting with toxic supervisors? (4) How do employees of Christian organizations who practice self-differentiation with toxic supervisors pursue shalom in their work? The study utilized a qualitative design using semi-structured interviews with eight former and one current employee of Christian organizations. The data were analyzed using the constant comparative method.

The findings of the study were that shalom and healing may be gained by interacting with toxic supervisors with a biblical focus on self-differentiation.

The study provided conclusions based on biblical literature, the social sciences in regard to toxic behaviors, and leadership best practice. It was concluded rejection of the supervisor's behavior may include confrontation, seeking accountability for the leader, or leaving the organization.

To Connie (my wife and best friend), Britney, Joel, Shea, and Janelle – my fellow pilgrims on the road to recovery.

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Unless otherwise noted, all scripture citations are taken from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version, copyright 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Text edition: 2007.

Chapter One

Introduction

Peter, an employee of a Christian organization, was asked to meet with John, the president of the organization. John was angry about an email Peter sent to other employees as part of an online discussion regarding a recent organizational problem. In the meeting, John asked, with a threatening tone, for Peter to apologize for challenging John's authority. Peter did not interpret the email as doing so, but John had no patience to listen to Peter's explanation. John continued his rant by defending his own actions and placing blame for the ongoing problem on one of his managers. Peter left the meeting wondering how long he could survive in the organization.

Susan, an instructor for a Christian school, was told by Martha, a fellow teacher and wife of the director, that Susan's students were misusing a computer lab for which Martha was responsible. Martha threatened to charge Susan a fee for her students to use the lab. She argued the students had never used the lab before for an assignment. Though Susan had assigned the students use of the lab previously, Susan sought a solution to the problematic use. Her husband, Mark, began working with the IT director to propose a solution. Martha, when hearing the proposal, sent a threatening email, saying, "If I want your input, I will certainly ask...I suggest you keep out of my lab." Mark was shocked by the response. Soon after, the school's director brought Mark into his office to explain how Mark needed to keep out of his wife's lab. Mark and Susan thought, as colleagues and Christians, they would be able to work through issues like this one. It was even more

confusing when, following a heated exchange with Martha, she treated Susan like her closest friend at a dinner that night. Susan and Mark thought they might be going crazy.

According to Justin Menkes of the Harvard Business Review Web Blog, it is the “high achievers” who are chosen for CEO positions in corporations.¹ Kate Ludeman and Eddie Erlundson, who have coached more than 1,000 senior executives, say “Alpha Males” and “Queen Bees,” so named in business management literature due to their aggressive and authoritarian leadership style, are “bold, self-confident, and demanding” and “have opinions about everything, and they rarely admit that those opinions might be wrong or incomplete.”² Robert Hare, the creator of the “Psychopathy Scale” used by many in criminal psychology, famously commented, “Not all psychopaths are in prison – some are in the board room.”³

Research indicates that a large percentage of employees are treated poorly by supervisors who exhibit a variety of toxic behaviors. Those numbers are “staggering” according to Michael Onorato of the School of Business at SUNY. His research suggests “90% of the workforce suffers boss abuse at some time in their career.”⁴ Onorato says

¹ Justin Menkes, “Narcissism: The Difference Between High Achievers and Leaders,” *Harvard Business Review Blog Network*, 1, entry posted July 4, 2012, accessed February 10, 2015, http://blogs.hbr.org/cs/2012/07/narcissism_the_difference_betw.html.

² Kate Ludeman and Eddie Erlandson, “Coaching the Alpha Male,” *Harvard Business Review* 82, no. 5 (May 2004), 58.

³ Tomas Chamorro-Premuzic, “Why Bad Guys Win at Work,” *Harvard Business Review*, November 2, 2015, accessed March 18, 2016, <https://hbr.org/2015/11/why-bad-guys-win-at-work>.

⁴ Michael Onorato, “An Empirical Study of Unethical Leadership and Workplace Bullying in Industry Segments,” *SAM Advanced Management Journal* 78, no. 2 (Spring 2013): 4.

recent research concluded that thirty-five percent of American workers say they have been bullied at work.⁵ Dr. Peggy Drexler, Professor of Psychology of the Weill Cornell Medical College, reports, “45% of respondents [to a national survey] had been bullied at the office.” This bullying included “verbal abuse, job sabotage, misuse of authority, [and] deliberate destruction of relationships.”⁶

Onorato suggests that it is a “silent epidemic” in part because these percentages are probably lower than the actual incidences “due to the reluctance of targets to report acts of bullying.”⁷ Toxic bosses are active in creating workplaces filled with fear and frustration. Drexler says alphas, male or female, “use fear as a tool for advancement.”⁸ Fear of reprimands, loss of employment, or ridicule may keep many employees from challenging the supervisor or seeking help from others in authority.

Pursuing ways to prevent abusive behavior in the corporate workplace, psychology professors Milda Astrauskaite, Roy M. Kern, and Guy Notelaers note research has shown “cooperation through problem solving behavior demonstrated positive consequences” in marital relationships and education settings, but “trying to solve problems and conflicts in a cooperative way with superiors or being open with the

⁵ Ibid., 5.

⁶ Peggy Drexler, “The Tyranny of the Queen Bee,” *The Wall Street Journal*, March 2, 2013, sec. C1.

⁷ Onorato, “An Empirical Study of Unethical Leadership and Workplace Bullying in Industry Segments,” 4.

⁸ Drexler, “The Tyranny of the Queen Bee.”

potential instigators may even make the situation worse.”⁹ The professors concluded that more research is needed in the particular area where there are power structures in place (i.e. employee to supervisor).¹⁰

After counseling “manipulators” and their victims for more than twenty years, George Simon says, abusers are “wolves in sheep’s clothing.”¹¹ This is an apt description of leaders of Christian organizations who can be described in the same way as their non-Christian counterparts in non-Christian organizations and corporations. Where the character of a Christian leader is to be “above reproach,” as the apostle Paul says in his letter to the young pastor, Timothy, some may use their position of authority for their own “shameful gain” as the apostle Peter says.¹² Andy Crouch, executive editor of *Christianity Today* and senior fellow of the International Justice Mission’s IJM Institute, explains, “power is meant for image-bearing, and image-bearing is meant for flourishing.”¹³ But, few under the authority of manipulative, aggressive, and unteachable leaders would describe the system in which they work as flourishing. Such environments are described as toxic whether found in a Christian or non-Christian organization.

⁹ Milda Astrauskaite, Roy M. Kern, and Guy Notelaers, “An Individual Psychology Approach to Underlying Factors of Workplace Bullying,” *The Journal of Individual Psychology* 70, no. 3 (Fall 2014): 230–31.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Dr. George K. Simon, *In Sheep’s Clothing: Understanding and Dealing with Manipulative People*, 2nd ed. (Little Rock, AR: Parkhurst Brothers Publishers Inc, 2010), 30.

¹² 1 Timothy 1:6, 1 Peter 5:2.

¹³ Andy Crouch, *Playing God: Redeeming the Gift of Power* (Downer’s Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2013), 54.

The difficulties that an employee of a Christian organization faces when interacting with these supervisors and determining when to leave the organization are numerous. Not only must they consider their psychological, physical, and economic well-being, but they must interact with their biblical and theological convictions in regards to submission to authority and conflict resolution. There is a plethora of literature available to instruct Christians in regards to relational conflict with family and friends, but literature that instructs the Christian working in an environment of fear and intimidation, created by supervisors who profess belief in their same Lord, is considerably less. Among business management specialists, much research has been done for persons facing this dilemma in non-Christian settings, but little has appeared interacting with the witness of scripture pertaining to this area of workplace dysfunction.

Rob Hay, Director of “Generating Change,” says it is likely an employee, “at some point during the span of a thirty or forty-year career, will work in an organization dominated by a toxic leader.”¹⁴ These organizations can include cross-cultural mission agencies, food aid programs, and education ministries, among others. Some of these employees join an organization believing in the vision and work of the organization. Later, they find that it is rife with toxicity created by a leader, who could be described as abusive.

Though some Christian organizations may have a structure that can come to the aid of an employee being abused by a supervisor, there are many reasons why employees

¹⁴ Rob Hay, “The Toxic Mission Organisation: Fiction or Fact?,” *Encounters Mission Ezine*, no. 2 (October 2004): 8.

fail to receive the help they need. They may refuse to come forward, believing they will be unable to receive fair treatment by investigators connected to the organization. In addition, they may have concerns about the confidentiality of their report, resulting in their supervisor retaliating.¹⁵ The efforts of “whistleblowers” – those who approach authorities to report toxic supervisors – after stepping “forward at great risk to name and career,” often do not “result in punishment of the toxic leaders they unmask,” according to Jean Lipman-Blumen.¹⁶ In addition, many who serve on the board of directors of such organizations, as those given authority over the CEO or president, serve largely at the whim of the organization’s leader. As Lipman-Blumen says, “Boards of directors commonly turn from shepherds into sheep.”¹⁷

When Christians serve under the authority of a leader who practices toxic leadership, they must determine first how they are to interact relationally with the leader. As a member of the body of Christ and, yet serving under the leader’s authority, do the scriptural passages that give guidance to those who have been offended by the sin of their brother in the faith apply to their present difficulty? Does Matthew 18:15-18 describe a three-step process that an employee must complete when relating to a toxic supervisor? Does 1 Peter 2:18-20 give direction to the employee of a Christian organization that is

¹⁵ Ventura County (CA) Grand Jury, “Bullying In the Workplace” (County of Ventura, California, May 24, 2011), 3, http://workplacebullying.org/multi/pdf/ventura_gj_report.pdf.

¹⁶ Jean Lipman-Blumen, *The Allure of Toxic Leaders: Why We Follow Destructive Bosses and Corrupt Politicians--and How We Can Survive Them* (Oxford University Press, 2004), 10, Kindle.

¹⁷ Ibid., 162.

under the oppressive behavior of an “unjust,” “unreasonable” or “harsh” leader?¹⁸ Should the employee simply overlook the moral failures of the supervisor out of respect for the office of “master” and, in some cases, a belief the ministry belongs to the leader? Should the founder not be afforded greater moral leeway in directing the ministry?

Second, can a self-differentiated employee have an impact on the leader and organization? Edwin Friedman, author of *A Failure of Nerve: Leadership in the Age of the Quick Fix*, argues a self-differentiated individual can calm an anxious system.¹⁹ What are the possible effects of the employee who, experiencing a toxic system, acts with self-differentiation as defined by Friedman and others?

Third, how does an employee serving under a toxic leader gain shalom in his life? Does resigning from a toxic ministry speak of failure on the part of the employee? Was the employee too sensitive and lacking faith to stand with the organization as it sought to accomplish its ministry in a hostile world? Should the employee have grasped the gospel goal with greater vigor, knowing that “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God?”

Defining Toxic Leadership

This study focuses on the response of employees of Christian organizations to employers or supervisors who practice toxic leadership. The word, “toxic” has been chosen broadly to differentiate habitually abusive leaders from leaders who may react

¹⁸ 1 Peter 2:18-20. In Greek, “skolios” means “crooked, curved” according to Thayer’s Greek Dictionary. The word is variously translated as “unjust” (ESV), “unreasonable” (NASB) and “harsh” (NKJ).

¹⁹ Edwin H. Friedman, *A Failure of Nerve: Leadership in the Age of the Quick Fix* (New York: Seabury Books, 2007), Chapter 4 (locations 2839-40), Kindle.

poorly and in passion to situations, but recognize their offense, and seek reconciliation or respond humbly in repentance to the offended party. Jean Lipman-Blumen, author of “The Allure of Toxic Leaders: Why We Follow Destructive Bosses and Corrupt Politicians—and How We Can Survive Them” says, toxic leaders are a

global label for leaders who engage in numerous destructive behaviors and who exhibit certain dysfunctional personal characteristics. To count as toxic, these behaviors and qualities of character must inflict some reasonably serious and enduring harm on their followers and their organizations. The intent to harm others or to enhance the self at the expense of others distinguishes seriously toxic leaders from the careless or unintentional toxic leaders, who also cause negative effects.²⁰

There are a number of behaviors common to toxic leaders: bullying, autocratic, narcissistic, abusive, psychopathic, and Machiavellian. Though, leaders may act in these ways at times, a toxic leader will be described, using one or more of these terms, with frequency. Under the authority of a toxic leader, an employee “is persistently exposed to negative and aggressive behaviors primarily of a psychological nature, with the effect of humiliating, intimidating, frightening, or punishing the target,” says Onorato.²¹

A Biblical Analysis

Relational conflict began in the Garden of Eden as described in Genesis 3. Adam and Eve, the first parents, were faced with the choice of trusting God or falling to the temptation that Satan laid before them. After their failure to trust God, the couple hid in shame from Yahweh while he was walking in the Garden. Immediately, Adam and Eve

²⁰ Lipman-Blumen, *The Allure of Toxic Leaders*, 18, Kindle.

²¹ Onorato, “An Empirical Study of Unethical Leadership and Workplace Bullying in Industry Segments,” 5.

sought to relieve themselves of failure and shame and so blamed others for their failures. In the case of the woman, she explained that Satan had caused her failure. In the case of Adam, he complained of God's failure in giving the woman to him despite God's having created the best possible mate for the man.²²

There is no ceasing in this world from conflict in relationships, whether it be between husband and wife or employee and supervisor. Though this study considers only four biblical passages in depth, a study that focused primarily on biblical theology would consider many other passages that speak into the intent and application of these passages. However, the passages focused on in this study were chosen because they were commonly considered by participants.

Conflict Resolution

Scripture provides much information on the resolution of conflict between people. Because Christianity is a relational religion, focusing on the relationships of God to man and man to man, the Bible is largely a textbook on relationship building and redeeming in each of these categories.²³ There is a significant amount of literature written by Christian and non-Christian alike studying the resolution of conflict between people whether in the home, workplace, or church.²⁴

²² Genesis 3:1–13.

²³ The ten commandments, found in Exodus 20, provide instructions for man's relationship to God (commandments one through 4) and man's relationships to other people (commandments five through 10).

²⁴ There are numerous works by authors such as Larry Crabb, Kenneth Sande, Gary Thomas, and others.

This research considers Matthew 18:15-19 and Matthew 7:1-6. Each passage contains the words of Jesus Christ as recorded by the apostle Matthew. Each are instructions given to his disciples on the matter of conflict resolution. Matthew 18 focusses on a process of engagement with a Christian brother who has sinned against another. Matthew 7 provides instructions on the attitude of the offended towards to offender.

Submission to Authority

As pastor and author, Timothy Witmer says, respect for authority has greatly decreased in our culture.²⁵ “Question authority” was apparently coined by the Greek philosopher Socrates (fifth century, BC), but was made popular in current culture by Timothy Leary.²⁶ The biblical authors speak of submission to authority in a number of places. From the many examples of both rejection of and submission to authority, the Bible is replete with instruction.²⁷ However, this study focuses on 1 Peter 2:18 where Peter stresses both the motive and action of submission to a “master.” Allan Barr, Scottish theologian, says, it is Peter “who brings the idea to the front and stresses it most.”²⁸

²⁵ Timothy Z. Witmer, *Shepherd Leader* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2010), 77.

²⁶ “Socrates,” *Wikipedia, the Free Encyclopedia*, February 24, 2015, accessed February 27, 2015, <http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Socrates&oldid=648603929>.

²⁷ 1 Samuel 24:4–6, Ephesians 6:5–8, 1 Peter 2:18.

²⁸ Allan Barr, “Submission Ethic in the First Epistle of Peter,” *The Hartford Quarterly* 2 (1961-62), 28.

Imprecatory Praying

Lastly, Psalm 55 is studied for its applicability to toxic supervisors. This psalm, written by David, the king of Israel in 1000 BC, is an “imprecatory psalm.” In it, David prays for the destruction of an enemy, who also happens to be a friend. As some employees of Christian organizations consider themselves friends of the leader who has abused them, this passage is very poignant in its applicability to their circumstances.

Practicing Self-Differentiation

This study of those who work for Christian organizations is intended to describe how an employee can interact with supervisors who practice toxic leadership. What are the best practices of those who seek to be a witness for Christ while under the authority of abusive leaders? The concept of self-differentiation provides a framework for interaction where engagement can be emotionally taxing for the employee. This research considers how the employee can engage a toxic employer and remain uncontrolled by their toxicity, as Herrington, Creech, and Taylor define self-differentiation.²⁹

Problem and Purpose Statements

Ideally, organizations seek “leaders who respect others and allow them to be themselves, with collaborative support, conveying a sense of unconditional worth and appreciation of their contributions.”³⁰ However, Dan Allender, psychologist and author,

²⁹ Jim Herrington, *The Leader’s Journey: Accepting the Call to Personal and Congregational Transformation* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2003), Chapter 2 (locations 273–74), Kindle.

³⁰ Onorato, “An Empirical Study of Unethical Leadership and Workplace Bullying in Industry Segments,” 6.

says, “There are people in this world who seem to live and breathe evil.”³¹ They are found in the workplace just as they are found in society as a whole. Though Allender cautions against rigidly categorizing people, he argues that unlike “normal sinners,” an evil individual is “deceitfully gifted in making the victim of his abuse feel like the perpetrator of the harm.”³²

The literature has given little attention to the confusion and emotional trauma Christian employees experience because of conflict with their supervisors who profess faith. There is inadequate scholarship addressing conflict resolution within power structures in the Christian workplace. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to explore how employees of Christian organizations practice differentiation while interacting with supervisors who exercise toxic leadership.

Three main areas that are central to this response to toxic leadership in Christian organizations have been identified: identifying toxic leadership, biblical-theological principles for conflict resolution with toxic leaders, and practicing differentiation.

Research Questions

To that end, the following research questions guided the qualitative research.

1. What are the biblical-theological principles employees of Christian organizations use to frame their practice of self-differentiation while interacting with toxic supervisors?
2. What are the challenges employees of Christian organizations face when practicing self-differentiation while interacting with toxic supervisors?

³¹ Dan B. Allender and Tremper Longman III, *Bold Love* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2014), 233.

³² *Ibid.*, 236.

3. What is the impact on Christian organizations of employees practicing self-differentiation while interacting with toxic supervisors?
4. How do employees of Christian organizations who practice self-differentiation with toxic supervisors pursue shalom in their workplace?

Significance of the Study

This study has significance for many who have been affected by toxic leadership in Christian organizations. The research is for those who presently serve, have resigned or been fired from, or counsel others who have experienced working in Christian organizations with toxic leadership.

First, there is significance for the Christian who, having sought opportunity to serve in a Christian organization full-time, is confronted with pathologies usually considered to only be related to the non-Christian workplace. Often, these employees are confused by finding leaders who are toxic in the way they direct a ministry. The bullying that takes place has a significant impact on employees' job satisfaction and in turn affects the quality of their work.³³ This study will consider how being differentiated in the workplace will provide the employee opportunity to positively impact the ministry and even possibly influence the toxic boss.

Second, there is significance for Christians who, having served in a parachurch organization and having left, discover emotional, physical, and spiritual scarring has taken place. It is well documented that oppressive behavior by those who wield power

³³ Mariam Ciby and R.P. Raya, "Exploring Victims' Experiences of Workplace Bullying: A Grounded Theory Approach," *Vikalpa: The Journal of Decision Makers* 39, no. 2 (June 2014): 74.

over another person often results in emotional damage.³⁴ This study will discuss the normalcy of emotional stress caused by individuals who are dysfunctional in their leadership and, in turn, help victims in their healing process.

Third, this study will provide Christian organizations with assistance in bringing aid to their employees who are crushed under the burden of a toxic work environment and help board members exercise proper authority over the leaders. Even though board members “face serious obstacles” when challenging a leader’s toxicity, according to Lipman-Blumen, it is in the ministry’s best interest, and is the responsibility of those who have authority, to remedy the broken workplace and help those oppressed by it.³⁵

Finally, there is significance for the counselor, whether friend or pastor, who is sought out for help by those currently or formerly under the authority of toxic leadership in a Christian organization. According to Raya and Ciby, professors of business management at Pondicherry Central University, the most common means of coping with bullying was “sharing their emotional experiences with their friends and family members.”³⁶ As biblically-directed Christian employees, there are numerous theological and psychological questions that are asked while interacting with toxic leadership and when a decision is made to leave such an organization. A counselor, who can empathize with employees and understand their circumstances can provide important healing and

³⁴ Ibid., 76.

³⁵ Lipman-Blumen, *The Allure of Toxic Leaders*, 175, Kindle.

³⁶ Ciby and Raya, “Exploring Victims’ Experiences of Workplace Bullying: A Grounded Theory Approach,” 76.

encouragement. In each case, an extensive and clarifying study of literature on the experiences of workplace harassment is of significant importance to affected Christian employees and their counselors.

Definition of Terms

In the context of this study, these terms are defined as follows:

Authority – Power and influence derived from a formally stated position within an organization.

CEO – Abbreviation for “Chief Executive Officer.” Usually, the CEO is given authority over an organization or company and is either a member of the board of directors or under their authority.

Covert-aggressive – Personality disorder of people who exhibit extreme manipulation of the victim’s normal sensitivities in order to get what they want, while concealing their behavior carefully from public display.³⁷

Machiavellianism – “Superficial charm, interpersonal manipulation, deceit, ruthlessness, and impulsivity. People who score highly on this trait are morally feeble and likely to endorse the idea that ‘the end justifies the means’ or agree that ‘it is hard to get ahead without cutting corners here and there.’”³⁸

Narcissism – A personality disorder of people who exhibit extreme selfishness, with a grandiose view of one's own talents and a craving for admiration.

³⁷ Simon, *In Sheep's Clothing*, 22-23.

³⁸ Chamorro-Premuzic, “Why Bad Guys Win at Work.”

Parachurch ministry – A Christian, faith-based organization that usually carries out the mission independent of church oversight.

Personality disorder – “A deeply ingrained and maladaptive pattern of behavior of a specified kind, typically manifest by the time one reaches adolescence and causing long-term difficulties in personal relationships or in functioning in society.”³⁹

Psychopathy – Personality trait or disorder of people described as “more dishonest, egocentric, reckless, and cruel than the population average.”⁴⁰ They “tend to lack remorse,” are “callous or insensitive” and “cynical.”⁴¹

Self-Differentiation – This study will use Herrington, Creech, and Taylor’s definition that describes self-differentiation as remaining relationally connected to other people, though not being emotionally controlled by them.⁴²

Shalom – Biblical Hebrew term for “completeness, soundness, welfare, peace.”⁴³

Subordinate – For the purpose of this study, subordinates are employees who are under the authority of a leader in their organization. The leader may be called a CEO, manager, supervisor, boss, or board chairman. These terms are used interchangeably in this paper.

³⁹ “Personality Disorder: Definition of Personality Disorder,” accessed March 21, 2016, http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/us/definition/american_english/personality-disorder.

⁴⁰ Chamorro-Premuzic, “Why Bad Guys Win at Work.”

⁴¹ Peter K. Jonason et al., “What Lies Beneath the Dark Triad Dirty Dozen: Varied Relations with the Big Five,” *Individual Differences Research* 11, no. 2 (June 1, 2013): 84.

⁴² Herrington, *The Leader’s Journey*, Chapter 2 (locations 273–74), Kindle.

⁴³ James Strong, *The New Strong’s Expanded Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*, Expanded ed. (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2010), 7965.

Supervisor – Person who has formal authority over another employee in the workplace.

This person may be a fellow worker, the president of the organization, or a member of the board of directors.

Teaming – Author Amy Edmondson uses the term to describe workplace relationships where the supervisor seeks feedback from subordinates, talks openly about mistakes without judgment, and asks for help from the employees.⁴⁴

Whistleblower – An individual within an organization who brings to attention illegal or unethical practices of the organization or of an individual employee.

Conclusion

This chapter has provided an overview of the problem and purpose of this study. Toxic leadership has been defined and limited to those who practice abusive behaviors in relationship with subordinates on a routine basis causing emotional, physical, or spiritual hurt. This study is intended to provide help to these subordinates as they apply biblical-theological principles, seek healthy differentiation in their interactions with their toxic bosses, and seek psychological and spiritual shalom.

In the next chapter the researcher will interact with the literature discussing leadership, self-differentiation, and biblical-theological principles regarding submission to authority and conflict resolution.

⁴⁴ Amy C. Edmondson, *Teaming: How Organizations Learn, Innovate, and Compete in the Knowledge Economy* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2012), Chapter 2 (locations 1054–1056), Kindle.

Chapter Two

Literature Review

The purpose of this study is to explore how employees of Christian organizations practice self-differentiation while interacting with supervisors who practice toxic leadership. The literature for this study focuses on three primary areas: leadership, the theology of conflict management in relation to submission to authority, and self-differentiation. These categories provide an understanding of toxic leadership, some of the inherent results of this leadership in organizations, and biblical-theological principles for responding to this form of leadership.

The literature review begins with a study of toxic leadership from the perspectives of social science, business, and theology. Literature was reviewed that provides analysis of best practice in business and organizational management and leaders who exhibit various forms and levels of personality traits and disorders. This section compares effective and abusive management techniques and the identification of supervisors who practice toxic leadership.

Leadership Practice

Much has been written about leadership in both the business and church settings. Both provide examples of leadership practices that create “shalom” in relationships and

productivity.⁴⁵ In addition, both provide examples of broken relationships and disengagement from the dignity of work.

Leadership Best Practice

There is much written describing, analyzing, and teaching business leadership practice that is other-centered and leadership that encourages the use of employees' skills and creative problem solving. The literature suggests followers should feel free from intimidation from their leader as both seek solutions to work problems. Founder of "The Table Group," CEO, and speaker, Patrick Lencioni, suggests trust between the leader and employee is necessary for "engaging in unfiltered and passionate debate of ideas," a necessary ingredient, according to Lencioni, to a productive work environment.⁴⁶ Psychologists Astrauskaite, Kern, and Notelaers argue, "It should be a common understanding in the organization that everyone is equally important, has value, and can contribute."⁴⁷ They go on to say "positive leaders" encourage and demonstrate "cooperation and mutual respect" with employees.⁴⁸

In a soon to be released book on "politics in the church," authors Robert Burns, Tasha Chapman, and Donald Guthrie present the "negotiating strategies" for those who

⁴⁵ James Strong, *The New Strong's Expanded Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*. According to Strong's Concordance, the Hebrew word, shalom includes, "peace," "completeness," "soundness," and "welfare."

⁴⁶ Patrick Lencioni, *The Five Dysfunctions of a Team: A Leadership Fable* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2002), 188.

⁴⁷ Astrauskaite, Kern, and Notelaers, "An Individual Psychology Approach to Underlying Factors of Workplace Bullying," 236.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

have conflicting power and interests.⁴⁹ The authors note four “cells” in which people interact. Each cell describes options of negotiation when there is equal or unequal power dynamics and shared or conflicting interests. At times, subordinates will share goals and interests with their supervisor. Burns, et. al., say, “The amount of power that people bring to the table is relatively unimportant because everyone has a similar set of interests driving their judgments.”⁵⁰ However, there may be times of difficulty when bosses are both unequal in power and have conflicting goals or interests with their employees. The authors suggest various biblical ways of negotiating within that context as a leader: command, direct, collaborate, delegate, and abdicate.⁵¹ In defining “collaboration,” the authors present an egalitarian kind of leadership saying, “Persons with more power agree to voluntarily limit their power and modify their interests in order to work together with others.”⁵² Likewise, delegation involves allowing power transfer. The authors suggest delegation means the leader trusts “a person or group enough to turn over control and responsibility to them.”⁵³ Other authors agree, this kind of open engagement between supervisors and subordinates requires leadership that sincerely expresses humility.⁵⁴

⁴⁹ Robert Burns, Tasha Chapman, and Donald Guthrie, *Negotiating Ministry: The Politics of Working with People* (Downer's Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, forthcoming), 6.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 7.

⁵¹ Ibid., 12–15.

⁵² Ibid., 13.

⁵³ Ibid., 14.

⁵⁴ Mike Bonem and Roger Patterson, *Leading from the Second Chair: Serving Your Church, Fulfilling Your Role, and Realizing Your Dreams* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2005), 29, Kindle.

Go Forth and Die

According to Heifetz and Linsky, the root of the term, “lead” is “Indo-European” and means “to go forth, die.”⁵⁵ The duties of the employer to their employees, according to Dr. Michael Oronato of the School of Business at SUNY, are for their “well-being in general and a right to safety in the work-place.”⁵⁶ Suzanne van Gils, et. al., takes it a step further saying a good leader sacrifices “personal gains for the benefit of the team.”⁵⁷ Astrauskaite, et. al., agree, saying, “The transformational leader creates and supports team spirit and shared vision among employees in the organization,” and provides “recognition for team achievement.”⁵⁸

The literature suggests that successful leadership over the long term will be characterized by a humble servanthood rather than authoritarian directives. Richard Rardin, writing to Christian leaders, says, “The servant of God must die to self before he or she can be of much use to the Father.”⁵⁹ Dying to self can be described as doing “nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant

⁵⁵ Heifetz and Linsky, *Leadership on the Line*, 208, Kindle.

⁵⁶ Onorato, “An Empirical Study of Unethical Leadership and Workplace Bullying in Industry Segments,” 5.

⁵⁷ Birgit Schyns and Tiffany Hansbrough, eds., *When Leadership Goes Wrong: Destructive Leadership, Mistakes, and Ethical Failures* (Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing, 2010), 296.

⁵⁸ Astrauskaite, Kern, and Notelaers, “An Individual Psychology Approach to Underlying Factors of Workplace Bullying,” 229.

⁵⁹ Richard Rardin, *The Servant’s Guide to Leadership: Beyond First Principles* (Albany, OR: Selah Publishing, 2001), 102–3.

than yourselves,” as the Apostle Paul writes.⁶⁰ Jim Collins, author of *Good to Great*, explains that the study of top rated corporations showed humility and an attitude of service by corporate CEOs was an important component of the company’s successful productivity. What he called, the “level 5 leader” was “an individual who blends extreme personal humility with intense professional will.”⁶¹

Sincere Humility

Ken Blanchard, in *The Leadership Challenge*, referring to Christian leadership, says, “The key to a servant leader's heart is humility.”⁶² According to some authors who explore leadership, Christian leadership will exhibit sincere humbleness. Richard Rardin, author of *The Servant’s Guide to Leadership: Beyond First Principles*, calls it an “inside-out phenomenon.”⁶³ Leadership in the church cannot simply be a veneer, according to Rardin who says that which is in the heart comes out in “words and deeds.”⁶⁴ Rardin suggests that the inner attitudes that leaders bring to the workplace will be expressed outwardly.⁶⁵

⁶⁰ Philippians 2:3.

⁶¹ James C. Collins, *Good to Great: Why Some Companies Make the Leap--and Others Don't* (New York: HarperBusiness, 2001), 21.

⁶² John C. Maxwell, *Christian Reflections on The Leadership Challenge*, ed. James M. Kouzes and Barry Z. Posner (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2006), 104.

⁶³ Rardin, *The Servant’s Guide to Leadership*, 36.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

In order for leaders to relate to their work and those under their authority in ways that create shalom, there must be an other-centeredness. Author Amy Edmondson says, “It can be hard for people to muster both the humility and the genuine curiosity that is needed to really learn from others.”⁶⁶ Edmondson argues humility is not something that comes easily for those who are in high positions. John Maxwell cautions, “Ironically, most people see leaders who change the world as needing to be brazen and audacious.”⁶⁷ He goes on to argue, “But the only way to make a real difference is to do so humbly, without regard for recognition, ego, pride, even self-preservation.”⁶⁸ Christian leadership requires a servant’s attitude and action on behalf of those who are subordinate. Leaders must go beyond their own comfort and needs, setting aside the world’s motivations of ego and pride, as Maxwell notes. “Lording it over” others, as Jesus says, is a basic temptation for Christian leaders.⁶⁹

Teaming and Gift Cultivation

Lencioni says, “The most important action that a leader must take to encourage the building of trust on a ‘team’ is to demonstrate vulnerability first.”⁷⁰ Vulnerability is evidence of humility and it is within the context of vulnerability that creative and

⁶⁶ Edmondson, *Teaming*, Chapter 2 (locations 1213–14), Kindle.

⁶⁷ Maxwell, *Christian Reflections on The Leadership Challenge*, 72.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Matthew 20:25.

⁷⁰ Lencioni, *The Five Dysfunctions of a Team*, 201.

productive work takes place. Dr. Robert Burns expounds upon the importance of vulnerability, saying, “Vulnerability in safe relationships makes learning possible.”⁷¹

Author Mary Alice Chrnalogar gives a tangible example of how leaders can be vulnerable, saying, “Teachers should seek public criticism to keep themselves in line.”⁷² However, according to Lencioni, most “successful people” have been trained either by example or by teaching to pursue career advancement through competitiveness.⁷³ Lencioni goes on to say this competitive view of leadership cannot build a team that uses the gifts of each individual. According to Ortberg, being vulnerable allows

your people to see your human side - hearing you say, 'I'm sorry' or 'I was wrong' - will take you off the pedestal...and put you down on the ground with them, where they will say, 'If she can do it, I can do it' or 'If he can make it work, I can, too.'⁷⁴

Several authors explored the relationship between vulnerability and collaboration. Justin Menkes, author of an article in the *Harvard Business Review*, says, “Individuals with extreme levels of insecurity — those that cannot remain stable while seeing others succeed — will fail in leadership.”⁷⁵ According to Edmondson, author of *Teaming: How Organizations Learn, Innovate, and Compete in the Knowledge Economy*, America’s “knowledge-based economy” is productive if employees are treated as “self-respecting,

⁷¹ Burns, *Resilient Ministry*, Chapter 4 (location 511), Kindle.

⁷² Mary Alice Chrnalogar, *Twisted Scriptures: Breaking Free from Churches That Abuse*, Revised (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010), 66, Kindle.

⁷³ Lencioni, *The Five Dysfunctions of a Team*, 201.

⁷⁴ Maxwell, *Christian Reflections on The Leadership Challenge*, 90.

⁷⁵ Justin Menkes, “Narcissism: The Difference Between High Achievers and Leaders.”

self-determining” adults.⁷⁶ She says, “candid communication” must take place that includes “seeking feedback; talking about errors; asking for help.”⁷⁷ It is a collaborative effort, Edmondson says, that builds teamwork.⁷⁸ She described the difference in leadership from Henry Ford’s assembly line that was “contingent upon a high level of managerial control over employee practices known today as command-and-control management, or top-down management.”⁷⁹ She notes there was little collaboration between the assembly line worker and the boss.

Being vulnerable also means being willing to make mistakes. Oren Harari, author of *The Leadership Secrets of Colin Powell*, writing of Powell’s leadership technique, suggests “open doors, an unfettered clash of ideas, an unfiltered dialogue, all aimed at solving problems” is part of the good practice of leadership.⁸⁰ “Seeking feedback” and allowing mistakes from subordinates is for the purpose, according to the literature, of creating better products. Edmondson says the “most successful leaders in the future” will know how to seek the maturing of their subordinates’ talents.⁸¹

⁷⁶ Edmondson, *Teaming*, Chapter 1 (locations 845–847), Kindle.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 1054–1056.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 1078–1080.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 451–53.

⁸⁰ Oren Harari, *The Leadership Secrets of Colin Powell* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2002), 50.

⁸¹ Edmondson, *Teaming*, Chapter 8 (locations 5043–5044), Kindle.

However, Edmondson argues, “Hierarchy, by its very nature, dramatically reduces speaking up by those lower in the pecking order.”⁸² It is only by concerted effort of the boss to seek out feedback and humbly receive it that this tendency can be minimized and real learning and productivity take place.⁸³ Frank Barrett, author of *Yes to the Mess: Surprising Leadership Lessons from Jazz*, agrees and draws on his experience as a jazz artist. He describes the process of improvising in the jazz genre. He says, jazz musicians “must develop...a mutual orientation to one another’s unfolding.” Barrett argues this building on the talents of others takes a large “degree of empathic competence.”⁸⁴

“Leaders must communicate that they respect employees, in particular by acknowledging the expertise and skills the employees bring,” according to Edmondson.⁸⁵ The leader that works to create an environment for “cultivating” employees’ giftedness is simply following the biblical mandate as Ortberg notes.⁸⁶ He says, Jesus trained his followers for three years for the eventuality he would give away his power to them. The Apostle Paul admonished the leadership of the Ephesian church “to equip the saints for

⁸² Ibid., 1226–29.

⁸³ Frank J. Barrett, *Yes to the Mess: Surprising Leadership Lessons from Jazz* (Boston: Harvard Business Review Press, 2012), 42, Kindle.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 32.

⁸⁵ Edmondson, *Teaming*, Chapter 4 (locations 2487–88), Kindle.

⁸⁶ Maxwell, *Christian Reflections on The Leadership Challenge*, 88.

the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ.”⁸⁷ Though the leaders of the church had a certain power, it was to be used to build the members’ own giftedness. The plurality of leadership in the church, according to these Christian writers, is one of building a team that uses their gifts for developing the ministry of the entire church. As noted in business literature, this principal of a leader who builds teamwork is good business practice. Barrett tells the story of a new employee of the IBM corporation. The president, Bill Gore, met the new MBA graduate and told him, “Look around and find something you’d like to do.”⁸⁸ Barrett affirms the valuing of the talents of those under a leader’s authority. Rather than the common view that leaders make all the decisions, Barrett challenges those in authority to give leadership away in order to build partnership and provide creative solutions in decision-making.⁸⁹ This is strikingly similar to the model of the “priesthood of all believers” as described in Ephesians and 1 Peter.⁹⁰ In these passages, the Apostles Paul and Peter describe the egalitarian structure of ministry. The ministry of a Christian leader is a “joint ownership” with others as noted by *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*.⁹¹

⁸⁷ 1 Timothy 1:5; Ephesians 4:11-12.

⁸⁸ Barrett, *Yes to the Mess*, 151–52, Kindle.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 138.

⁹⁰ Ephesians 4:12; 1 Peter 2:9.

⁹¹ Frank E. Gaebelin et al., *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Hebrews through Revelation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1982), 12:231.

Toxic Leadership

According to Rob Hay, the behaviors of “toxic leaders, like poor parents...confuse and paralyse [sic] others who depend on them.”⁹² Bacal, author of the article, “Toxic Organizations: Welcome to the Fire of an Unhealthy Workplace,” says, “Toxic organization creates a high degree of distress, and eliminates any possibility that the organization can accomplish much.”⁹³ On the other hand, Bacal goes on to say, “Toxic organizations cannot develop when there is a strong, mentally healthy leader.”⁹⁴ Toxic leadership practices detract from teamwork and the cultivating of the employees’ gifts. Herrington, Creech, and Taylor say, “Self-serving leaders use the trust and authority that accrues to them to help themselves, rather than using it to help find solutions to our challenges.”⁹⁵ Wang, Sinclair, and Deese agree, saying, “Destructive leaders are usually viewed as pursuing selfish goals, controlling and coercing their subordinates, and compromising subordinates’ quality of life.”⁹⁶

In the previous section, effective leadership principles were considered from the literature. In this section, the literature reviewed will consider how toxic personality traits

⁹² Rob Hay, “The Toxic Mission Organisation: Fiction or Fact?” 3.

⁹³ R. Bacal, “Toxic Organizations - Welcome to the Fire of an Unhealthy Workplace,” accessed April 6, 2016, <http://work911.com/articles/toxicorgs.htm>.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Herrington, *The Leader’s Journey*, Introduction (locations 52–53), Kindle.

⁹⁶ Schyns and Hansbrough, *When Leadership Goes Wrong*, 74.

or disorders and leadership dysfunction are identified, the statistical prevalence of toxic leadership, and the effects of dysfunctions on the ministries they lead.

Identifying Toxic Leaders

Eric Jackson, in his article, “The Seven Habits of Spectacularly Unsuccessful Executives,” describes seven characteristics of poor leadership. He argues, using research from Sydney Finkelstein, bad bosses arrogantly “suffer from the illusion of personal preeminence.”⁹⁷ They also “think they have all the answers” and are ruthless about ridding the organization or company of any who disagree with them.⁹⁸ The image of the company is so important, “they often settle for the appearance of accomplishing things.”⁹⁹

Authors Ket de Vries and Danny Miller, in their book, *The Neurotic Organization*, say, “Human behavior is generally characterized by a mixture of neurotic styles.”¹⁰⁰ Christian psychologist, Dan Allender says, “All of us are capable of doing evil things, but evil people are driven by a self-interest that is so heartless, conscious, and cruel that it delights in stealing from others the lifeblood of their soul.”¹⁰¹ De Vries and

⁹⁷ Eric Jackson, “The Seven Habits of Spectacularly Unsuccessful Executives,” *Forbes*, accessed March 8, 2017, <http://www.forbes.com/sites/ericjackson/2012/01/02/the-seven-habits-of-spectacularly-unsuccessful-executives/>.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Manfred F. R. Kets de Vries and Danny Miller, *The Neurotic Organization: Diagnosing and Changing Counterproductive Styles of Management* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1984), 17.

¹⁰¹ Allender and Longman, *Bold Love*, 233.

Miller agree, arguing, “But occasionally people will exhibit a good number of characteristics that all appear to manifest a common neurotic style.”¹⁰² Greenfield notes that people sin, failing to relate to others in loving ways, but, in distinguishing between being sinful and being evil, he says, “The central defect of evil persons is not their sin but their refusal to acknowledge it.”¹⁰³ Evil people refuse to confess wrongdoing, according to Greenfield.

Dysfunctional behaviors are experienced over long periods of time and are not limited to single incidences of discomfort for the employee according to Ayoko, Callan, and Härtel of the University of Queensland. Einarsen, Skogstad, and Aasland argue, “A single mistake or a single instance of insivility (sic) by a leader is not sufficient to evaluate such leadership as destructive” as all leaders will make mistakes.¹⁰⁴ Guy Greenfield, author of the *Wounded Minister: Healing from and Preventing Personal Attacks*, agrees saying, “Isolated antagonistic behaviors do not make a person a pathological antagonist.”¹⁰⁵ The *DSM-IV-TR*, published by the American Psychiatric Association, maintains that a personality disorder is “an enduring pattern of inner experience that deviates markedly from the expectations of the individual’s culture.”¹⁰⁶ A

¹⁰² Kets de Vries and Miller, *The Neurotic Organization*, 19.

¹⁰³ Guy Greenfield and Brooks Faulkner, *The Wounded Minister: Healing from and Preventing Personal Attacks* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2001), 51, Kindle.

¹⁰⁴ Schyns and Hansbrough, *When Leadership Goes Wrong*, 150.

¹⁰⁵ Greenfield and Faulkner, *The Wounded Minister*, 39, Kindle.

¹⁰⁶ American Psychiatric Association, *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders DSM-IV-TR*, 4th ed. (Washington, DC: American Psychiatric Publishing, Inc., 2000), 689.

personality disorder is a consistent pattern of thinking and acting by an individual in a destructive way.

Diagnosing Toxic Leadership

The literature argues the diagnosis of personality disorders must be made under close and careful scrutiny by professional diagnosticians. Though the literature gives various means of identifying toxic leaders, Allender cautions, “We need to be aware, however, of the dangers in the use of any label when attempting to account for the unique, mysterious human soul.”¹⁰⁷ He argues, “In order to put the diversity of humanity into any comprehensive group...a degree of precision and specificity will be sacrificed for the benefit of categorization.”¹⁰⁸

Cohn and Moran, authors of *Why Are We Bad At Picking Good Leaders?* explain that their approach to diagnosis combines “360-degree referencing and traditional interview questions with a technique designed to test for ethical awareness.”¹⁰⁹ Diane Langberg, author and psychiatrist, in a lecture on narcissism also cautions, “There are all flavors” of personality traits and disorders so diagnosis must be done cautiously.¹¹⁰ Alan Goldman adds, “Whether assessing couples, families, or organizations, insufficiently

¹⁰⁷ Allender and Longman, *Bold Love*, 230.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 231.

¹⁰⁹ Jeffrey Cohn and Jay Moran, *Why Are We Bad at Picking Good Leaders A Better Way to Evaluate Leadership Potential* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2011), 34.

¹¹⁰ Diane Langberg, "Narcissism And The System It Breeds," (lecture, ELF Christian Counsellors Network, June 2, 2015), accessed March 7, 2016, <https://soundcloud.com/kendall-beachey/narcissism-and-the-system-it>.

trained and inexperienced interviewers can have difficulty recognizing a troubled and destructive individual.”

Because some personality disorders and dysfunctional behaviors are found on a continuum, the presence of individual traits will be found in the general population.¹¹¹ Robert Hare warns care must be taken to distinguish personality traits from a personality disorder, saying, “Many people are impulsive, or glib, or cold and unfeeling, but this does not mean that they are psychopaths.”¹¹² Greenfield notes, people sin, but “it is not individual sins as such that characterize evil people but the subtlety, persistence, and consistency of their sins.”¹¹³ It is the prevalent presence and consistency of certain traits that lead to a diagnosis of a toxic individual. “One awful, abusive event does not make a person evil, but when it represents a repetitive pattern of excessive disregard for others (mockery) and wanton, vicious refusal to look at the damage done (arrogance), then one can ascertain a significant inclination to evil,” says Allender.¹¹⁴

Wayne Oates, author of *Behind the Masks: Personality Disorders in Religious Behavior*, says, “A common denominator in all those afflicted with personality disorders is the impaired ability...to form and maintain durable relationships.”¹¹⁵ Toxic bosses are

¹¹¹ Tomas Chamorro-Premuzic, “Why Bad Guys Win at Work.”

¹¹² “This Charming Psychopath,” *Psychology Today*, January 1, 1994, accessed March 18, 2016, <http://www.psychologytoday.com/articles/199401/charming-psychopath>.

¹¹³ Greenfield and Faulkner, *The Wounded Minister*, 51, Kindle.

¹¹⁴ Allender and Longman, *Bold Love*, 238.

¹¹⁵ Wayne E. Oates, *Behind the Masks: Personality Disorders in Religious Behavior* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1987), 134.

known for leaving a trail of broken relationships.¹¹⁶ They are very difficult to serve under, Bacal says, as their “decisions and direction can change suddenly and without apparent rationale. At the core of the toxic manager is the sending of mixed messages so that employees never know what is expected, or what will be punished.”¹¹⁷

However, leaders who are destructive may not appear to others as having personality disorders or be dysfunctional in all relationships. “Leaders who behave destructively towards subordinates may not necessarily be destructive in other interpersonal relationships,” according to Einarsen, Skogstad, and Aasland.¹¹⁸ As Lundy Bancroft argues, “Most abusive men put on a charming face for their communities, creating a sharp split between their public image and their private treatment” of their victims.¹¹⁹ Allender agrees, saying, “Often the one who delights in evil is an ordinary, unassuming person who hides behind a facade of normalcy.” A “Psychology Today” blog discusses “gaslighting,” a common result of interactions with individuals with these dysfunctions. The author, Robin Stern, lists a variety of symptoms including “constantly second-guessing yourself” and feeling “as though you can’t do anything right.”¹²⁰ She

¹¹⁶ Robert I. Sutton, *The No Asshole Rule: Building a Civilized Workplace and Surviving One That Isn't* (New York: Business Plus, 2007), 11–12.

¹¹⁷ R. Bacal, “Toxic Organizations - Welcome to the Fire of an Unhealthy Workplace.”

¹¹⁸ Schyns and Hansbrough, *When Leadership Goes Wrong*, 153.

¹¹⁹ Lundy Bancroft, *Why Does He Do That?: Inside the Minds of Angry and Controlling Men* (New York: Berkley Books, 2002), 68.

¹²⁰ Robin Stern, “Are You Being Gaslighted?,” *Psychology Today*, entry posted May 19, 2009, accessed February 24, 2017, <http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/power-in-relationships/200905/are-you-being-gaslighted>.

also says, “You often feel confused and even crazy at work.”¹²¹ Allender adds, they are often difficult to identify “even after the evidence of their deceit, destructiveness, and hardness is exposed.”¹²² Allender argues that abusive people may even “offer sorrow at a funeral or joy at a wedding,” but these actions hide a “coldness of heart.”¹²³

Therefore, detecting a toxic leader before they attain a position of leadership is sometimes difficult. When screening applicants for leadership positions, Chandler and Fields, say they “are difficult to detect through assessments because candidates with strong social skills and a positive self-esteem demeanor may camouflage” their “dark side” characteristics.¹²⁴ Dark side characteristics are defined by Wang, Sinclair, and Deese as personality traits that “involve ways people manage interpersonal relationships in order to deal with anxiety.”¹²⁵ The authors describe the three ways of managing relationships that are negative: “moving away” to protect themselves, “moving towards” in dependency, and “moving against” through “manipulation or intimidation.”¹²⁶ This study focuses on those who move “against” others in their management of relationships.

The positive leadership of those who are self-reflective and encourage the use of their employees’ giftedness is largely deficient in the toxic leader. The lack of humble

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Allender and Longman, *Bold Love*, 233.

¹²³ Ibid., 235.

¹²⁴ Schyns and Hansbrough, *When Leadership Goes Wrong*, 104.

¹²⁵ Ibid., 86.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

self-reflection is commonly used as a diagnostic tool by authorities on toxic leadership. Ludeman says, “They’re the people who aren’t happy unless they’re the top dogs—the ones calling the shots.”¹²⁷ Author Shahida Arabi says, “One sure sign of toxicity is when a person is chronically unwilling to see his or her own shortcomings and uses everything in their power to avoid being held accountable for them.”¹²⁸

The literature reviewed contains a variety of forms of dysfunctional leadership. Several different terms are used to describe the personalities and behavior of those who are destructive in relationships with their subordinates. The following section defines each toxic personality trait or disorder and provides diagnostic tools. This is not an exhaustive list of these dysfunctional behaviors.

Alpha Males & Queen Bees

Alpha males are described as leaders “who aren’t happy unless they’re the top dogs.” Ludeman and Erlandson, who study and consult with “alpha males” in business management, argue that “70 percent of all top executives” can be classified as alpha.¹²⁹ Chamorro-Premuzic suggests one reason for both the large numbers of leaders with these personality traits and the frequent support they receive is the traits may appear positive

¹²⁷ Ludeman and Erlandson, “Coaching the Alpha Male,” 58.

¹²⁸ Shahida Arabi, “20 Diversion Tactics Highly Manipulative Narcissists, Sociopaths And Psychopaths Use To Silence You,” *Thought Catalog*, June 30, 2016, accessed September 23, 2016, <http://thoughtcatalog.com/shahida-arabi/2016/06/20-diversion-tactics-highly-manipulative-narcissists-sociopaths-and-psychopaths-use-to-silence-you/>.

¹²⁹ Ludeman and Erlandson, “Coaching the Alpha Male,” 58.

such as “extraversion, openness to new experience, curiosity, and self-esteem.”¹³⁰

Ludeman says, these leaders are “highly intelligent, confident, and successful.”¹³¹ But, the authors say they are “typically stubborn and resistant to feedback.”¹³²

According to Peggy Drexler, the term “queen bee” was coined forty years ago in a University of Michigan study of promotion rates among women in the workplace. These women leaders were “obsessed with maintaining their authority.”¹³³ Drexler’s article, discussing the queen bee, argues they create unique dysfunctions in the workplace, “What makes these queen bees so effective and aggravating is that they are able to exploit female vulnerabilities that men may not see, using tactics that their male counterparts might never even notice.”¹³⁴ She says queen bees do not seek the development of their subordinates’ talents, but rather undermine “their professional standing.”¹³⁵

Authoritarianism

Bonam, author of *Leading from the Second Chair*, says, “If you have the misfortune of working for a first chair who is a true autocrat, then you may find that any disagreement is seen as insubordination.”¹³⁶ Jean Lipman-Blumen says authoritarianism

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ Drexler, “The Tyranny of the Queen Bee,” 2.

¹³⁴ Ibid., 3.

¹³⁵ Ibid., 2.

¹³⁶ Bonem and Patterson, *Leading from the Second Chair*, 55, Kindle.

is “a hallmark of toxic leaders.”¹³⁷ The prevalence of authoritarian leaders within the Christian ministry is extensive according to Ronald Enroth.¹³⁸

The literature suggests authoritarian leaders are unwilling to receive criticism from their followers. Allender notes that the arrogance of the autocrat “creates a mood of ‘follow me or get lost.’”¹³⁹ De Vries and Miller, describing the paranoid organization, explain the leader has a “tendency to centralize power,” and leaders “who feel threatened generally like to have a good deal of control over their subordinates.”¹⁴⁰ Greenfield and Faulkner agree, saying, “An authoritarian pastor perceives himself as boss of the staff and gives orders that are never to be questioned.” Where there are disagreements, “there is no room for any input from staff members.”¹⁴¹ Herrington, et. al., say authoritarian leaders are emotionally dependent on others. As a result, “Others are there to serve the leader's purpose.”¹⁴²

Why do authoritarian leaders lack willingness to hear other ideas? Lipman-Blumen argues, “Some leaders fall into the trap of believing in their own wisdom” as their followers become more and more dependent on them.¹⁴³ Within the Christian

¹³⁷ Jean Lipman-Blumen, *The Allure of Toxic Leaders*, 99.

¹³⁸ Ronald M. Enroth, *Churches That Abuse* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1993).

¹³⁹ Allender and Longman, *Bold Love*, 239.

¹⁴⁰ Kets de Vries and Miller, *The Neurotic Organization*, 26.

¹⁴¹ Greenfield and Faulkner, *The Wounded Minister*, 152, Kindle.

¹⁴² Herrington, *The Leader's Journey*, Chapter 3 (location 589), Kindle.

¹⁴³ Lipman-Blumen, *The Allure of Toxic Leaders*, 59, Kindle.

church setting, some suggest followers “can’t criticize leaders without being critical of God.”¹⁴⁴ Therefore, Enroth adds, an authoritarian “leader is beyond confrontation.”¹⁴⁵ A leader may have “exclusionary proclivities,” according to Lipman-Blumen and “they are unlikely to take counsel or correction from those outside the charmed circle,” the secondary leadership of the organization.¹⁴⁶

Autocrats have an unwillingness to hear counsel from subordinates and they seek to control followers. Edmondson argues authoritarian leaders use fear to control. And she says, “Control reinforces certainty and predictability.”¹⁴⁷ This form of management style was common in the past according to Frank Barrett who explains, “We have grown up with a variety of models of organizations, most of which have relied to some degree on a mechanistic view of top-down approaches to change.” This “top-down” approach emphasizes “routines and rules” for organizational control.¹⁴⁸ However, Rob Hay suggests that the “authoritarian command and control approach of the old style business has given way to self-managing teams...and general autonomy.”¹⁴⁹ The authors of “Resilient Ministry” suggest authority, developed through relationships, is more important than the formal authority practiced by autocrats. “While we don't disregard the

¹⁴⁴ Chrnalogar, *Twisted Scriptures*, 56, Kindle.

¹⁴⁵ Enroth, *Churches That Abuse*.

¹⁴⁶ Lipman-Blumen, *The Allure of Toxic Leaders*, 62, Kindle.

¹⁴⁷ Edmondson, *Teaming*, Chapter 1 (locations 508–9), Kindle.

¹⁴⁸ Barrett, *Yes to the Mess*, 148, Kindle.

¹⁴⁹ Hay, “The Toxic Mission Organisation: Fiction or Fact?” 6.

importance of formal authority and the role it plays in accomplishing God's purposes, we suggest that relational authority trumps formal authority much of the time,” according to Burns, et. al.¹⁵⁰

Narcissistic Personality Disorder

“The authoritarian religious leader is predominantly narcissistic,” according to Oates.¹⁵¹ Langberg explains the name, “Narcissist” comes from the Greek mythological story of a young, handsome youth who had a “heart that was inaccessible to love.”¹⁵² One of his “rejected lovers” prayed that he be punished for his “lack of empathy.”¹⁵³ Nemesis, the god of retribution to whom she prayed, “caused Narcissist to see his reflection in the water and fall completely in love with himself.”¹⁵⁴ As he was unable to access his reflection, he “died of unrequited love.”¹⁵⁵

It is common for narcissists to occupy leadership positions. According to Chamorro-Premuzic, “An impressive 15-year longitudinal study found that individuals with psychopathic and narcissistic characteristics gravitated towards the top of the organizational hierarchy.”¹⁵⁶ Chandler and Fields explain, “Narcissistic leaders may pass

¹⁵⁰ Burns, *Resilient Ministry*, Chapter 13 (location 2492), Kindle.

¹⁵¹ Oates, *Behind the Masks*, 112.

¹⁵² Langberg, “Narcissism and The System It Breeds.”

¹⁵³ Ibid.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ Chamorro-Premuzic, “Why Bad Guys Win at Work.”

selection screening because they possess strengths such as the ability to present a vision in a charismatic fashion, inspire others with rhetoric, and thereby persuade others to follow.”¹⁵⁷

There have been many studies on the Narcissistic Personality Disorder according to George Simon, author of the article, “Narcissism: Pathological Self-Love,” despite the American Psychiatric Association removing the disorder from the DSM-5.¹⁵⁸ He says, “Too many folks who know all too well how painful it is to live or deal with a narcissist” are seeking information on narcissism. He goes on to say, “Because ours is the age of permissiveness and especially ‘entitlement,’ narcissism has flourished, and just about everyone has a story to tell about dealing with a narcissist.”¹⁵⁹

Narcissistic individuals are described as “conceited, boastful or pretentious,” according to the Mayo Clinic.¹⁶⁰ Chamorro-Premuzic says narcissists have “unrealistic feelings of grandiosity, an inflated – though often unstable and insecure – sense of self-worth, and a selfish sense of entitlement coupled with little consideration for others.”¹⁶¹ Oates defines empathy as “putting oneself in another person’s place and experiencing that

¹⁵⁷ Schyns and Hansbrough, *When Leadership Goes Wrong*, 106.

¹⁵⁸ George K. Simon, Ph.D., “Narcissism: Pathological Self-Love,” *CounsellingResource.com: Psychology, Therapy & Mental Health Resources*, accessed March 29, 2016, <http://counsellingresource.com/features/2014/10/06/pathological-self-love>.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

¹⁶⁰ Mayo Clinic Staff, “Narcissistic Personality Disorder,” Mayo Clinic, November 18, 2014, accessed February 10, 2015, <http://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/narcissistic-personality-disorder/basics/definition/con-20025568>.

¹⁶¹ Chamorro-Premuzic, “Why Bad Guys Win at Work.”

person's needs as primary," and lacking this other-centeredness is a common characteristic of narcissism.¹⁶² Narcissists often "belittle or look down on people" they "perceive as inferior."¹⁶³ "As a result...they naturally conclude they should come first: their needs (often lavish), their image, their success," argue Chapman, White, and Myra.¹⁶⁴

According to Chandler and Fields, "Narcissistic leaders...blame others for their failures."¹⁶⁵ They "usually have no interest in self-insight or change."¹⁶⁶ Oates agrees, saying, "The capacity for self-evaluation and self-criticism is absent."¹⁶⁷ Subordinates are simply "expected to provide blind support."¹⁶⁸ If employees do not act in support of the narcissist, they become "increasingly expendable," according to Oates.¹⁶⁹

Abuse and Bullying

Literature covering a broad range of relational abuse or bullying from domestic to workplace is extensive. However, most work done in this area of study is secular

¹⁶² Oates, *Behind the Masks*, 45.

¹⁶³ Mayo Clinic Staff, "Narcissistic Personality Disorder."

¹⁶⁴ Gary Chapman, Paul E. White, and Harold Myra, *Rising Above a Toxic Workplace: Taking Care of Yourself in an Unhealthy Environment* (Chicago: Northfield Publishing, 2014), 136.

¹⁶⁵ Schyns and Hansbrough, *When Leadership Goes Wrong*, 106.

¹⁶⁶ Arabi, "20 Diversion Tactics Highly Manipulative Narcissists, Sociopaths and Psychopaths Use to Silence You."

¹⁶⁷ Oates, *Behind the Masks*, 45.

¹⁶⁸ Schyns and Hansbrough, *When Leadership Goes Wrong*, 107.

¹⁶⁹ Oates, *Behind the Masks*, 50.

according to Jeff Crippen. He argues, “The secular world has more wisdom by far about abuse than does the Christian church.”¹⁷⁰ He explains, in *A Cry for Justice: How the Evil of Domestic Abuse Hides in Your Church!* that his own journey of understanding abuse was through books by secular social scientists.¹⁷¹

According to a study of workplace bullying by the Ventura County California Grand Jury, bullying is defined as “an abuse or misuse of power that manifests itself in ‘behavior that intimidates, degrades, offends, or humiliates a worker.’”¹⁷² The authors of “An Individual Psychology Approach to Underlying Factors of Workplace Bullying” define bullying as “having unequal power and about being exposed to negative acts over and over again without being able to defend oneself in the actual situation.”¹⁷³ A Workplace Bullying Institute publication describes a variety of behaviors that are classified as bullying such as “being shouted at or sworn at, being excessively monitored, being isolated or excluded from activities, being threatened, [or] being physically intimidated.” WBI says a large percentage (38%) of co-workers do nothing to help the target of bullying in the workplace, effectively isolating the victim.¹⁷⁴ Other bullying

¹⁷⁰ Jeff Crippen and Anna Wood, *A Cry for Justice: How the Evil of Domestic Abuse Hides in Your Church* (Amityville, NY: Calvary Press, 2012), 17.

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

¹⁷² Ventura County (CA) Grand Jury, “Bullying in the Workplace,” 1.

¹⁷³ Astrauskaite, Kern, and Notelaers, “An Individual Psychology Approach to Underlying Factors of Workplace Bullying,” 226.

¹⁷⁴ Gary Namie, “2014 WBI U.S. Workplace Bullying Survey,” *Workplace Bullying Institute*, accessed November 1, 2016, www.workplacebullying.org.

behaviors noted in “Exploring Victims’ Experiences of Workplace Bullying: A Grounded Theory Approach” were “forcing to work overtime,” “overruling decisions, removing responsibility,” attacking their “professional status,” giving “persistent criticism,” using “manipulation,” and “undermining, and false accusations.”¹⁷⁵

Lundy Bancroft, a former codirector of the United State’s first program for abusive men, contrasts abuse with love saying, “Genuine love means respecting the humanity of the other person, wanting what is best for him or her...this kind of love is incompatible with abuse and coercion.”¹⁷⁶ Bancroft lists a variety of characteristic behaviors and thinking patterns of the abuser, saying they are “controlling,” “entitled,” “possessive,” and “manipulative;” abusers twist the truth, think of themselves as “superior,” confuse “love and abuse,” seek to present a “good public image,” feel “justified” in their thoughts and action, and commonly “deny and minimize” their behavior.¹⁷⁷ He suggests, much the same as Namie, that abusers isolate their victim to retain control.¹⁷⁸ According to Einarsen, et. al., abuse is identified as “behaviors such as intimidating followers, belittling, or humiliating them in public.”¹⁷⁹ Robert Sutton agrees, noting the victims of abusers in the workplace “feel oppressed, humiliated, de-energized,

¹⁷⁵ Mariam Ciby and R. P. Raya, “Exploring Victims’ Experiences of Workplace Bullying: A Grounded Theory Approach,” 74.

¹⁷⁶ Bancroft, *Why Does He Do That?* 65.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., 50–73.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., 74.

¹⁷⁹ Schyns and Hansbrough, *When Leadership Goes Wrong*, 148.

or belittled.”¹⁸⁰ He also suggests the abuser normally aims “his or her venom at people who are less powerful rather than at those people who are more powerful.”¹⁸¹

Many of these characteristics are found in descriptions of personality disorders. According to Clive Boddy, author of the article, “Corporate Psychopaths, Bullying and Unfair Supervision in the Workplace,” there is significant “cross-over” between psychopaths and bullies in the workplace. He says, “The traits of narcissism, lack of self-regulation, lack of remorse, and lack of conscience have been identified as those displayed by bullies. These traits are shared with psychopathy.”¹⁸² Robert Hare, author of *This Charming Psychopath*, says psychopaths have a “remarkable ability to rationalize their behavior.”¹⁸³ He also notes they are “deceitful and manipulative.”¹⁸⁴ In addition, Narcissists are described as having a sense of “entitlement” and “superiority,” characteristics of an abuser or bully.¹⁸⁵

However, Bancroft argues, though abusive individuals may have personality disorders, an abuser’s “value system is unhealthy, not their psychology.”¹⁸⁶ He notes

¹⁸⁰ Sutton, *The No Asshole Rule*, 9.

¹⁸¹ Ibid.

¹⁸² Clive R. Boddy, “Corporate Psychopaths, Bullying and Unfair Supervision in the Workplace,” *Journal of Business Ethics* 100, no. 3 (May 2011): 368, doi:<http://dx.doi.org/search.covenantseminary.edu/10.1007/s10551-010-0689-5>.

¹⁸³ “This Charming Psychopath,” under “Glib and Superficial.”

¹⁸⁴ Ibid.

¹⁸⁵ John Lipinski and Laura M. Crothers, eds., *Bullying in the Workplace: Causes, Symptoms, and Remedies* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 226.

¹⁸⁶ Bancroft, *Why Does He Do That?* 38.

recent research shows mental illness occurrence even in “violent abusers is not high.”

Bancroft concludes, “Mental illness doesn’t cause abusiveness any more than alcohol does.”¹⁸⁷ Though he provides a chapter in *Why Does He Do That* called the “Process of Change,” discussing counseling techniques and encouragement for treating abusers, he also notes, “It is more common for abusers to stay the same or get worse.”¹⁸⁸

Psychopathic Personality Disorder

A recent study in Australia “found that about one in five corporate executives are psychopaths – roughly the same rate as among prisoners.”¹⁸⁹ Some estimate there are “three times” the number of corporate board members in these categories than among the general population.¹⁹⁰ Unfortunately, it is estimated the cost of psychopathy to American taxpayers is approximately “\$460 billion a year.”¹⁹¹

Psychopathy is “characterized by high levels of aggression in response to frustration,” according to Zeigler-Hill and Vonk in their article, “Dark Personality Features and Emotion Dysregulation.”¹⁹² Ross, Benning, and Adams described those with

¹⁸⁷ Ibid., 39.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., 359.

¹⁸⁹ Jonathan Pearlman, “1 in 5 CEOs Are Psychopaths, Study Finds,” *The Telegraph*, 11:38, sec. 2016, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2016/09/13/1-in-5-ceos-are-psychopaths-australian-study-finds/>.

¹⁹⁰ Chamorro-Premuzic, “Why Bad Guys Win at Work.”

¹⁹¹ Jennifer Kahn, “Can You Call a 9-Year-Old a Psychopath?,” *The New York Times*, May 11, 2012, Accessed November 22, 2016, <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/05/13/magazine/can-you-call-a-9-year-old-a-psychopath.html>.

¹⁹² Virgil Zeigler-Hill and Jennifer Vonk, “Dark Personality Features and Emotion Dysregulation,” *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology* 34, no. 8 (October 2015): 695, doi:<http://dx.doi.org/search.covenantseminary.edu/101521jscp2015348692>.

the disorder as “callous, calculating, manipulative, and deceitful.”¹⁹³ Robert Hare suggests, “Psychopaths seem proud of their ability to lie.”¹⁹⁴ Hare also says,

Their lack of remorse or guilt is associated with a remarkable ability to rationalize their behavior, to shrug off personal responsibility for actions that cause family, friends, and others to reel with shock and disappointment. They usually have handy excuses for their behavior, and in some cases, deny that it happened at all.¹⁹⁵

In addition, Psychopaths have a lack of compassion for others and are unable to show concerns for the needs of others, according to Jonason, Kaufman, Webster, and Geher.¹⁹⁶ Boddy agrees, saying they “have no conscience, few emotions, and an inability to have any feelings or empathy for other people.”¹⁹⁷ Simon adds, “Most researchers and theorists...view psychopaths as individuals devoid of conscience.”¹⁹⁸

Machiavellianism

According to Chamorro-Premuzic, “Machiavellian individuals are politically savvy and good at networking and managing upwards,” making them, like those with narcissistic and psychopathic traits, often part of upper management of organizations. He

¹⁹³ Scott R. Ross, Stephen D. Benning, and Zachary Adams, “Symptoms of Executive Dysfunction Are Endemic to Secondary Psychopathy: An Examination in Criminal Offenders and Noninstitutionalized Young Adults,” *Journal of Personality Disorders* 21, no. 4 (August 2007): 384.

¹⁹⁴ “This Charming Psychopath,” under “Deceitful and Manipulative.”

¹⁹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁹⁶ Peter K. Jonason et al., “What Lies Beneath the Dark Triad Dirty Dozen: Varied Relations with the Big Five,” 87.

¹⁹⁷ Boddy, “Corporate Psychopaths, Bullying and Unfair Supervision in the Workplace,” 368.

¹⁹⁸ Simon, “Narcissism.”

suggests they have “superficial charm.”¹⁹⁹ However, “Individuals who scored high on the Machiavellian scale were found to manipulate more, win more, were persuaded less, and persuaded others more in face-to-face interactions,” according to Jacob Siegel, author of “Machiavellianism, MBA's and Managers: Leadership Correlates and Socialization Effects.”²⁰⁰ Chamorro-Premuzic agrees, stating they are deceitful and “ruthless.”²⁰¹

Ziegler and Vonk argue Machiavellianistic individuals have little consideration for the emotional impact of their decisions, saying they “do whatever is necessary to achieve one’s goals without a great deal of concern for the emotional consequences of their behaviors.”²⁰² According to these researchers, this does not mean they are unable to identify the emotional states of others, but “they do not experience emotional discomfort when exposed to the suffering of others,” making them lacking in empathy.²⁰³

Statistics on Toxic Leadership

The prevalence of toxic leadership is not isolated or uncommon according to statistics. According to Gary and Ruth Namie of the Workplace Bullying Institute, nearly 37 percent of 146 million employees in the United States in 2007, had been “bullied” at

¹⁹⁹ Chamorro-Premuzic, “Why Bad Guys Win at Work.”

²⁰⁰ Jacob P. Siegel, “Machiavellianism, MBA’s and Managers: Leadership Correlates and Socialization Effect,” *Academy of Management Journal* 16, no. 3 (1973): 405.

²⁰¹ Chamorro-Premuzic, “Why Bad Guys Win at Work.”

²⁰² Zeigler-Hill and Vonk, “Dark Personality Features and Emotion Dysregulation,” 701.

²⁰³ *Ibid.*, 693.

work in the preceding year.²⁰⁴ They concluded that 72 percent of the toxic behavior was instigated by bosses.²⁰⁵ Author, Robert Sutton, agrees, saying “much of the nastiness is directed by superiors to their subordinates,” in the case of bullying in the workplace. He estimated 50 to 80 percent of incidents take place between a boss and employee.²⁰⁶ A report from 2001 said, “a staggering 90 percent of the workforce suffers boss abuse at some time in their careers.”²⁰⁷ According to Norwegian researchers Einarsen, Skogstad, and Aasland, their 2009 study of Norwegian employees concluded that, “33.9% of the respondents reported exposure to at least one destructive leadership behavior ‘quite often’ or ‘very often or nearly always’ during the last six months.”²⁰⁸ In a study of a Fortune 500 company, McFarlin and Sweeney, “the most common complaint was that...managers tyrannized their subordinates.”²⁰⁹

The destructive behavior of leaders who exhibit destructive personality traits or disorders is not limited to the secular business world. Rob Hay, Principal of Redcliffe College, an institution focused on missionary training, says, “The likelihood is great that

²⁰⁴ Gary Namie and Ruth Namie, *The Bully at Work: What You Can Do to Stop the Hurt and Reclaim Your Dignity on the Job*, 2nd edition (Naperville, IL: Sourcebooks, 2009), 5.

²⁰⁵ Ibid., 47.

²⁰⁶ Sutton, *The No Asshole Rule*, 23.

²⁰⁷ Onorato, “An Empirical Study of Unethical Leadership and Workplace Bullying in Industry Segments,” 4.

²⁰⁸ Schyns and Hansbrough, *When Leadership Goes Wrong*, 156.

²⁰⁹ Ibid., 250.

almost everyone, at some point during the span of a thirty or forty-year career, will work in an organization dominated by a toxic leader.”²¹⁰

The Results of Toxic Leadership

The loss of hope is characteristic of those experiencing toxic leadership. Allender says, “Evil...strips people of their hope.”²¹¹ One study in Sweden found up to 15 percent of suicides committed in Sweden were “due to isolation and victimization at work.”²¹² The authors agree toxic managers cause damage in productivity and employee welfare. Several studies have established the negative effects of workplace toxicity. Productivity is affected by bullying according to Ayoko, Callan, and Härtel who argue that “relationship conflict reduces levels of mutual understanding and goodwill” within an organization and the quality of group work is negatively affected.²¹³ The authors go on to say, “Other behavioral reactions to organizational frustration include reduced levels of job performance, absenteeism, and organizational and interpersonal aggression.”²¹⁴

A toxic workplace not only affect the productivity of the employees, it affects employee “mental and physical health,” according to Ciby and Raya. Workplace bullying

²¹⁰ Hay, “The Toxic Mission Organisation: Fiction or Fact?” 1.

²¹¹ Allender and Longman, *Bold Love*, 241.

²¹² Astrauskaite, Kern, and Notelaers, “An Individual Psychology Approach to Underlying Factors of Workplace Bullying,” 223.

²¹³ Oluremi B. Ayoko, Victor J. Callan, and Charmine E.J. Härtel, “Workplace Conflict, Bullying, and Counterproductive Behaviors,” *International Journal of Organizational Analysis* 11, no. 4 (October 2003): 284.

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 285.

results in “headache[s], sleep disturbance, and altered eating habits and timing.”²¹⁵ In addition, the “damage” is not only to the “immediate targets” of abuse, Sutton explains, “Coworkers, family members, or friends who watch...these ugly incidents suffer ripple effects.”²¹⁶ According to Branson and Silva, authors of *Violence Among Us: Ministry to Families in Crisis*, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder may be among the results of abusive environments. They say, the victim “may experience flashbacks and nightmares about past abuse and may develop unhealthy coping skills.”²¹⁷

Summary

This section has reviewed literature considering elements of leadership best practice and leadership by toxic supervisors. Personality disorders, traits, and abusive behavior have been defined and discussed for the purpose of diagnosis. In the next section, literature will be reviewed which comments directly or indirectly on Matthew 18:15-20, Matthew 7:1-6, 1 Peter 2:18-25, and Psalm 55. These passages will be analyzed for their applicability to conflict management.

The Theology of Conflict Management

As Christian workers seek places of shalom within organizations with a vision toward the expansion of God’s kingdom, various literary works provide information

²¹⁵ Ciby and Raya, “Exploring Victims’ Experiences of Workplace Bullying: A Grounded Theory Approach,” 76.

²¹⁶ Sutton, *The No Asshole Rule*, 31.

²¹⁷ Brenda Branson and Paula J. Silva, *Violence Among Us: Ministry to Families in Crisis* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 2007), 31.

regarding the often-confusing work environment created by toxic leadership. Whereas the Apostle Paul describes the intimacy and functionality of various parts of the human body as an analogy of how the church should function, employees may question how they are to respond to conflicts created by a supervisor who causes dysfunction by his toxic treatment of subordinates.²¹⁸

This section will review four biblical passages and other literature as they address the interpersonal conflicts that develop between leaders, described as toxic, and their subordinates. How do subordinates respond to these leaders in order to seek the unity of the body of Christ as described by the Apostle Paul?²¹⁹ Commentaries on Matthew 18, Matthew 7, 1 Peter 2, Psalm 55, as well as literature by authors on the principles presented in these biblical passages, will be studied. As previously stated, a study focused primarily on biblical theology would consider many other passages that would expand and deepen the understanding and application of these selected texts. However, these passages were commonly considered by the participants in this study.

The Matthew 18 Principle

The Bible gives guidance in Matthew 18 on the process of confronting a Christian who has sinned.²²⁰ Those who are employed by a Christian organization and are under

²¹⁸ 1 Corinthians 12:1-31.

²¹⁹ Ephesians 4:1-6.

²²⁰ Ibid.; Matthew 18:15-20.

the authority of a professing Christian leader may ask whether they are to heed the instructions found in this passage and if so, how to apply it in relation to a toxic leader.

Commentary on Matthew 18

Matthew 18 provides foundational principles that govern Christian-to-Christian interaction when that relationship has been severed or at least significantly damaged.

Matthew 18:15-20 says:

If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. Truly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. Again, I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them.²²¹

According to Lenski in his commentary on Matthew, Jesus is speaking of a conflict between fellow Christian believers in his use of your “brother.”²²² France, in his commentary, agrees with Lenski, as do others, noting the sin issue is between two “disciples.”²²³ Only France, of the commentators reviewed, suggested this passage was intended for “two brothers/sisters” who “stand on an equal footing,” implying the inapplicability of this process to a Christian who is the victim of a toxic supervisor who

²²¹ Matthew 18:15-20.

²²² Richard C. H. Lenski, *Interpretation of St. Matthew's Gospel* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1961), 698.

²²³ R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, New International Commentary on the New Testament edition (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007), 690.

has greater power.²²⁴ The others gave no guidance on the application of these passages to the workplace in particular.

Matthew Henry exhorts the Christian to “not suffer thy resentments to ripen into secret malice...but, to give vent to them in mild and grave admonition.”²²⁵ He suggests confrontation is important to disallow the fermenting of hostilities, just as the Apostle Paul warns in Ephesians 4:26-27, “Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and give no opportunity to the devil,” encouraging an immediate response to wrongs done by a Christian brother.²²⁶

However, Lenski suggests, “This first step [of private confrontation] is automatically omitted when the sin is one that has been committed against more than one person.”²²⁷ The commentaries disagree on the validity of the words “against you” being present in the original canon. Theologians, Howley, Bruce, and Howley, suggest these words were later “inserted” in the manuscript, “to discourage the idea that Jesus was giving a charter to the busy-body.”²²⁸ France agrees saying it was added “in the majority of MSS and versions.”²²⁹ Hendrickson agrees that it was added, but notes that the idea

²²⁴ Ibid., 691.

²²⁵ Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2009), 5:258.

²²⁶ Ephesians 4:26-27.

²²⁷ Lenski, *Interpretation of St. Matthew's Gospel*, 700.

²²⁸ G.C.D. Howley, H.L. Ellison, and F.F. Bruce, *New Layman's Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1979), 1207.

²²⁹ France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 689.

was “implied” by verse 21 which says, “Then Peter came up and said to him, ‘Lord, how often will my brother sin against me, and I forgive him?’”²³⁰ Tasker in his commentary, *The Gospel According to Matthew* argues these words “rightly interpret the text” and it is not “every kind of sin” that is being “considered,” but the “personal wrong done by one brother to another.”²³¹ Hendriksen agrees, asking, “Would not the admonition to have a private interview with the erring brother somewhat favor the assumption that the sin referred to was also of a private character?”²³²

When confronting the brother, the commentaries are consistent in drawing attention to the privacy intended in the first step of confrontation. As an example, Lenski says this terminology “enjoins strict privacy and forbids blurting out the matter in public.”²³³ He adds that this “makes it as easy as possible [for the offender] to confess the sin and to ask for pardon.”²³⁴ Howley, et. al., agree, saying this approach will “rouse a minimum of ill-feeling.”²³⁵

²³⁰ William Hendriksen, *Exposition of the Gospel According to Matthew*, 5th Printing ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1982), 698.

²³¹ R. V. G. Tasker, *The Gospel According to St. Matthew: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1961), 177.

²³² Hendriksen, *Exposition of the Gospel According to Matthew*, 698.

²³³ Lenski, *Interpretation of St. Matthew's Gospel*, 699.

²³⁴ Ibid.

²³⁵ Howley, Ellison, and Bruce, *New Layman's Bible Commentary*, 1207.

The confrontation must be “prompted by love,” according to Lenski, and is intended to “show him his sin so that he will see it as sin and feel guilty accordingly.”²³⁶ The approach should be in “wooing and love” as Hendriksen states.²³⁷ The privacy of one-on-one confrontation and the attitude behind the confrontation are because concern is given to the erring brother. “Every opportunity must be given to the offender to show that his offense is only a temporary lapse from grace,” according to Tasker.²³⁸

The process is intended to “gain thy brother,” as Henry notes.²³⁹ It has a “pastoral purpose of the approach,” as France notes, “underlined by the verb ‘win,’ which shows that the concern is not mainly with the safety and/or reputation of the whole community but with the spiritual welfare of the individual.”²⁴⁰ Seeking out the erring brother and bringing him back to the safety of the church’s fold is the goal of these confrontations.²⁴¹

At times, however, a professing brother in Christ will refuse to repent and be reconciled after confrontation by another Christian. “Sorrow and disappointment are to fill the wronged brother” when met with this rejection.²⁴² In these cases, Jesus’ instructions are to “take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be

²³⁶ Lenski, *Interpretation of St. Matthew’s Gospel*, 699.

²³⁷ Hendriksen, *Exposition of the Gospel According to Matthew*, 699.

²³⁸ Tasker, *The Gospel According to St. Matthew*, 173.

²³⁹ Henry, *Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible*, 5:258.

²⁴⁰ France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 692.

²⁴¹ Henry, *Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible*, 5:258.

²⁴² Lenski, *Interpretation of St. Matthew’s Gospel*, 700.

established by the evidence of two or three witnesses.”²⁴³ Multiple commentaries direct their readers to Deuteronomy 19:15 as the formative basis of this procedure, including Lenski who says, “In case the matter is ever inquired into...the case can be properly settled as to the facts by the two or the three witnesses.”²⁴⁴ He continues,

A single witness shall not suffice against a person for any crime or for any wrong in connection with any offense that he has committed. Only on the evidence of two witnesses or of three witnesses shall a charge be established. If a malicious witness arises to accuse a person of wrongdoing, then both parties to the dispute shall appear before the Lord, before the priests and the judges who are in office in those days. The judges shall inquire diligently, and if the witness is a false witness and has accused his brother falsely, then you shall do to him as he had meant to do to his brother. So, you shall purge the evil from your midst. And the rest shall hear and fear, and shall never again commit any such evil among you.²⁴⁵

According to Bruce, the witnesses are not only to be present to evaluate the response of the offender, but to “check on the validity of the accusation.”²⁴⁶ In addition, Hendriksen admonishes the offended, suggesting this step in the process may also cause him to consider whether the sin was “really so serious” that others must be brought into the difficulty.²⁴⁷ Again, because the goal of the confrontations is to “convince the sinner of his error and to bring him to repentance,” Hendriksen argues that it may be “easier for

²⁴³ Matthew 18:16.

²⁴⁴ Lenski, *Interpretation of St. Matthew's Gospel*, 701.

²⁴⁵ Ibid.

²⁴⁶ Howley, Ellison, and Bruce, *New Layman's Bible Commentary*, 1207.

²⁴⁷ Hendriksen, *Exposition of the Gospel According to Matthew*, 699.

two or three persons to succeed at this task than for one.”²⁴⁸ Henry suggests this is because the additional witnesses are “disinterested” and the offender is more likely to “hearken to them.”²⁴⁹

Matthew 18:17 goes on to instruct more witnesses be brought into counsel in the form of the “church” should there continue to be rejection of the counsel given by the offended and his party. There is some disagreement regarding the meaning of “church” among the commentators. Lenski proposes a reading of “tell it to the congregation,” though does not stipulate if that necessarily involves the leadership (elders).²⁵⁰ France makes note that there is no mention of leadership at this point in the process, but only the “local congregation.”²⁵¹ Hendriksen goes further in suggesting that respect must be shown to the congregation as a whole in the process, though leaders may also be involved.²⁵² However, Henry disagrees saying, “Tell it to the guides and governors of the church.”²⁵³

The commentators also disagree as to the purpose of broadening the number of people involved in this step in the confrontation process. The purpose, according to France is the expansion of the “number of people who agree in disapproving of the

²⁴⁸ Ibid., 700.

²⁴⁹ Henry, *Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible*, V:258.

²⁵⁰ Lenski, *Interpretation of St. Matthew’s Gospel*, 701.

²⁵¹ France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 691.

²⁵² Hendriksen, *Exposition of the Gospel According to Matthew*, 701.

²⁵³ Henry, *Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible*, 5:260.

offender's action" be involved in the discussion.²⁵⁴ This may imply the congregation places trust in the witnesses' evaluation of the situation. However, Henry argues that the church body is to "examine the matter and, if they find the complaint frivolous and groundless," they are to "rebuke the complainant."²⁵⁵ France suggests the "gathering is not to pronounce judgment but to strengthen the pastoral appeal... The offender, faced by the disapproval of the whole local disciple community, ought surely to recognize this was not just a personal grievance."²⁵⁶

If the erring brother fails to respond to the church's rebuke, "Let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector."²⁵⁷ The interpretation of this final step creates disagreement among these theologians. Matthew Henry speaks the most strongly, arguing,

Let him be cast out of the communion of the church, secluded from the special ordinances, degraded from the dignity of a church member, let him be put under disgrace, and let the members of the society be warned to withdraw from him, that he may be ashamed of his sin, and they may not be infected by it.²⁵⁸

This would have been "the natural meaning if spoken by most Jews," according to France. The *New Layman's Commentary* agrees, saying, "If he refuses to hear the local church, he is clearly a poisonous influence and must be excluded."²⁵⁹ However, the

²⁵⁴ France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 691.

²⁵⁵ Henry, *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible*, 5:260.

²⁵⁶ France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 693.

²⁵⁷ Matthew 18:17b.

²⁵⁸ Henry, *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible*, 5:260.

²⁵⁹ Howley, Ellison, and Bruce, *New Layman's Bible Commentary*, 1207.

Wycliffe Bible Commentary argues the congregation, rather than “withdraw from him,” as Henry suggests, are to “reach him with the Gospel.”²⁶⁰ Hendriksen explains further that Jesus did not “withdraw” from the publicans and sinners, but instead welcomed them as shown in chapter 8 of Matthew. Hendriksen argues that the erring brother has “lost his right to church membership” and is viewed as “being as yet outside the kingdom of God,” judging him to be an unbeliever.²⁶¹ But, France adds that the Gospel of Matthew emphasizes “Jesus’ sympathy for outsiders and his willingness to break conventional taboos in order to reach them.”²⁶²

Theological Reflections on Matthew 18 Principles

The application of the Matthew 18 principles when confronting an erring boss in the Christian organization can be very difficult. One expert explained, “Try disagreeing with a bully: it is an effective means to identify one!”²⁶³ According to an analyst of the leadership of Mark Driscoll of Mars Hill ministries, says, “Mark Driscoll removed any leader who challenged him or even merely questioned him.”²⁶⁴ The power of employment makes confrontation of those with power possibly risky. Mary Alice

²⁶⁰ Charles F. Pfeiffer and Everett F. Harrison, eds., *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 1990), 962.

²⁶¹ Hendriksen, *Exposition of the Gospel According to Matthew*, 701.

²⁶² France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 694.

²⁶³ “The Terrible Legacy of Spiritual Abuse,” *Evangel* 22, no. 2 (Summer 2004): 34.

²⁶⁴ “Capstone 2-8: Conclusions: Lessons to Learn from the Meltdown of Mars Hill,” *Futuristguy*, January 8, 2015, accessed September 23, 2016, <https://futuristguy.wordpress.com/2015/01/08/capstone-2-8-conclusions-lessons-to-learn-from-the-meltdown-of-mars-hill/>.

Chrnalogar, author of *Twisted Scriptures: Breaking Free from Churches That Abuse* says, “It is not likely you will ‘win’ in a confrontation with your group’s leaders.”²⁶⁵

Confronting the Boss

An example of the first step of the Matthew 18 process is found in 2 Samuel 12. In 2 Samuel 11, the story of King David and Bathsheba is told. David, gazing upon Bathsheba as she bathed below him as he walked on his roof, determines to sexually molest her. After having sex and learning she is pregnant, David had her husband, Uriah killed in battle. In chapter 12, it is related that Nathan, a prophet, comes to David privately to confront David for his sin. David responds in repentance as envisioned in Matthew 18, saying, “‘I have sinned against the Lord.’ And Nathan said to David, ‘The Lord also has put away your sin; you shall not die.’”²⁶⁶

As the literature previously explored, Matthew 18 provides direction and encouragement to confront professing brothers in Christ for the purpose of restoring fellowship through repentance. However, Chrnalogar argues the Matthew 18 principles of confrontation do not apply to leaders in the same way as to other church members. Speaking of those who spiritually abuse their congregations, “Isolated confrontation of leaders by a layperson is dangerous.”²⁶⁷ She makes a distinction between the first step of individual confrontation found in Matthew 18 and confrontation of leaders as instructed

²⁶⁵ Chrnalogar, *Twisted Scriptures*, 208, Kindle.

²⁶⁶ 2 Samuel 12:13.

²⁶⁷ Chrnalogar, *Twisted Scriptures*, 66, Kindle.

in 1 Timothy 5:19-20. The passage says, “Do not admit a charge against an elder except on the evidence of two or three witnesses. As for those who persist in sin, rebuke them in the presence of all, so that the rest may stand in fear.”²⁶⁸ She argues the first step of confrontation must be made at the second level of the Matthew 18 process; including two or three witnesses.²⁶⁹ Lipman-Blumen agrees, saying, “Dissenters do better when they have a group standing with them.”²⁷⁰

Lipman-Blumen goes on to suggest confronters must do “due diligence” prior to confronting with a third party. They need to know “the general political landscape.”²⁷¹ Ken Sande, author of *The Peacemaker*, agrees saying abusers are effective at manipulating and intimidating, “Therefore, it is usually best to involve others in the confrontation process.”²⁷²

Power and Interests

Authors Burns, Chapman, and Guthrie present the “negotiating strategies” for those who have conflicting power and interests.²⁷³

²⁶⁸ 1 Timothy 5:19-20.

²⁶⁹ Chrnalogar, *Twisted Scriptures*, 65, Kindle.

²⁷⁰ Lipman-Blumen, *The Allure of Toxic Leaders*, 149, Kindle.

²⁷¹ Ibid., 198.

²⁷² Ken Sande, *The Peacemaker: A Biblical Guide to Resolving Personal Conflict*, 3 edition (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2004), 156.

²⁷³ Burns, Chapman, and Guthrie, *Negotiating Ministry: The Politics of Working with People*, 6.

	<i>EQUAL POWER</i>	<i>UNEQUAL POWER</i>
<i>SHARED INTERESTS</i>	<u>Cell One</u> Suggested Strategy: <i>Collaborate</i>	<u>Cell Two</u> Suggested Strategy: <i>Network</i>
<i>CONFLICTING INTERESTS</i>	<u>Cell Three</u> Suggested Strategy: <i>Bargain</i>	<u>Cell Four</u> Suggested Strategy: <i>Range of options depending on position of power</i>

Table 1. Power and Interests

“Cell Four” is of interest to this study as it describes conflict between individuals who have “unequal power” and have “conflicting interests.” Following a “review of the gospels,” the authors determined Jesus ministered primarily in Cell Four as he engaged the religious and governmental authorities. The authors argue for several types of response to conflict with those with a greater position of power. The methods include counteract, subvert, defer, suffer, and surrender.²⁷⁴

Burns, et. al., describe counteract as to “take concrete action against” the one with greater power which can include supervisors. They explain this is normally in confrontation. Subverting is acting to reverse the “values and principles” of the systems in place or actions of the toxic leader.²⁷⁵ The Hebrew midwives subverted Pharaoh’s edict to kill all the boys born and Moses’ mother hid her newborn son from the government

²⁷⁴ Ibid., 9–12.

²⁷⁵ Ibid., 9.

authorities.²⁷⁶ Jonathan subverted his father, King Saul, when Saul planned to murder David.²⁷⁷ The authors describe deferring as conforming to the requests of someone else. Joseph deferred to the “will of God,” remaining engaged to Mary who was pregnant with Jesus.²⁷⁸ Suffering is to willingly tolerate “loss, pain, distress or even death” when responding to conflict. The Apostle Paul explains his suffering at length in his second letter to the Corinthian church.²⁷⁹ Burns, et. al., say surrender is to “give up control” or to resist combat.²⁸⁰ The authors argue Christians should always “surrender their prerogatives to the plans and purposes of God.” They propose followers of Christ should never surrender the truth as found in scripture in order to obey an earthly leader.²⁸¹

Repentance and Forgiveness of the Offender

At each step in the process presented in Matthew 18, repentance by the erring brother is the goal. The literature gives various perspectives on what is entailed in repentance. O'Donnell asks, regarding the apparent repentance of the offender,

Does the person demonstrate awareness of the pain his or her sin has caused others, and has the person taken all possible steps to make amends and bring healing to those he or she has hurt? This would mean the person

²⁷⁶ Exodus 1:15-2:2.

²⁷⁷ 1 Samuel 20.

²⁷⁸ Burns, Chapman, and Guthrie, *Negotiating Ministry: The Politics of Working with People*, 10.

²⁷⁹ Ibid., 11.

²⁸⁰ Ibid.

²⁸¹ Ibid., 12.

has “owned” the sin—he or she is the one who did this, and it is the person’s responsibility to help his or her victims as much as possible.²⁸²

Allender, in his book, *Leading with a Limp*, says confession is a first step in repentance that involves embracing personal “brokenness” and letting go “of the futile effort to manage our addiction – whatever it might be.”²⁸³

O’Donnell warns confession may be made when “caught,” but, “One’s willingness to enter into restitution...is one way to measure true repentance.”²⁸⁴ Gordon Leah, author of the article, “Touching the Edge of His cloak: Reflections on Repentance and Grace,” suggests “sincerity” is a “fundamental need” in repentance. However, he notes sincerity is “difficult to assess” for those evaluating the authenticity of the offender’s response. Simon, in *Character Disturbance*, says, “Being embarrassed at being...found out is not the same as feeling genuine shame.” He goes on to argue, “A person who truly feels ashamed is certainly not likely to do the same things over and over again with no compunction.”²⁸⁵ In Leah’s discussion of the story of the tax collector in the temple from Luke 18, he asks, “How are we to gauge sincerity when all we hear are the words and all we see are perhaps a depressed downward look and a beating of the

²⁸² Kelly O’Donnell, “Wise as Doves and Innocent as Serpents? Doing Conflict Resolution Better,” *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* (January 2007), under “Step 2: Recovery, #2,” accessed December 1, 2016, <https://www.emqonline.com/node/2014>.

²⁸³ Dan B. Allender, *Leading with a Limp: How the Hurts in Your Past Can Lead You to a More Abundant Life* (Colorado Springs, CO: WaterBrook Press, 2006), 72, Kindle.

²⁸⁴ O’Donnell, “Wise as Doves and Innocent as Serpents?,” under “Step 2: Recovery, #2.)

²⁸⁵ George K. Simon, Ph.D., *Character Disturbance: The Phenomenon of Our Age* (Little Rock, AR: Parkhurst Brothers Publishers Inc., 2011), 37.

breast?” However, he concludes that the “context” presumes the man’s sincere repentance.²⁸⁶ Leah argues throughout his essay that repentance will appear differently with each individual case and “however weak [a believer’s] experience and [a believer’s] commitment may be, [he is] accepted and empowered by the one whose power surpasses [his] own.”²⁸⁷

When considering forgiveness of the offender, Kibble, in his article, “On Preaching the Need for Repentance,” notes “forgiveness does not depend on repentance but it demands a response of repentance” in God’s relationship to his people.²⁸⁸ Daniel Wilson, in his article, “God’s Definition of Forgiveness,” argues God’s people should forgive as God forgives. He defines forgiveness as, “A commitment by the one true God to pardon graciously all those who repent and believe in Christ so that they are reconciled to Him, although this commitment does not eliminate all consequences in this life.”²⁸⁹ He proposes, “Biblical forgiveness involves ‘letting go’ of bitterness or revenge and ‘graciously giving’ pardon to those who ask.”²⁹⁰ However, Wilson notes God does not

²⁸⁶ Gordon Leah, “‘Touching the Edge of His Cloak’: Reflections on Repentance and Grace,” *European Journal of Theology* 23, no. 2 (2014): 141.

²⁸⁷ Ibid., 148.

²⁸⁸ David G Kibble, “On Preaching the Need for Repentance,” *Currents in Theology and Mission* 41, no. 5 (October 2014): 345.

²⁸⁹ Daniel Wilson, “God’s Definition of Forgiveness,” *The Journal of Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary*, accessed December 20, 2016, <http://gpts.edu/resources/documents/katekomen/Forgiveness-1.pdf>.

²⁹⁰ Ibid.

take away all consequences of sin, but “disciplines His own not for the purpose of punishing them, but for His glory and for their joy in the future.”²⁹¹

Sande commends forgiveness as a means of imitating God and in turn, glorifying him before a watching world.²⁹² Later in the book, Sande suggests some sins may be overlooked and forgiven. However, he gives two conditions for overlooking sin: the sin has not “created a wall between” the offender and victim and the sin is “not causing serious harm to God’s reputation, to others, or to the offender.”²⁹³

In a review of the book, *The Subtle Power of Spiritual Abuse: Recognizing and Escaping Spiritual Authority Within the Church*, Julie Douglas says such passages as found in Matthew 18 are “misapplied” in “some Christian groups where forgiveness is emphasized.”²⁹⁴ In these groups, abusive behavior is overlooked, believing that ignoring abuse is showing forgiveness. Douglas argues, “Forgiveness cannot occur on any deep level until the issue of the abuse has been addressed and worked through in one way or another.”²⁹⁵ Shane Waldron, former director of Refuge Ministries, a ministry to victims of domestic violence and their batterers, suggests Luke 17:3-4 allows repentance to be

²⁹¹ Ibid.

²⁹² Sande, *The Peacemaker*, 32.

²⁹³ Ibid., 82–83.

²⁹⁴ Julie M Douglas, review of *The Subtle Power of Spiritual Abuse: Recognizing and Escaping Spiritual Authority within the Church*, by David Johnson and Jeff VanVonderen, *African Ecclesial Review* 35, no. 5 (October 1993): 322.

²⁹⁵ Ibid.

required by the victim for giving forgiveness, though is not necessary.²⁹⁶ However, Robert Burns, in his book, *The Adult Child of Divorce*, argues there are two types of forgiveness: legal and relational.²⁹⁷ He says we are commanded to forgive “even as God in Christ forgave us.”²⁹⁸ Burns says, God’s forgiveness is offered to all (legal), but must be received by the sinner (relational). He suggests we have a responsibility to forgive the offender before God, but until the offender repents, forgiveness is not offered to them.

Enroth argues it is important for the victim’s health to forgive the offender.²⁹⁹ A failure to forgive “can be unhealthy and damaging to one’s physical, emotional, and relational welfare,” according to Greenfield whether or not the offender has repented.³⁰⁰

Matthew 7 and Confrontation

Several chapters earlier in the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus is speaking with his disciples on a hill in what has become known as the “Sermon On the Mount.”³⁰¹ In Jesus’ “sermon” a variety of topics are discussed including a Christian’s witness in the world, anger, lust, divorce, oaths, how to treat enemies, giving to those in need, how to pray,

²⁹⁶ Quoting Luke 17:3-4 during a Refuge Ministry Training for Mentors. Luke says, “Pay attention to yourselves! If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him, and if he sins against you seven times in the day, and turns to you seven times, saying, ‘I repent,’ you must forgive him.”

²⁹⁷ Bob Burns and Michael J. Brissett, *The Adult Child of Divorce* (Nashville: Oliver-Nelson Books, 1991), 140.

²⁹⁸ Ephesians 4:32.

²⁹⁹ Enroth, *Churches That Abuse*.

³⁰⁰ Greenfield and Faulkner, *The Wounded Minister*, 184, Kindle.

³⁰¹ Matthew 5:1.

fasting, and God's provision for his people. At the beginning of chapter 7, Jesus tells his disciples

Judge not, that you be not judged. For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and with the measure you use it will be measured to you. Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when there is the log in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye. "Do not give dogs what is holy, and do not throw your pearls before pigs, lest they trample them underfoot and turn to attack you."³⁰²

Commentary on Matthew 7

The Greek verb for "judge" in this passage is not necessarily a negative term, according to France. However, as more than one commentator points out, the context makes it evident "this sort of judging is not to be welcomed."³⁰³ Hendriksen argues judging that is harsh, self-righteous, without mercy or love is being censored in this passage. He makes a distinction between being "hypercritical" and "discriminating."³⁰⁴ Lenski agrees, saying, "What he forbids is the self-righteous, hypocritical judging which is false and calls down God's judgment on itself."³⁰⁵

Though the commentators agree that judgments must be made, Matthew Henry is representative of the others in suggesting, "Our own sins ought to appear greater to us

³⁰² Ibid.; Matthew 7:1-6.

³⁰³ France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 274.

³⁰⁴ Hendriksen, *Exposition of the Gospel According to Matthew*, 357.

³⁰⁵ Lenski, *Interpretation of St. Matthew's Gospel*, 288.

than the same sins in others.”³⁰⁶ In consideration of the analogy Jesus uses, Lenski points out, “The splinter is thought to be some small moral fault, and the beam a fault correspondingly greater.”³⁰⁷ Hendriksen adds, “A person may be ever so good in his own eyes; yet if he is not humble, then, as God sees him, there is a beam in his eye, the beam of self-righteousness.”³⁰⁸ The theologians agree fundamentally that the approach to the brother who is sinning must be done with humble self-evaluation, as Hendriksen suggests commenting on Matthew 18, “The brother who has been sinned against is, after all, also himself a sinner, one who should at all times first of all examine himself.”³⁰⁹

In verse 6, Jesus warns his disciples. Within the context of his prior statements condemning a judgmental attitude towards a brother, this verse seems to contradict his teaching. Hendriksen notes “hogs or pigs” are understood to be “contemptible and filthy” to Jesus’ audience.³¹⁰ France notes some confusion, saying, “Whereas, verses 1-5 carried a clear and simple instruction for disciples, this apparently independent saying is couched only in metaphor, with no indication how it might be applied to real-life contexts.”³¹¹ However, Harrison, Hendriksen, Lenski, Henry, and Tasker all suggest Jesus is speaking of individuals who are particularly vicious in their response to reproof, and therefore

³⁰⁶ Henry, *Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible*, 5:88.

³⁰⁷ Lenski, *Interpretation of St. Matthew’s Gospel*, 290.

³⁰⁸ Hendriksen, *Exposition of the Gospel According to Matthew*, 358.

³⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 699.

³¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 359.

³¹¹ France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 276.

there is no contradiction in his teaching in verse 6 to what has come before. Henry says, “They will trample the reproofs under their feet, in scorn of them, and rage against them.”³¹² Lenski says, “The command not to judge others...has its obvious limits.” He says, “The command does not extend to dogs and swine.”³¹³ Harrison argues they are “unalterably vicious.”³¹⁴

Therefore, the commentators recommend care in approaching those who may “turn to attack you.”³¹⁵ France cautions the “inappropriate use of the labels ‘dogs’ and ‘pig,’ but suggests there are circumstances where failure to judge will be “a recipe for disaster.”³¹⁶ Henry argues, “Christ makes the law of self-preservation one of his own laws, and precious is the blood of his subjects to him.”³¹⁷ Though a Christian may be tempted to believe endless patience is modeled by God in response to the rebellion of his creation, Hendriksen argues, “In the parable of the Barren Fig Tree (Luke 13:6-9) he showed that God’s patience, though prolonged, is not endless.”³¹⁸ In addition, Harrison suggests those who viciously reject Christ’s teaching should not “be allowed to treat

³¹² Henry, *Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible*, 5:89.

³¹³ Lenski, *Interpretation of St. Matthew’s Gospel*, 291.

³¹⁴ Pfeiffer and Harrison, *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary*, 941.

³¹⁵ Matthew 7:6.

³¹⁶ France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 277.

³¹⁷ Henry, *Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible*, 5:89.

³¹⁸ Hendriksen, *Exposition of the Gospel According to Matthew*, 360.

these precious things as cheap.”³¹⁹ According to Allender, giving examples such as Hitler and Stalin, “There are people in this world who seem to live and breathe evil.”³²⁰

Theological Reflections on Matthew 7

In Matthew 7, Jesus teaches his disciples to humbly instruct those who are erring. However, he also gives direction to the disciple who seeks humbly to instruct one who is unwilling to heed the instruction and viciously attacks the one bearing the good news. Humble disciples are to preserve both themselves and the dignity of the biblical message when seeking to redirect an erring brother, making judgments as to whether he is a brother willing to receive correction or a swine who will trample it.³²¹ The literature proposes there are distinctions between judging wrongly and making necessary judgments where great evil exists.

Recounting the experiences of a woman who was abused by her father, Allender says, “I concentrated on her refusal to face the real state of his heart and her tendency to assume responsibility for the abuse in order to hide his stalking evil.”³²² The woman, desiring to judge not, was taking on the responsibility for the abuse of her oppressor. “We must resist two extremes: a penchant to judge too freely, labeling others with

³¹⁹ Pfeiffer and Harrison, *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary*, 941.

³²⁰ Allender and Longman, *Bold Love*, 233.

³²¹ Henry, *Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible*, V:89.

³²² Allender and Longman, *Bold Love*, 236.

condescending confidence and snarlish anger, or a refusal to assess data given the potential for error,” according to Allender.³²³

The Apostle Peter and Toxic Bosses

In the New Testament era, “Household slaves were found regularly in Greek and Roman families.”³²⁴ And in the time of Christ, many slaves were being converted to Christianity, according to Lenski.³²⁵ Peter wrote to “Jewish Christians, members of the Diaspora” who had “fled from Jerusalem, expelled under the Emperor Claudius” and “had settled in little communities in Asia Minor” in his first epistle.³²⁶ He writes in his second chapter

Servants, be subject to your masters with all respect, not only to the good and gentle but also to the unjust. For this is a gracious thing, when, mindful of God, one endures sorrows while suffering unjustly. For what credit is it if, when you sin and are beaten for it, you endure? But if when you do good and suffer for it you endure, this is a gracious thing in the sight of God. For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps. He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly. He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed. For you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.³²⁷

³²³ Ibid., 233.

³²⁴ Donald Guthrie et al., eds., *The New Bible Commentary: Revised*, 3rd rev. ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1984), 1242.

³²⁵ Lenski, *Interpretation of St. Matthew's Gospel*, 114.

³²⁶ R. C. Sproul, *1-2 Peter* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011), 21.

³²⁷ 1 Peter 2:18-25.

Commentary on 1 Peter

The Expositor's Bible Commentary says the "Christian duty" of the slave "was submission and loyalty to their master, even if he was harsh (skolios, 'perverse')." ³²⁸ Though slavery was "not a divine arrangement," the slave's submission was to be unlike that of non-Christian slaves, according to Lenski, "which is due to mere human compulsion." The Christian slave was to submit "due to submission to God's will." ³²⁹ Though some masters were "good," some masters "could make life...very difficult for [the slave]." ³³⁰ Harrison encourages the suffering slave, saying, "The Spirit-filled man is enabled to meet demands unreasonable, yes, quite impossible on any other basis." ³³¹

The submission of slaves to their masters is found in the broader context of submission to "every human institution." Peter begins this passage with the exhortation,

Be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme, or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good. For this is the will of God, that by doing good you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish people. ³³²

Bruce translates "every human institution" as "every fundamental social institution," suggesting Peter's principle is subjection to all who are given authority over the

³²⁸ Gaebelein et al., *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Hebrews through Revelation*, 12:234.

³²⁹ Lenski, *Interpretation of St. Matthew's Gospel*, 115.

³³⁰ Guthrie et al., *The New Bible Commentary*, 1242.

³³¹ Pfeiffer and Harrison, *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary*, 1448.

³³² 1 Peter 2:13-15.

Christian.³³³ Matthew Henry broadens the scope of those to whom Peter speaks, arguing “By servants he means those who were strictly such, whether hired, or bought with money, or taken in the wars, or born in the house, or those who served by contract for a limited time, as apprentices.”³³⁴ But, Stibbs in his commentary appears to disagree, noting the Greek word, “despotai” means “absolute ownership and uncontrolled power.”³³⁵

Alan Stibbs argues the submission “‘for the Lord’s sake’ stresses the deliberately chosen, voluntary character of the subjection. Christians should be dutiful not because they have to be so, but because they freely choose to be so.”³³⁶ However, Sproul says submission is not unqualified, “We are to do so unless those ordinances prohibit us from doing what God commands or command us to do what God forbids.”³³⁷ The commentators emphasize “the sinful misconduct of one relation [the master] does not justify the sinful behavior of the other.”³³⁸ Employees are to submit to their employers whether their bosses act in accordance with God’s ethical guidelines or not.

³³³ Howley, Ellison, and Bruce, *New Layman’s Bible Commentary*, 1636.

³³⁴ Henry, *Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible*, 5:1019.

³³⁵ Alan M. Stibbs, *The First Epistle General of Peter: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1959), 114.

³³⁶ *Ibid.*, 110.

³³⁷ Sproul, *1-2 Peter*, 78.

³³⁸ Henry, *Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible*, 5:1019.

The goal of Peter's instruction is that the willing subjection of those under authority "should produce conviction of sin in their slanderers."³³⁹ Sproul suggests, "Some personalities...produce wall-to-wall land mines. Whatever you say is likely to provoke them to rage."³⁴⁰ He goes on to say, "Our conduct is to be honorable so that people's speaking evil against us will not be a land mine."³⁴¹ However, in the end, "We cannot control what other people do, but we can control what we ourselves do."³⁴² Astrauskaite, Kern, and Notelaers says, "In fact, some researchers argued that trying to solve problems and conflicts in a cooperative way with superiors or being open with the potential instigators may even make the situation worse."³⁴³

Peter finishes this passage with the encouragement of Jesus Christ's example, "Throughout his earthly ministry, Jesus was reviled. In all these situations, he was ever the patient sufferer who was able to control his tongue."³⁴⁴ Lenski suggests considering "the mockery and the abuse of the Sanhedrin, of the scourging and the mockery of the soldiers, and of the mockery and the reviling under the cross."³⁴⁵ In response to these considerations, "The sufferings of Christ should quiet us under the most unjust and cruel

³³⁹ Howley, Ellison, and Bruce, *New Layman's Bible Commentary*, 1636.

³⁴⁰ Sproul, *1-2 Peter*, 76.

³⁴¹ Ibid.

³⁴² Sproul, *1-2 Peter*, 76.

³⁴³ Astrauskaite, Kern, and Notelaers, "An Individual Psychology Approach to Underlying Factors of Workplace Bullying," 231.

³⁴⁴ Gaebele et al., *The Expositor's Bible Commentary Hebrews through Revelation*, 12:235.

³⁴⁵ Lenski, *Interpretation of St. Matthew's Gospel*, 121.

sufferings we meet with in the world.”³⁴⁶ Henry goes on to say, “He suffered voluntarily, not for himself, but for us, with the upmost readiness, with perfect patience, from all quarters...”³⁴⁷

Psalms 55

Psalms 55 is designated as a “psalm of David,” David’s second king.³⁴⁸ This psalm, a song used in Hebrew worship, is found in the second book of psalms.³⁴⁹ Johannes G. Vos includes it with his examination of Psalms 59, 69, 79, 109 and 137 as “imprecatory Psalms” in his article, “The Ethical Problem of the Imprecatory Psalms.”³⁵⁰ An article on the Bible Gateway website lists Psalms 5, 10, 17, 35, 58, 59, 69, 70, 79, 83, 109, 129, 137, and 140 as imprecatory Psalms.³⁵¹ J. Carl Laney lists only Psalm 7, 35, 58, 59, 69, 83, 109, 137, and 139.³⁵² One commentary on the imprecatory Psalms said,

These prayers awaken the conscience to the human cry for redress, the cosmic demand for moral order and justice. They can lead one to feel as deeply as one ought the horrendous insult to Yahweh and his creation perpetrated by those who lie and cheat and kill and abuse and blaspheme.

³⁴⁶ Henry, *Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible*, 5:1020.

³⁴⁷ Ibid.

³⁴⁸ 2 Samuel 2.

³⁴⁹ Howley, Ellison, and Bruce, *New Layman’s Bible Commentary*, 628.

³⁵⁰ Johannes Geerhardus Vos, “The Ethical Problem of the Imprecatory Psalms,” *The Westminster Theological Journal* 4, no. 2 (May 1942): 123.

³⁵¹ “Imprecatory Psalms,” *Biblegateway*, accessed March 14, 2017, <https://www.biblegateway.com/resources/asbury-bible-commentary/Imprecatory-Psalms>.

³⁵² J. Carl Laney, “A Fresh Look at the Imprecatory Psalms,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 138, no. January-March (1981): 36.

Made callous by exposure to continual evil, one may lose the sense of outrage these evils deserve, whether done to us or to others or to God. These prayers awaken that outrage, which is to be offered to God and which motivates to redemptive action.³⁵³

Commentary on Psalm 55

Henry suggests, Psalm 55 “is the expression of a heart which, deeply wounded by the faithlessness of a friend, turns to God in supplication and confidence.”³⁵⁴ Pfeiffer agrees, proposing the psalm “is a lament of an individual oppressed by enemies and deserted by friends.”³⁵⁵ Howley, et.al., note this psalm has been connected to several difficult times in David’s life including the “rebellion of Absalom or King Saul’s persecution. They note that some have also believed it to be a “foreshadowing...of Christ’s experience of the treachery of Judas.”³⁵⁶ However, these commentators suggest these connections are “incapable of proof.”³⁵⁷

The psalmist wants to cope with his troubles by running away and “leave them as far behind as possible.”³⁵⁸ However, David turns to God, crying out for judgment on those who are “wreaking havoc.”³⁵⁹ Pfeiffer, et. al., divide the psalm in three sections and

³⁵³ “Imprecatory Psalms.”

³⁵⁴ Guthrie et al., *The New Bible Commentary*, 485.

³⁵⁵ Pfeiffer and Harrison, *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary*, 515.

³⁵⁶ Howley, Ellison, and Bruce, *New Layman’s Bible Commentary*, 637.

³⁵⁷ Ibid.

³⁵⁸ Ibid.

³⁵⁹ Ibid.

note the second (verses 9-15) begins and ends “with a plea for vengeance.”³⁶⁰ In the midst of this section (verses 12-15), David explains his anger:

For it is not an enemy who taunts me—
 then I could bear it;
 it is not an adversary who deals insolently with me—
 then I could hide from him.
 But it is you, a man, my equal,
 my companion, my familiar friend.
 We used to take sweet counsel together;
 within God's house we walked in the throng.
 Let death steal over them;
 let them go down to Sheol alive;
 for evil is in their dwelling place and in their heart.³⁶¹

David says he could have tolerated “oppression and fraud,” however “what incurs his wrath is the treachery of a trusted friend.”³⁶² Howley, et. al., agree, saying, “He still cannot get over the fact this his friend has deceived and betrayed him.”³⁶³ The psalmist explains it was not an adversary who oppressed him, but an individual who was a friend, someone who he took “sweet counsel together.”³⁶⁴ The word, counsel, “implies intimacy,” according to *The New Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible: Hebrew*

³⁶⁰ Pfeiffer and Harrison, *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary*, 515.

³⁶¹ Psalm 55:12-15.

³⁶² Guthrie et al., *The New Bible Commentary*, 485.

³⁶³ Howley, Ellison, and Bruce, *New Layman's Bible Commentary*, 637.

³⁶⁴ Psalm 55:14.

and Chaldee Dictionary.³⁶⁵ Guthrie, et. al., say David “had known unity of heart” with this friend “as they worshipped God” together.³⁶⁶

Theological Reflections on Imprecatory Psalms

Only one text comments on the basis upon which David seeks divine judgment for this friend. Guthrie, et. al., note the vindictiveness of the tone in David’s writing in the imprecatory Psalms. The authors maintain the judgment David calls for is “proper to those who rebel against leaders appointed by God.”³⁶⁷ The authors direct their readers to the “clear allusion to the incident of Korah” when the “ground swallow[s] them all.”³⁶⁸

However, Vos, in his study of the imprecatory psalms, argues the basis upon which these vindictive prayers is founded is not personal revenge, but the “righteous nature” of God and his right to “take away the life of sinful man.”³⁶⁹ Vos goes on to reason that if it is “right for God to destroy evil,” then his inspiration of the Psalmists “to pray for that same work of destruction” is appropriate.³⁷⁰ He says, “The total destruction of evil...is the prerogative of the sovereign God, and it is right not only to pray for the accomplishment of this destruction, but even to assist in effecting it when commanded to

³⁶⁵ Strong, *The New Strong’s Expanded Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*, 82.

³⁶⁶ Guthrie et al., *The New Bible Commentary*, 486.

³⁶⁷ Ibid.

³⁶⁸ Guthrie et al., *The New Bible Commentary*, 486.

³⁶⁹ Vos, “The Ethical Problem of the Imprecatory Psalms,” 134.

³⁷⁰ Ibid.

do so by God himself.”³⁷¹ According to Branson and Silva, the church should assist God in bringing judgment on the evil present in abusive environments. The authors argue,

The Church represents Christ to a dying world. We can either be a weak, an ineffective, and a judgmental people who hide evil or kill our wounded or we can be the hands and feet of Jesus, offering justice to the oppressed and healing to the broken.³⁷²

The Asbury Bible Commentary provide a different perspective, balancing between Guthrie and Vos. The commentary says, these prayers provide “a place to start” when unable to see blessing and redemption in our circumstances. It says, the Psalms lead us “through the desire for vengeance to the prayer for blessing and redemption to which we are called.”³⁷³

Summary

In this section, the Bible and other literature was reviewed as the writers reflected upon Matthew 18, Matthew 7, 1 Peter 2, and Psalm 55. These passages were considered on their relation to conflicts created by a toxic supervisor. Consideration will now be given to literature on the practice of self-differentiation in the context of toxic work environments.

Self-Differentiation

The third category of literature addresses self-differentiation in professional work relationships. Whereas the literature thus far has focused on the problems of toxic

³⁷¹ Vos, “The Ethical Problem of the Imprecatory Psalms,” 135.

³⁷² Branson and Silva, *Violence Among Us*, 67.

³⁷³ “Imprecatory Psalms.”

leadership and theological analysis of several passages related to conflict management, this section considers the employee's personal response and well-being when relating to a toxic supervisor. The literature suggests, "High inferiority and lack of belonging combined with higher sensitivity and the propensity to view the environment as hostile put people in the position of being targets" of bullying in the workplace.³⁷⁴ How can the subordinate of a toxic supervisor respond in ways that discourage bullying and provide emotional, physical, and spiritual shalom?

Defining Self-Differentiation

Herrington, et. al, in their study of self-differentiation suggest, "We offer a focus on managing yourself rather than managing others."³⁷⁵ They say, "Differentiation is the ability to remain connected in relationship to significant people in our lives and yet not have our reactions and behavior determined by them."³⁷⁶ Dianne Crampton, author of the article, "How Effective Are Emotionally Intelligent Leaders – Really?" suggests this begins with taking "care of your own needs before addressing the needs of others."³⁷⁷

Friedman, author of *A Failure of Nerve: Leadership in the Age of the Quick Fix*, notes a self-differentiated approach moves away from "one that focuses on techniques that

³⁷⁴ Astrauskaite, Kern, and Notelaers, "An Individual Psychology Approach to Underlying Factors of Workplace Bullying," 228.

³⁷⁵ Herrington, *The Leader's Journey*, Introduction (location 70), Kindle.

³⁷⁶ Ibid., 273–74.

³⁷⁷ Dianne Crampton, "How Effective Are Emotionally Intelligent Leaders – Really?," *LinkedIn Pulse*, February 13, 2016, accessed February 16, 2016, <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/how-effective-emotionally-intelligent-leaders-really-dianne-crampton>.

motivate others to one that focuses on the leader's own presence and being."³⁷⁸ He says the individual must "focus first on their own integrity and on the nature of their own presence rather than through techniques for manipulating or motivating others."³⁷⁹ Heifetz and Linsky say, "First, know yourself, tell yourself the truth about what you need, and then appropriately honor those human needs."³⁸⁰ Sutton argues taking the focus off "forces" the employee cannot "control" is an important part of keeping "mental and physical health intact."³⁸¹

The literature argues a differentiated self does not seek to impress others. Herrington, Creech, and Taylor contend self-differentiation is "choosing to be who we are with each other rather than living out of an image or a persona."³⁸² Friedman proposes "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."³⁸³ He says to be self-differentiated, an individual must be "clear about one's own personal values and goals."³⁸⁴ Edward Welch, author of *When People Are Big and God is Small*, argues the fear of other people tends to take greater preference for many people than the "fear of the

³⁷⁸ Edwin H. Friedman, *A Failure of Nerve*, Introduction (locations 158-59), Kindle.

³⁷⁹ Ibid., 313–15.

³⁸⁰ Heifetz and Linsky, *Leadership on the Line*, 184, Kindle.

³⁸¹ Sutton, *The No Asshole Rule*, 130–31.

³⁸² Herrington, *The Leader's Journey*, Chapter 7 (locations 1375–76), Kindle.

³⁸³ Friedman, *A Failure of Nerve*, Chapter 5 (location 3359), Kindle.

³⁸⁴ Ibid., 3364–74.

Lord.”³⁸⁵ He suggests we spend too much time concerned about what other people think of what we say.³⁸⁶

Lipman-Blumen writes of this fear of people. He describes a study by a Yale University researcher who was “exploring obedience to a toxic leader.”³⁸⁷ It was found volunteers were “intimidated into obeying a malevolent authority” to “administer what they believed to be electric shocks” to other volunteers because the “authority” was wearing scientific garb and speaking authoritatively.³⁸⁸

Sometimes, Heifetz and Linsky say people must “stomach hostility” in order to “stay connected to people.”³⁸⁹ Unfortunately, “Intuitively, people play it safe rather than put at risk the love, esteem, and approval of people or institutions they care about,” according to Heifetz and Linsky.³⁹⁰ The authors advise the employee to “distinguish between the self, which we can anchor,” and his role, which depends on the “expectations of people around us.”³⁹¹ Welch argues rather than care “more about the praise of man,”

³⁸⁵ Edward T. Welch, *When People Are Big and God Is Small: Overcoming Peer Pressure, Codependency, and the Fear of Man* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 1997), 40.

³⁸⁶ Ibid.

³⁸⁷ Lipman-Blumen, *The Allure of Toxic Leaders*, 16, Kindle.

³⁸⁸ Ibid.

³⁸⁹ Heifetz and Linsky, *Leadership on the Line*, 18, Kindle.

³⁹⁰ Ibid., 28.

³⁹¹ Ibid., 187.

Christians should seek the “praise of God.”³⁹² This, he argues, brings “liberation from the snares of the fear of man.”³⁹³

Self-Differentiation vs. Empathy

Does self-differentiation exclude connection to others in the form of empathy? There is disagreement in the literature regarding the place empathy has in the practice of self-differentiation. Friedman argues empathy has no place in self-differentiation. He maintains, “The original intent of the word empathy was to convey how projecting oneself into a work of art (painting, sculpture, theater) would enable a viewer to appreciate better the creation being observed.”³⁹⁴ He argues it was an extension of “concepts such as sympathy or compassion, which mean only ‘to feel or to suffer with.’”³⁹⁵ He goes on to say he has never seen empathy help the other “be more self-aware,” “mature,” or “more responsible for their being.”³⁹⁶

However, Herrington, et. al argue, “Jesus cared for the crowds.”³⁹⁷ Jesus was emotionally connected to the crowds in his concern for them, “but he governed his relationship to their needs on the basis of principle, not their demands.”³⁹⁸ He did not

³⁹² Welch, *When People Are Big and God Is Small*, 237–38.

³⁹³ Ibid.

³⁹⁴ Friedman, *A Failure of Nerve*, Chapter 4 (locations 2492–95), Kindle.

³⁹⁵ Ibid.

³⁹⁶ Ibid., 2510–12.

³⁹⁷ Herrington, *The Leader’s Journey*, Chapter 2 (locations 322–23), Kindle.

³⁹⁸ Ibid.

give in to their demands when those demands conflicted with God's will. The authors go on to say humans have a necessary emotional connection to one another.³⁹⁹ So, they argue self-differentiation is not so much lacking empathy as being able to “choose a response rather than simply” react to the demands of other anxious individuals.⁴⁰⁰ Allender contends empathy is a necessary ingredient in functioning relationships. He says, “Evil is present when there is a profound absence of empathy, shame and goodness.”⁴⁰¹

Practicing Self-Differentiation with Toxic Supervisors

Winston Churchill alleged the Second World War came about because those who were good failed to stand up against evil.⁴⁰² Some experts argue, and the literature suggests, subordinates who practice self-differentiation may influence their toxic supervisors. Chapman, et. al provide several examples of self-differentiating behavior when under the supervision of a toxic boss. They suggest gaining “perspective” by seeking “objective counsel,” resisting “embittered resentments” that start to create toxicity in the victim, facing fears rather than burying them, establishing clear boundaries that may include confrontation of the boss, and seeking to protect others from the poison.⁴⁰³

³⁹⁹ Ibid., 383.

⁴⁰⁰ Ibid., 339–41.

⁴⁰¹ Allender and Longman, *Bold Love*, 234.

⁴⁰² Friedman, *A Failure of Nerve*, Chapter 4 (locations 2757–59), Kindle.

⁴⁰³ Chapman, White, and Myra, *Rising Above a Toxic Workplace*, 142–43.

Regarding confrontation of toxic supervisors, a popular blogger who addresses spiritual abuse, called the “Futurist Guy” says, “If we observe damaging patterns in a person, ministry, or church...and we let them continue unchallenged, we are complicit – accomplices – to the damage these perpetrators inflict.”⁴⁰⁴ O’Donnell says there are times that people “must stand firm and say to dysfunction what Gandalf said to the monstrous balrog in the Mines of Moria: ‘You cannot pass!’”⁴⁰⁵ For example, “Futurist Guy” explains how “From earliest times of Mark Driscoll’s ministry, there were people who took up their responsibility to challenge him on his personal issues and sins, and hold him accountable.”⁴⁰⁶ Lipman-Blumen says, “The leader becomes emboldened to continue on a misguided path” when others are unwilling to confront.⁴⁰⁷

However, the literature does not minimize the difficulties of confronting the toxic Christian supervisor. The Futurist Guy has blogged extensively regarding Mark Driscoll’s response to those “who took up their responsibility” to confront him.⁴⁰⁸ As Edmondson’s notes, “Shooting the messenger remains an enduring and problematic phenomenon.”⁴⁰⁹ Driscoll was known to respond in “reviling outbursts of anger” and

⁴⁰⁴ “Capstone 2-8.”

⁴⁰⁵ O’Donnell, “Wise as Doves and Innocent as Serpents?,” under “Final Thoughts.”

⁴⁰⁶ “Capstone 2-8.”

⁴⁰⁷ Lipman-Blumen, *The Allure of Toxic Leaders*, 148, Kindle.

⁴⁰⁸ “2D Sample #2: Pyramid of Responsibility for Abuse,” *Futuristguy’s Field Guides*, accessed December 29, 2015, <https://futuristguysfieldguides.wordpress.com/2d-sample-2/>.

⁴⁰⁹ Edmondson, *Teaming*, Chapter 5 (locations 3110–12), Kindle.

sometimes fired those who challenged him. Friedman, describing “hostile environments” in biology, argues, “All entities that are destructive to other entities share one major characteristic that is totally unresponsive to empathy: they are not capable of self-regulation.”⁴¹⁰ He relates this to those who are not self-differentiated. He goes on to say, these leaders “cannot learn from their experience, which is why the unmotivated are invulnerable to insight.”⁴¹¹ Chapman, et. al., warn, “Drawing that line in the sand can lead to rough jolts and losses of security and relationships” with these toxic leaders.⁴¹²

“Toxicity, like truffles, grows best in the dark,” says Jean Lipman-Blumen.⁴¹³ It takes courage to confront a bully, according to Cohn and Moran. They say, “Courage can be understood as a profound level of human balance and centeredness.”⁴¹⁴ It is a strong commitment to a cause.⁴¹⁵ Failure to confront toxicity may seem to be the safest course for the embattled employee. However, Archibald Hart, author of *The Anxiety Cure* suggests “underassertiveness breeds hostility and frustration.”⁴¹⁶ Lipman-Blumen argues that toxic leaders must be exposed by those suffering their abuse for health to return to organizations. She argues, if followers are unwilling to confront their bosses, “The leader

⁴¹⁰ Friedman, *A Failure of Nerve*, Chapter 4 (locations 2531–32), Kindle.

⁴¹¹ Ibid., 2540–41.

⁴¹² Chapman, White, and Myra, *Rising Above a Toxic Workplace*, 34.

⁴¹³ Lipman-Blumen, *The Allure of Toxic Leaders*, 252 Kindle.

⁴¹⁴ Cohn and Moran, *Why Are We Bad at Picking Good Leaders A Better Way to Evaluate Leadership Potential*, 152.

⁴¹⁵ Ibid.

⁴¹⁶ Archibald Hart, *The Anxiety Cure* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2001), 98, Kindle.

becomes emboldened to continue on a misguided path.”⁴¹⁷ In addition, Lipman-Blumen notes that leaders who are seen as geniuses in certain areas are often tolerated despite their profound weaknesses “as evidence of their entitlement.”⁴¹⁸

The researchers suggest a variety of responses to abusive supervisors such as confronting the boss, seeking justice from those in higher authority, and leaving the organization, all of which require self-differentiation. When speaking up in disagreement with a supervisor in the workplace, Chapman, White, and Myra suggest, “Some [supervisors] listen and learn, but others – no matter how diplomatic the approach – react defensively.”⁴¹⁹ Bacal agrees, saying the toxic manager usually “reacts poorly to being challenged.”⁴²⁰ Greenfield notes, writing about pathological ministry leaders, “Their problems, they think, are caused by others, whom they are quick to blame.”⁴²¹ Simon advocates that abusive individuals, or as he calls them, “disordered characters,” have little or no conscience. They are able to do “great harm with absolutely no compunction.”⁴²² Bancroft agrees, saying, an abusive individual “feels justified” in his behavior.⁴²³ Ciby and Raya went further in arguing when victims of workplace bullies

⁴¹⁷ Lipman-Blumen, *The Allure of Toxic Leaders*, 148, Kindle.

⁴¹⁸ Ibid., 114.

⁴¹⁹ Chapman, White, and Myra, *Rising Above a Toxic Workplace*, 43.

⁴²⁰ R. Bacal, “Toxic Organizations - Welcome to the Fire of an Unhealthy Workplace.”

⁴²¹ Greenfield and Faulkner, *The Wounded Minister*, 146, Kindle.

⁴²² Simon, *Character Disturbance*, 34.

⁴²³ Bancroft, *Why Does He Do That?* 70.

were bold enough to “talk directly to the bully to solve the issue,” there was an increase in “bullying behaviors.”⁴²⁴ They go on to report that the bully goes to great lengths to “demean the victim.”⁴²⁵ In these situations, there is no “psychological safety” that Amy Edmondson describes as “a climate in which people feel free to express relevant thoughts and feelings without fear of being penalized.”⁴²⁶

Therefore, researchers recommend care be taken in the process of confronting a toxic boss. Kelly O’Donnell says much has been written “to help people resolve differences.”⁴²⁷ However, he argues, in much of the literature, assumptions are made “that people are playing fair and that there is not significant dysfunction in one of the individuals or organizations involved.”⁴²⁸ The “Peacemaker’s Pledge,” found in *The Peacemaker: A Biblical Guide to Resolving Personal Conflict*, says, “Instead of blaming others for a conflict or resisting correction, we will trust in God’s mercy and take responsibility for our own contribution to conflicts.”⁴²⁹ The Peacemaker approach,

⁴²⁴ Ciby and Raya, “Exploring Victims’ Experiences of Workplace Bullying: A Grounded Theory Approach,” 74.

⁴²⁵ Ibid., 77.

⁴²⁶ Edmondson, *Teaming*, Chapter 2 (locations 1475–76), Kindle.

⁴²⁷ O’Donnell, “Wise as Doves and Innocent as Serpents?,” under “Resources to Help.”

⁴²⁸ Ibid.

⁴²⁹ Sande, *The Peacemaker*, 260.

outlined in the book, assumes a lack of this serious dysfunction, according to Jeff Crippen, in a review of the book on his blog.⁴³⁰

O'Donnell warns against the usual mediatorial approach presented in many texts, saying, mediators “usually default toward wanting to stay neutral.”⁴³¹ He argues the inadequacy of this perspective when working with toxic individuals. O'Donnell suggests, “Surely we must not make a mountain out of a molehill; yet we should not make a molehill out of a mountain.”⁴³²

Self-Differentiating Approaches to Confrontation

As there are subordinates who believe they have “no choice” but to confront as “whistleblowers,” Lipman-Blumen suggests protective steps be taken when confronting a toxic leader.⁴³³ She says there should be “multiple witnesses to the encounter” as this can “keep the toxic leader in check and possibly force him to change his behavior.”⁴³⁴ Tomlinson, et. al, say it is helpful to form alliances with others in the same circumstances. They say it can “enhance your confidence and lessen the chances of reprisal” from the supervisor.⁴³⁵ Lipman-Blumen agrees, saying the leader may be

⁴³⁰ “Book Review: The Peacemaker — Peace at Any Cost?,” *A Cry For Justice*, August 13, 2012, Accessed December 7, 2016, <https://cryingoutforjustice.com/2012/08/13/book-review-the-peacemaker-peace-at-any-cost-by-jeff-crippen/>.

⁴³¹ O'Donnell, “Wise as Doves and Innocent as Serpents?,” under “Resources to Help.”

⁴³² Ibid.

⁴³³ Lipman-Blumen, *The Allure of Toxic Leaders*, 204, Kindle.

⁴³⁴ Ibid., 197.

⁴³⁵ Lipinski and Crothers, *Bullying in the Workplace*, 295.

unwilling to hear criticism when a “sole critic steps forward” because “no one else supports the dissenter.”⁴³⁶ In addition, McFarlin, and Sweeney, authors of the article, “The Corporate Reflecting Pool,” suggest “employees try to display strength instead of weakness when facing narcissistic tantrums.”⁴³⁷ Tomlinson, et. al, agree saying “bullies lose their power if you don’t cower.”⁴³⁸

However, Herrington, et. al. argue using the term confront is a “sure sign that the focus is on changing” the other person rather than on “differentiating self.”⁴³⁹ It is also important to consider, according to Chrnalogar, “The longer you try to reason with them, the greater will be your chance of suffering an emotional beating.”⁴⁴⁰ She suggests it is important to recognize when there will be no further progress towards reconciliation. A Workplace Bullying Institute survey would support Chrnalogar’s contention. In a 2012 survey, only 3.5% of those who confronted their bullies at work experienced a change in bullying.⁴⁴¹ In another WBI survey, 61% of the victims lost their job, while only 15% of the perpetrators lost theirs.⁴⁴²

⁴³⁶ Lipman-Blumen, *The Allure of Toxic Leaders*, 148–49, Kindle.

⁴³⁷ Schyns and Hansbrough, *When Leadership Goes Wrong*, 272.

⁴³⁸ Lipinski and Crothers, *Bullying in the Workplace*, 297.

⁴³⁹ Herrington, *The Leader’s Journey*, Chapter 6 (locations 1155–56), Kindle.

⁴⁴⁰ Chrnalogar, *Twisted Scriptures*, 208, Kindle.

⁴⁴¹ Gary Namie, “2013 Instant Poll - D: The Timing & Results of Targets Confronting Bullies at Work,” *Workplace Bullying Institute*, accessed November 1, 2016, www.workplacebullying.org.

⁴⁴² Namie, “2014 WBI U.S. Workplace Bullying Survey.”

Self-Differentiation and Justice

Where direct confrontation fails, or is unfeasible, some authors suggest seeking justice with those in greater authority. According to Astrauskaite, et. al., “bullying will take place only if supported by the organization and superiors.”⁴⁴³ When direct confrontation with their bully is not enough, a subordinate may report to upper management and human resources.⁴⁴⁴

However, there may be difficulties in seeking justice through those in higher positions. Human resource departments, which may have the authority to bring an end to abuse in the workplace, may be under pressure from “corporate policies and government regulations” and fail to provide help.⁴⁴⁵ Lipman-Blumen says when employees seek justice they often “share the lot of Roger Boisjoly, an engineer formerly with the Morton Thiokol Company.”⁴⁴⁶ He spoke out against the launch of the Challenger space shuttle because he was concerned that the O-rings would fail. Following the shuttle explosion, he was fired and “lost his professional standing as an engineer.”⁴⁴⁷ Unfortunately, Lipman-

⁴⁴³ Astrauskaite, Kern, and Notelaers, “An Individual Psychology Approach to Underlying Factors of Workplace Bullying,” 229.

⁴⁴⁴ Ciby and Raya, “Exploring Victims’ Experiences of Workplace Bullying: A Grounded Theory Approach,” 78.

⁴⁴⁵ Chapman, White, and Myra, *Rising Above a Toxic Workplace*, 43.

⁴⁴⁶ Lipman-Blumen, *The Allure of Toxic Leaders*, 41-42, Kindle.

⁴⁴⁷ Ibid.

Blumen notes, “most...are quite unprepared for the hostile reaction from those they believe secretly agree with them.”⁴⁴⁸

When considering “360-degree referencing,” a common business practice used for job reviews, employees “naturally fear that full disclosure might come back and bite them,” according to Jefferey Cohn and Jay Moran, authors of *Why Are We Bad at Picking Good Leaders?*⁴⁴⁹

The board of directors may be difficult to approach as well. Burns, Chapman, and Guthrie argue, “Governing boards may not be psychologically safe places to talk about difficult experiences and failure.”⁴⁵⁰ Chapman, et. al., suggest, “Those who serve as trustees too often see it as an honor...failing to help ensure key board functions.”⁴⁵¹ This can include oversight of leaders. Some boards “lack independence” as the leader may be a member of the board. The board may be hand-picked by the founder and the board may, again lack the independence to make the difficult decision to end the leader’s reign. Mulvey and Padilla say boards are less likely to remove leaders who also serve on the board.⁴⁵² Other “executives” may not provide relief as they may be “hand-picked” by the leader and, like Mark Driscoll’s “executive elders,” fail to be held accountable or take

⁴⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁴⁹ Cohn and Moran, *Why Are We Bad at Picking Good Leaders A Better Way to Evaluate Leadership Potential*, 34.

⁴⁵⁰ Burns, *Resilient Ministry*, Chapter 13 (location 2373), Kindle.

⁴⁵¹ Chapman, White, and Myra, *Rising Above a Toxic Workplace*, 111.

⁴⁵² Schyns and Hansbrough, *When Leadership Goes Wrong*, 59.

responsibility for the authoritarian leadership.⁴⁵³ “The clubby composition of these boards appears to be one major factor in boards’ ...inability to maintain their oversight objectivity,” according to Lipman-Blumen.⁴⁵⁴

Self-Differentiated Change Agents

Though there are a variety of dangers involved in approaching those who have authority over the toxic supervisor, the literature also suggests organizations and businesses do sometimes provide these avenues of justice. Ludeman and Erlandson, authors of article, “Coaching the Alpha Male,” tell the story of a turnaround in leadership at Dell Computers when one of the managers discovered through the 360-degree process “his people found him hard to read and craved more direct feedback.”⁴⁵⁵ He was “remote and transactional” even with colleagues he valued.⁴⁵⁶ The process provided an important turning point in management at Dell.

“As a society, we are accustomed to leaders with big egos.” Cohn and Moran go on to say, “The truth is that most of us like a little bit of rock star in our leaders.”⁴⁵⁷ Author, Chamorro-Premuzic argues the “dark triad” of personality disorders – psychopathy, narcissism, and Machiavellianism – are encouraged by the systems present

⁴⁵³ “Capstone 2-8.”

⁴⁵⁴ Lipman-Blumen, *The Allure of Toxic Leaders*, 174, Kindle.

⁴⁵⁵ Ludeman and Erlandson, “Coaching the Alpha Male,” 60.

⁴⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁵⁷ Cohn and Moran, *Why Are We Bad at Picking Good Leaders A Better Way to Evaluate Leadership Potential*, 22.

in the organization, “And the more polluted or contaminated the environment – in a political sense – the more these parasitic personalities will thrive.”⁴⁵⁸ The authors agree toxic systems are fed by those who fail to be self-differentiated. According to the literature, abusers often seek out certain personality types as targets.⁴⁵⁹ People-pleasers are commonly pounced upon by the abusive individuals. In the experience of Lundy Bancroft, niceness does not help an abuser.⁴⁶⁰ He says, “You cannot, I am sorry to say, get an abuser to work on himself by pleading soothingly, gently leading, getting friends to persuade him, or using any other nonconfrontational method.”⁴⁶¹ On the other hand, if an abusive individual has a sense of his destructiveness on those around him, he may take the difficult steps necessary to throw off the old man, according to Bancroft.⁴⁶²

Though Edwin Friedman and Herrington, et. al. argue for focusing on self in reaction to anxious systems such as a toxic workplace, they believe self-differentiated individuals will have an important impact on their environment. Friedman suggests when individuals are “well-defined, the resulting systemic effects on a society inhibit the probability that the opportunistic infections we call looters are likely to form.”⁴⁶³

⁴⁵⁸ Chamorro-Premuzic, “Why Bad Guys Win at Work.”

⁴⁵⁹ Gary Namie, “2014 Instant Poll - A: Personal Attributes of Bullied Targets at Work,” *Workplace Bullying Institute*, 1, accessed November 1, 2016, www.workplacebullying.org.

⁴⁶⁰ Bancroft, *Why Does He Do That?*, 335.

⁴⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 361.

⁴⁶² *Ibid.*

⁴⁶³ Friedman, *A Failure of Nerve*, Introduction (locations 393–95), Kindle.

Friedman, using the analogy of sociobiology, claims there is a way to build an immunity to toxicity. He says, “One of the major advances in modern medicine has been the effort to stamp out disease not by trying to eliminate all the disease agents in the environment, but by enabling the body to limit a toxic agent’s invasiveness.”⁴⁶⁴ According to Friedman, “looters,” or toxic leaders, rarely have opportunity to take over the organizational system if others are self-differentiated.⁴⁶⁵

Bardes and Piccolo, authors of the article, “Goal Setting as an Antecedent of Destructive Leader Behaviors” argue employees with certain characteristics, “such as shyness, nonassertiveness, and passivity,” tend to face bullying more often, implying self-differentiated employees will possibly limit this negative behavior.⁴⁶⁶ As an example, Eubanks and Mumford argue Stalin was “somewhat kept in check” by individuals surrounding him.⁴⁶⁷ *Rising Above the Toxic Workplace* encourages those under toxic bosses to “get tough.”⁴⁶⁸ Chapman, White, and Myra suggest the employee “find ways to nurture [their] inner reserves and gain perspective.”⁴⁶⁹ They also suggest that when there are “accusations, infighting and threats” it is the common reaction to attack and “affix

⁴⁶⁴ Ibid., 1425–27.

⁴⁶⁵ Ibid., 393–95.

⁴⁶⁶ Schyns and Hansbrough, *When Leadership Goes Wrong*, 7.

⁴⁶⁷ Ibid., 32.

⁴⁶⁸ Chapman, White, and Myra, *Rising Above a Toxic Workplace*, 43.

⁴⁶⁹ Ibid.

blame.”⁴⁷⁰ However, Chapman argues this only “ignites the dysfunctions.”⁴⁷¹ The writers advocate self-differentiation as a means of minimizing toxic behavior.

Self-Differentiation and Leaving the Organization

Hay says one study found “80% of people who leave jobs do so because of a toxic boss.”⁴⁷² Dan Allender says,

A person's hope is deadened when nothing she does is good enough, or when all her choices, no matter what they are, are used to punish her. We all fear being cast out of another garden – be it a tightly knit family or an authoritarian church – yet to defy evil results in sure banishment.⁴⁷³

Though self-differentiated individuals may have a non-anxious effect on the systems in the work environment, Friedman warns it also can have the effect of igniting opposition. He says, “Self-Differentiation always triggers sabotage.”⁴⁷⁴ The literature suggest determining the toxicity of the supervisor as soon as possible as when the time comes to leave the organization, “you may have spent far too much of your life in a toxic situation.”⁴⁷⁵ O’Donnell ends his article with the advice, “Sometimes the wisest thing to do is to back away or to move on.”⁴⁷⁶ As Ciby and Raya report, some victims leave when they realize “they could not defend the situations of bullying because the bully was more

⁴⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁴⁷¹ Ibid., 126.

⁴⁷² Hay, “The Toxic Mission Organisation: Fiction or Fact?” 4.

⁴⁷³ Allender and Longman, *Bold Love*, 241.

⁴⁷⁴ Friedman, *A Failure of Nerve*, Chapter 8 (locations 4488–89), Kindle.

⁴⁷⁵ Chapman, White, and Myra, *Rising Above a Toxic Workplace*, 145.

⁴⁷⁶ O’Donnell, “Wise as Doves and Innocent as Serpents?,” under “Final Thoughts.”

powerful” in the organizational structure.⁴⁷⁷ Some “bullies drive” their victims and witnesses to their abuse “out of their jobs.”⁴⁷⁸

Some authors note the difficulty of leaving a toxic Christian organization. Douglas asks, “Why do we stay in spiritually abusive relationships?”⁴⁷⁹ She suggests in part it is due to victims feeling they “are to blame for the abuse.”⁴⁸⁰ Some feel “ashamed of the way [they] have been taken advantage of.”⁴⁸¹ Hare says psychopaths “often give the impression that it is they who are suffering and the victims are to blame for their misery.”⁴⁸² According to Hay, many mission organizations say, “loyalty is dead” as “no one stays very long.” But, he says, “Organisations [sic] that draw that conclusion are toxic.”⁴⁸³

Others fail to leave due to financial reasons. They may “have no escape route to another job, at least to one that pays as well.”⁴⁸⁴ Toxic leaders also seek to manipulate and control the “traitors” through exploiting “group dynamics.” The leader isolates and

⁴⁷⁷ Ciby and Raya, “Exploring Victims’ Experiences of Workplace Bullying: A Grounded Theory Approach,” 75.

⁴⁷⁸ Sutton, *The No Asshole Rule*, 33.

⁴⁷⁹ Douglas, “The Subtle Power of Spiritual Abuse,” 319.

⁴⁸⁰ Ibid., 320.

⁴⁸¹ Enroth, *Churches That Abuse*.

⁴⁸² “This Charming Psychopath,” under “A Survival Guide.”

⁴⁸³ Hay, “The Toxic Mission Organisation: Fiction or Fact?,” 1.

⁴⁸⁴ Sutton, *The No Asshole Rule*, 127.

spotlights the “troublemakers,” intimidating others so they “don’t support those ‘bad guys.’”⁴⁸⁵

Chapman, et. al., provide guidelines for determining if leaving is worth the “fallout” that sometimes make a transition difficult. One tough question is whether the boss is simply unpleasant or difficult. The authors recommend studying “principles for dealing with bad bosses” prior to “pulling the plug.”⁴⁸⁶ Yet, in some cases, employees should consider the physical and emotional damage inflicted by toxic bosses and weigh them against “their paychecks.”⁴⁸⁷

Self-Differentiation and Healing

The psychological process a subordinate goes through while under the duress of toxic leadership was found in much of the literature. Grandy and Starratt, authors of the article, “Making Sense of Abusive Leadership,” report employees describing their supervisors in a variety of ways to give “rational explanation” to their behavior. These descriptions include “bipolar,” “child,” and criticizing their “technical or management skill” to “minimize the significance of the supervisor’s role in the organization.”⁴⁸⁸ The employees gain distance from the effects of abuse this way.

⁴⁸⁵ Lipman-Blumen, *The Allure of Toxic Leaders*, 45, Kindle.

⁴⁸⁶ Chapman, White, and Myra, *Rising Above a Toxic Workplace*, 145.

⁴⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸⁸ Schyns and Hansbrough, *When Leadership Goes Wrong*, 189, 191, 192.

However, Friedman suggests, those who “focus primarily on their own response to a trauma generally heal faster” from that trauma.⁴⁸⁹ Greenfield and Faulkner says the “first step toward healing” is to “face realistically the consequences of having been abused” in ministry.⁴⁹⁰ It is helpful, according to Lipman-Blumen, to be able to recognize when leadership “behavior is inappropriate.”⁴⁹¹ This way followers can refrain from “kiss[ing] their feet.”⁴⁹²

Summary

The literature reviewed in this chapter focused on three primary areas: leadership, the theology of conflict management in relation to submission to authority, and self-differentiation. This literature considered effective business practices in part being the results of sincere humility and the development of employee giftedness. Literature comparing this leadership best practice to toxic leadership was then discussed. The identification and diagnosis of toxic leaders was considered from the texts and the many forms of dysfunction in leadership.

Secondly, biblical-theological literature analyzing conflict management was reviewed. Four biblical passages related to relational conflict were studied including commentaries on Matthew 18, Matthew 7, 1 Peter 2, and Psalm 55. Following each of

⁴⁸⁹ Friedman, *A Failure of Nerve*, Chapter 2 (locations 1486–87), Kindle.

⁴⁹⁰ Greenfield and Faulkner, *The Wounded Minister*, 179, Kindle.

⁴⁹¹ Lipman-Blumen, *The Allure of Toxic Leaders*, 32, Kindle.

⁴⁹² Ibid.

these sections, literature that reflected upon principles taught in these passages was considered. Areas related to work under toxic supervision were examined: judging the evil in others, confrontation of toxic supervisors, repentance, and biblical discussion of abuse.

Thirdly, self-differentiation was defined and applied in the context of toxic authority within the literature. The literature discussed how self-differentiation is practiced in relationships, confrontation, and the affects a self-differentiated employee makes on a system of toxicity. The next chapter explores the methodology employed by this study.

Chapter Three

Methodology

Employees of Christian organizations led by supervisors, managers, board members, and presidents who practice toxic leadership are often frustrated by their inability to resolve interpretations of passages such as Matthew 18:15-18 and the workplace's power structure. The literature indicates that self-differentiation helps people pursue mental health in many types of situations. More research is needed to understand how differentiation takes place under toxic leadership. Therefore, this study explores how employees of Christian organizations practice self-differentiation while interacting with supervisors who practice toxic leadership.

To address this purpose, the research identifies three main areas of focus that inform employees' interactions with their supervisors. These include the areas of identifying toxic leadership, biblical-theological principles of conflict resolution with toxic leaders, and acting with self-differentiation while interacting with toxic supervisors. To examine these areas more closely, the following questions focused the qualitative research:

1. What are the biblical-theological principles employees of Christian organizations use to frame their practice of self-differentiation while interacting with toxic supervisors?
2. What are the challenges employees of Christian organizations face when practicing self-differentiation while interacting with toxic supervisors?
3. What is the impact on Christian organizations of employees practicing self-differentiation while interacting with toxic supervisors?
4. How do employees of Christian organizations who practice self-differentiation with toxic supervisors pursue shalom in their workplace?

Design of the Study

The interpretive research model of general qualitative research forms the design of this study. Sharan B. Merriam, in her text, *Qualitative Research and Case Study Applications in Education* says, “Understanding the meaning of the process or experience constitutes the knowledge to be gained from an inductive, hypothesis—or theory—generating (rather than a deductive or testing) mode of inquiry.”⁴⁹³ Unlike a positivist research model – where a theory is tested by the research methods – the theory is developed from the real-life experiences of those who face the questions in practice. As Merriam notes, the underlying assumption is that reality is understood by those who are “interacting with their social worlds.”⁴⁹⁴ The interpretive research model does not take place within a laboratory that has little connection to real, social interactions. Furthermore, the research is not forced into a presumed ideology that may or may not provide a true framework for the social interactions that are taking place.⁴⁹⁵ Instead, there is, to a certain extent, a blank slate from which the researcher operates that allows for an open and honest response to the data. The experience of ministry workers who have had toxic leadership thwart their work in God’s kingdom share many expressions of the gospel in their interactions and yet may also differ in how they interpret and express scriptural teachings. The interpretive model allows for this complexity in the data as it

⁴⁹³ Sharan B. Merriam, *Qualitative Research and Case Study Applications in Education*, 2nd ed. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1998), 4.

⁴⁹⁴ Ibid., 6.

⁴⁹⁵ Ibid., 4.

becomes available. Through interacting with literature and interviews, the data provides a more thoroughgoing approach to the problems associated with toxic environments.

Merriam explains, “Basically, qualitative researchers are interested in...how people make sense of their world and the experiences they have in the world.”⁴⁹⁶ As the divergent perspectives of the research participants and literature are analyzed and evaluated, qualitative research brings the varying experiences from a single context together to create theory helpful to many in similar contexts.

Merriam identifies and summarizes five characteristics of qualitative research: First, “Reality is constructed by individuals interacting with their social worlds.”⁴⁹⁷ The researcher seeks to understand how the participants comprehend the toxic environment, necessary responses, and resultant psychological, physical, and spiritual impact through their own experiences.

Second, the “researcher is the primary instrument for data collection and analysis.”⁴⁹⁸ As noted above, through interviews with the people who have first-hand experience under toxic leadership, the researcher has few intermediary layers through which to interpret the data collected. The researcher, being present to collect the data, gives firsthand experience for the interpretation of that data.

⁴⁹⁶ Sharan B. Merriam, *Qualitative Research: A Guide to Design and Implementation*, 2nd ed. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2009), 13.

⁴⁹⁷ Merriam, *Qualitative Research and Case Study Applications in Education*, 6.

⁴⁹⁸ Ibid., 7.

Third, the research normally involves fieldwork.⁴⁹⁹ Research is done through direct contact with the participant whether through observation or interview. Whereas an intermediary researcher separates the writer from the source of data, qualitative research instead marginalizes the separation between the researcher and the data. Qualitative research also maximizes the opportunity to fairly present the data and its subsequent hypotheses. The presence of the interviewer, observing the participants' body language and tone, provides greater opportunity to respond more accurately to the underlying emotions of those who have suffered under difficult employers. However, Merriam warns that qualitative research does not necessarily result in objective reading of the data as "the researcher must be aware of any personal biases and how they may influence the investigation"⁵⁰⁰ despite little reliance on other intermediary sources.

Fourth, qualitative research "primarily employs an inductive research strategy,"⁵⁰¹ thereby providing a flexibility to adjust to the data as it is collected. Rather than having a full slate of theory to test and prove while evaluating the data, qualitative research gives freedom to respond to the data and the context in which it is found. Merriam explains how "Qualitative researchers build toward theory from observations and intuitive understandings gained in the field."⁵⁰² Qualitative researchers can respond and adjust their approach to the research to more fully grasp the data's meaning and the theory to

⁴⁹⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰⁰ Ibid., 21.

⁵⁰¹ Ibid., 7.

⁵⁰² Ibid., 7.

which it leads. Though many experiences of people who work under toxic leaders are similar, the participants' particular interactions with difficult supervisors may take many different directions both in any given circumstance and in accordance with the type of dysfunction that exists in the system. As Merriam notes, "It allows the researcher to adapt to unforeseen events and change direction in pursuit of meaning."⁵⁰³ Where the means and structure of gathering data is largely determined in advance by the researcher's hypotheses in quantitative research, qualitative researchers can adjust their strategy as they gather data and develop their theory.

Last, the "product is richly descriptive."⁵⁰⁴ The researcher can develop a full picture that involves the context, people, and activities that make up the study providing deeply, meaningful data for analysis.⁵⁰⁵ The particular experiences of the interview participants provide lines of connection with other victims of toxic leadership experiences.

Besides several literary works discussed in Chapter Two, interviews with nine current or former employees of Christian organizations were completed. These employees served under the authority of toxic supervisors, in some cases the organization's president or CEO. Merriam suggests that interviews help develop an understanding of the participants' thinking which cannot be observed, only shared

⁵⁰³ Ibid., 20–21.

⁵⁰⁴ Ibid., 8.

⁵⁰⁵ Ibid., 6–8.

through oral communication. The quality of these interviews is largely determined by the ability of the interviewer to empathize which develops trust with the interviewee, communicate good questions, and listen well to the answers.⁵⁰⁶

Participant Sample Selection

This research required participants who could communicate deeply about their experiences with toxic supervisors in a Christian organization setting. Therefore, the purposeful study sample consisted of a selection of eight employees from the population of current or former employees of Christian parachurch organizations. These participants also professed to be Christians and have significant maturity in their biblical knowledge and relational interaction.⁵⁰⁷ Because this research sought to develop best practice principles, the researcher chose interview participants who had spiritual maturity in both knowledge and practice of healthy social relationships. The data, therefore, provided rich details about the participants' interactions with toxic supervisors and guiding biblical principles.

To determine the spiritual and social maturity of these individuals, those with whom they had frequent interactions attested to their maturity. Furthermore, the participants' own clarity of response to the questions posed to them by the researcher confirmed their maturity. The participants also had a good understanding and practice of biblical principles that mold Christian interactions within the workplace to provide

⁵⁰⁶ Ibid., 23.

⁵⁰⁷ Ibid., 64.

encouragement to employees who are determined to practice biblical self-differentiation in a toxic workplace. These principles are but not limited to respect of authority, self-evaluation, humility, and the ability to confront an erring brother graciously.

Participants were chosen for a maximum variation type of sample. Multiple variables provided data that can show “common patterns.”⁵⁰⁸ Participants were purposefully chosen to provide variation in organizational settings as most were employed by different organizations – only three being from the same organization. They also varied in authority and position held within the organization which provides a wide spectrum of experience for the study. The interviewees ranged in age from approximately 45 years old to 70 years old and were both males and females providing “maximum variation.”

The researcher invited participants via an introductory communication by email, followed by a personal telephone call to help determine if they met the study criteria. All expressed interest and gave written, informed consent to participate.

Each participant was asked to complete a one-page demographic and relational questionnaire before the interview. The questionnaire asked for information concerning the selection criteria. It also requested information of particular interest in this study. The following list contains the items on the questionnaire.

1. Personal data: Name, address, telephone, and email address.
2. Length of employment with Christian organization.

⁵⁰⁸ Merriam, *Qualitative Research*, 78–79.

3. How would you describe your supervisor?

Data Collection

This study utilized semi-structured interviews as the primary means for data gathering. Though these interviews were directed through particular, pre-determined questions, the participants were given as much freedom as possible to develop their thoughts regarding their experience. Their responses directed the interviews for the maximum potential of relevant data gathering. The interview protocol contained the following questions.

1. Describe an unpleasant experience you had with your supervisor.
 - (1) Describe how others interacted with the supervisor in these kinds of situations.
2. Describe a particular incident in which you believe you could respond in a way you believed was biblical to the negative actions of your supervisor.
 - (1) If and how did you apply Matthew 7:1-6 in that particular situation?
 - (2) If and how did you apply Matthew 18:15-20 to the situation?
 - (3) If and how did you apply 1 Peter 2:18-20 to the situation?
 - (4) If and how did you apply Psalm 55 to the situation?
3. Describe how your supervisor (who created the toxic work environment) responded both at the time of confrontation (if there was one) and following.
4. What were the results of the actions you took?
 - (1) Describe your emotional, physical, and spiritual state both short and long-term.
 - (2) Describe a time of emotional healing during and after working with the supervisor.
 - (3) How did this experience affect your view of mission work?
 - (4) If you have experienced “positive results” from this conflict, describe them.

(5) How would you describe your process of forgiveness in this situation?

Open-ended interview questions facilitated the researcher's ability to build upon participant responses to complex issues to explore them more thoroughly. Merriam argues that "good interview questions are those that are open-ended and yield descriptive data."⁵⁰⁹ Ultimately, semi-structured interviews enabled this study to look for common themes, patterns, concerns, and contrasting views across the variation of participants. According to Merriam, an important step in the process of analyzing the data is constantly comparing and "looking for recurring regularities in the data."⁵¹⁰ A pilot test of the interview protocol was performed to help evaluate the questions for clarity and usefulness in eliciting relevant data. Initial interview protocol categories were derived from the literature but evolved around the explanations and descriptions that emerged from doing constant comparison work during the interviewing process.

Nine participants were interviewed for approximately one and a half hours each. Prior to the interview, the participants received a letter stating the primary areas of interest the researcher had in their experience and knowledge. To accommodate participant schedules, the researcher traveled to the participants' homes or interviewed them via Skype. This provided both a "safe" environment and created as little hardship as possible for the participant. The researcher audio and/or videotaped the interviews with a digital recorder. Following three initial interviews, the researcher conducted two

⁵⁰⁹ Ibid., 99.

⁵¹⁰ Ibid., 175, 177.

interviews in a week. Coding and categorizing the data, while continuing the process of interviewing, was also allowed for the emergence of new sources of data.

Data Analysis

As soon as possible, and always within one week of each interview, the researcher personally transcribed each interview by using computer software to play back the digital recording and to type out each transcript. The software allowed for coding in subsequent reading. This study utilized the constant comparison method of data analysis: routinely analyzing the data throughout the interview process.⁵¹¹ When the interviews and observation notes were fully transcribed into computer files, they were coded and analyzed using ATLAS.ti. The analysis focused on discovering and identifying common themes, patterns, and recurring regularities across the variation of participants, and congruence or discrepancy between the different groups of participants.

Researcher Position

This section reveals three areas or biases that affect the researcher's stance. These three areas include the consideration of the researcher's own background as an employee of a Christian organization, a heightened sensitivity to forms of emotional abuse, and some personal biases of the researcher.

The researcher served for eight years with an organization whose founders and administrators exhibited toxic leadership. The researcher resigned due to observing abusive behaviors directed at others within the organization. Because the researcher

⁵¹¹ Merriam, *Qualitative Research and Case Study Applications in Education*, 18.

experienced some abusive actions, the researcher could gain a degree of empathy for those under toxic leaders. The first-hand experience of toxic leadership provided both a passion and directedness in research possibly missing from purely academic research.

Having experienced this toxic workplace has both encouraged a thoughtful consideration and study of these dysfunctional environments. It has also at times encouraged a hyper-sensitivity to and judgment of those who exhibit forms of abusive behavior. Individuals who experience abuse often find an “abuser under every rock” as one interviewee aptly stated. However, as noted above, though it can bias the research, the researcher’s personal experiences can also provide valuable insight to the thoughts and emotions of the participants.

Finally, the researcher considers the Bible to be “breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work.”⁵¹² In addition to God’s revelation in the Bible, God has revealed himself through his created world.⁵¹³ God, having created man with the purpose of “taking dominion”⁵¹⁴ of his creation, continues to endow his created beings with abilities and talents whether or not they purposefully acknowledge the receipt of such gifts from God. Therefore, wisdom is found

⁵¹² 2 Timothy 3:16–17.

⁵¹³ Romans 1:20.

⁵¹⁴ Genesis 1:26.

in the social sciences by means of the researchers who have been made in the image of God.

The Bible is the ultimate authority in the determination of truth and where there is true and evident conflict with the researcher's knowledge, the Bible must take primacy. Most of the research on personality disorders, business leadership, and emotional abuse has been done by those with a secular-humanist worldview. According to this view, the researcher is "given to the concerns of the present age, to lack a transcendent perception of reality, to belong to the present world as distinguished from the spiritual or eternal reality of God."⁵¹⁵ Therefore, this study will give most of its attention to and consider most valid those research findings that agree with the researcher's understanding of the biblical principles that interact with their findings.

Study Limitations

As stated in the previous section, people interviewed for this study were limited to those who have served in Christian organizations under supervisors described as toxic in their leadership. Readers who desire to generalize some of the particular aspects of these conclusions on the basis of similarity to their own work environments should test those aspects in their particular context. As with all qualitative studies, readers bear the responsibility to determine what can be appropriately applied to their context. The results of this study may also have implications for employees in churches or the business workplace which share many characteristics of management.

⁵¹⁵ L Russ Bush, "What Is Secularism," *Southwestern Journal of Theology* 26, no. 2 (1984): 6.

In conclusion, the qualitative research methodology used for this study has been described. In the next chapter, a review and analysis of interviews with nine current or former employees of Christian organizations will be discussed. Each of the participants were under the authority of a supervisor who practiced toxic leadership.

Chapter Four

Findings

The purpose of this study was to explore how employees of Christian organizations practice self-differentiation while interacting with toxic supervisors. Four research questions were framed to guide the study. To that end, this chapter utilizes the findings of interviews with nine current or former employees of Christian organizations and reports on common themes and relevant insights pertaining to the research questions for this study. The research questions were,

1. What are the biblical-theological principles employees use to frame their practice of self-differentiation while interacting with toxic supervisors?
2. What are the risks employees face when practicing self-differentiation while interacting with toxic supervisors?
3. What impact do employees have on Christian organizations when practicing self-differentiation while interacting with toxic supervisors?
4. How do employees, who practice differentiation with toxic supervisors, pursue shalom in their lives and work?

In this chapter, the participants of the study will be introduced and their insights concerning the study questions will be presented.

Introductions of Participants

Nine current or former employees of Christian organizations were selected to participate in this study. The participants are evangelical in their theology as are the organizations by whom they were employed. Their experiences with supervisors who practiced toxic leadership took place in parachurch or mission organizations. They represent a variety of ministry types including missionary sending agencies, educational,

and mercy ministries. The interviewees are members of churches in different denominations.

In the following section, each participant will briefly be introduced. All names and identifiable information of participants have been changed to protect their identities. The following are summaries of their organizations, duties, and experiences.

Harris

Harris, gifted in developing the vision of organizations, worked successfully with several mission organizations as a leader. He worked under a toxic board Chairman for only seven months before he was terminated from the organization. Harris described the Chairman as “obsessed with detail, control, and a need to know everything.” Though Harris would not describe the Chairman as “evil,” he considered him to be “by nature suspicious and was also insecure.”

“A search firm” representing the large parachurch organization approached Harris, though he was not looking for a new appointment. He said he was happy in his leadership position with an international mission organization. However, the vision of the organization to expand the influence of the Bible in the culture and the need for rebuilding the organization caught his attention. Following a long and involved interview process, Harris was hired by an enthusiastic Board of Directors who “were happy to have somebody that was a globally experienced person. Somebody who loved the Bible. Somebody who could raise money.” Several people outside the organization warned Harris that the board was “dysfunctional.”

Within the short amount of time Harris was with the organization, “there was a lot of excitement.” He was “developing relationships” that were already producing fruit for

the organization including a four hundred-million-dollar building project paid for entirely by a Christian developer. After a few months, Harris developed a serious medical issue. During recovery from the surgery, the Chairman spoke with him, asking for access to his “digital calendar” and said, “I’d like to ask that you sign over your right to privacy with your private physician.” Shortly after, Harris was fired. In a meeting board members called at a law office, they told him, “We’ve turned off your phone, we’ve turned off your email account. We don’t want you back in the building. We don’t want you to talk to our staff or to board members. We’ll pack your books and send them to you.” Harris explained, “I think the building [project] was really my undoing, because it wasn’t [the chairman’s] idea. I think he felt disempowered [suddenly]. It wasn’t his building.”

Adam

Adam’s work began as a teacher of theology in an educational ministry in a developing country and, when he resigned approximately ten years later, he was acting as ministry Director. He had attended seminary, receiving a Master of Divinity, and was an ordained pastor. His duties as Director included oversight of all ministries on the campus, including both educational and medical.

Adam’s toxic supervisors were the founders, the CEO, and the CEO’s wife. He described them as “paternalistic,” “demanding,” and “colonialist.” Adam considered himself a friend to the founders and CEO, having been “lured with food, with vacations, with connections, and good ol’ boy slaps on the back.” Adam said he was often able to mediate conflicts between the staff and the CEO and founder. However, Adam recalled the founder of the organization entering his office, demanding “that I go and fire the gate guard, who after a week of water shortages, had been running water from our well system

to give a gallon of water a piece to about 30 women who were from the village across the street.” The village had suffered through several days of water shortages and he said, “The irony was that we were watering our grass while the village across the street [had] no water.”

From Adam’s perspective, “The ministry is not used as a tool to develop the [nationals]. The [nationals] were a tool to develop the ministry.” He said there was “no evidence that the interest was in the [nationals].” When he was asked to be Director, he believed he had “the chance to actually make the organization decent relationally with the students, but it just didn’t happen.” Following his resignation, he joined a large group of other missionaries in writing to the Board of Trustees about the harshness of and lack of integrity present in the leadership.

Ben and Casandra

Ben also taught theology and was a chaplain for an educational mission. In addition, he was responsible for the expansion of the library and development of a master’s degree program. Ben’s wife, Casandra, also interviewed, worked with her husband on the organization of the library and as an administrative assistant for two years before they resigned from the organization. Ben and Casandra described the leaders of the ministry as “demanding,” “demeaning,” “manipulative,” and “harsh.”

They described several times that unreasonable “demands” were made by the CEO, including an “email about an additional layer of responsibilities” they received one month prior to moving onto the mission field. When Ben would meet with the CEO, he said, “The moment I walked in, it was not a dialogue. It was a pretend dialogue that I could say what I wanted to say and for as long as I wanted to say it. But, the answer was

already etched in stone and was going to be carried out.” Casandra had few conflicts with the CEO, but when she was helping in one of the other offices, she was “yelled at by [the founder’s wife] to not be involved at all because I ‘didn’t know what I was talking about.’”

Deirdre

Deirdre, following the death of her husband, began working in a developing country at a school and orphanage. She began as a pre-school teacher in the school and, when the mission founded an orphanage, Deirdre spent much of her time caring for the children. Deirdre said, the founder of the organization had likely done “many great and wonderful things [many years ago]. But something changed along the way.” Deirdre said the founder was “depressed,” “lied,” was “very negative,” and “sickly.”

She said the founder’s “attitude towards the workers” and lying caused her the greatest concern. “She treated them like slaves,” Deirdre said. The founder was “very demeaning to them.” Deirdre recalled the ministry receiving a significant gift from donors to be used for clothing the children. The founder purchased dresses for three girls she “favored.” When confronted by a worker, asking why the boys had not received any clothing, the founder said, “That was designated money...for the girls.” According to Deirdre, the founder was also known for “taking advantage” of local businesses, owing one businessman approximately \$35,000 and never paying it back. The founder of Deirdre’s organization is the only toxic boss described in these interviews to leave the ministry prior to the participant. Deirdre continues, as of this writing, to work as a missionary for the organization.

Eugene

Eugene's work began with his organization's CEO while on the mission field, where a friendship developed. Later, joining the organization, he worked as a mid-level manager until his forced resignation as a Vice President. Eugene and the CEO had been friends for seventeen years at the time of his resignation. Eugene had oversight of more than 200 missionaries in 14 overseas fields. His description of his toxic supervisor, the CEO of the agency, included "friendly," "easy to get along with," "visionary," and "gregarious." He said he would use these descriptions until his "last meeting" with the CEO. However, he said, "Other people described him very differently." Some had told Eugene the CEO was "egotistical" and "bull headed about getting his way."

He said his own conversations about difficult things with the CEO were never "negative." However, he added, "I could probably say he never really gave in either!" In the final months of his employment he said he began to see and understand this dynamic. Eugene described yearly "re-organizations" of the ministry done following meetings with the vice presidents in which the CEO would seek their counsel and then ignore it in the final plan. When the CEO finally made a decision, "everyone would be shaking his head and hitting their heads against the wall, saying, 'This isn't anything like we told you!'"

In the end, Eugene chanced upon a book that described a "case where a person, as a result of an accident, had lost the ability to have emotional intelligence." Eugene thought the person described in the book sounded very much like his CEO. Eugene said, as a friend, he needed to confront the CEO as the CEO "needed to realize this was a weakness he had." Eugene "created a very long letter, documenting his belief that it was a lack of emotional intelligence that was handicapping the CEO and making it impossible

to find an appropriate leadership structure under which the org could move forward." One suggestion was that he and the CEO lead jointly.

He confronted the CEO in the letter saying, "You keep disregarding or twisting things that I say, making decisions I can't be responsible for," but noting his support for and friendship with the CEO for nearly ten years. He said, "The letter was prefaced with the desire that this communication be strictly between me and the CEO, as the basis for a discussion of the issues it contained." Eugene wanted it to go no further. However, the CEO contacted the board chairman who counseled him to terminate Ben immediately. Not wanting to do that, the CEO gave him the option of a 6-week administrative leave to sort things out and decide if Ben would be able to continue serving or not.

He was given less than one hour to decide. The CEO said, "In the meantime, I want your laptop, I want your computer, I want your credit card, I want your cell phone." Though accepting the administrative leave, after two days Eugene resigned from the organization.

Frances

Frances was appointed the CEO of a parachurch organization. She described her duties as equipping "Christian leaders" and to "re-envision leaders through mutual interaction and instruction by ministry experts." In addition, Frances was responsible for assembling "leaders for interaction and instruction." Her work ended abruptly after four years, being fired by the Board of Directors. She described the Board Chairman, the one she believed was responsible for her firing, as "secretive, intelligent, well respected, and a deceptive communicator."

The working relationship between the Chairman and Frances was described as good, though limited until an effort by the Chairman to reorganize Frances' "job

responsibilities.” Frances was given a non-negotiable deadline to respond as to whether she would “comply.” She said this was “totally unprecedented in the organization” and “it was such a shock to get that ultimatum.” She believed either a yes or no answer to the ultimatum would have been “disastrous.” She decided to appeal to the other trustees who had been unaware of the situation, but said, “At that point, I was totally cut off.” She explained she did not know how her communication with the board was stopped, but according to Frances, “Clearly there were some communications to the board members to not communicate” with her anymore.

Frances was suddenly asked to resign, then fired soon thereafter. Several former board members criticized the board chairman's and other trustees' actions and supported Frances throughout the ordeal, but to no avail. Though being “careful to not speak ill,” Frances recalled being told of some organizational history that might have given the board chairman reason to seek “revenge” against her and others, but she does not know the motives behind the attacks.

Isaac

Isaac and his wife were employed by two mission organizations, providing organizational leadership. At one organization, Isaac was instrumental in the development of orphan care, agriculture, and a pastor training ministry until being told to “move on” by the founder. He described the founder as a “self-made guy” with an “entrepreneurial spirit.” Isaac’s experience with the founder gave him the impression the founder considered the ministry to be his “house,” his “ministry.” His leadership involved making decisions “really quick, without maybe all the facts.”

The founder built the organization having met a family where the parents had died “and the child had no home.” The founder determined to build an orphanage. Isaac had been serving under a toxic boss in another organization and was seeking an alternative outlet of ministry in the same country. The founder said, “Just come be with us.” The founder lived out of country so Isaac was told he could “continue to do all the ministry you feel like God is calling you to...just help keep an eye on the kids and help do things.”

After moving to the orphanage, Isaac and his wife developed the ministry “advertisements” and “drummed up a whole lot of publicity” for the orphanage. They arranged for “medical programs” for the children and “worked on their education.” In addition, they established agriculture training programs and worked with water well companies. They worked to bring various ministries together to care for the people in the impoverished village. Isaac said, “It was good for our family.” He said, “We had grand plans...just being there.”

However, “Over time [the founder] began to expect” more and more from the family. Isaac explained, “He made us feel guilty for living out here.” When Isaac spoke with the founder, he told him, “We talked before. Our expectations were this.” Then they “got a call out of the blue one day.” The founder asked them to “move on” because the ministry is “going to go another direction.” Isaac has not spoken to the founder since, having moved back to the United States.

Graham

Graham, at one time a pastor, served on the board and then became the Director of a large parachurch organization. He worked with the organization for over ten years. He explained the mission “addressed a major social issue on a national and international

scope.” On staff and in senior leadership, he was responsible for “advocating and implementing policy to achieve the goals of the mission, interacting with all levels, from senior staff to volunteers.” Graham described the founder of the organization as “visionary, charismatic (in the non-biblical sense), bombastic, demanding, abusive, micro-managing, compassionate, spiritual, [and] a risk taker.”

Being informed that the founder “had been sexually harassing and abusing several female staff over a number of years,” Graham and two men confronted the founder. According to Graham, they came with what they “thought was...a biblical plan of healing and reconciliation that would allow him over a period of time to stay with the organization, that wouldn’t go public.” Graham said, with a laugh, “We all felt we were dealing among Christians, that when the facts were laid out, he would be humble and open to both healing and reconciliation and in the end of the afternoon, we would hug and get it done!”

However, the plan was “rejected out of hand” by the founder and the scandal “did all go public.” The confrontation with the founder of the organization in the end led to Graham’s firing by the board of trustees under the pressure of a well-known, wealthy supporter of the organization and friend of the founder. In addition, the founder terminated 45 of Graham’s staff. Approximately ten years later, the CEO was once again accused of sexual harassment and was fired by the board.

Table 2. Participants in Study

NAME OF PARTICIPANT	POSITION IN ORGANIZATION	TOXIC BOSS	RESOLUTION
Harris	CEO of multiple international Christian organizations.	Board Chairman	Fired
Adam	Faculty member and Director of foreign Christian educational mission.	CEO and Founders	Resigned
Ben	Faculty member, Chaplain, and Graduate School founder for foreign Christian educational mission.	CEO and Founders	Resigned
Casandra	Wife of Ben. Administrative Assistant and Library organization for foreign Christian educational mission.	CEO and Founders	Resigned
Deirdre	Teacher's aide and orphanage worker for foreign mission.	CEO / Founder	Current
Eugene	Vice President of missionary sending agency.	CEO	Forced Resignation
Frances	CEO of parachurch organization equipping Christian leaders.	Board Chairman	Fired
Isaac	Employed by two toxic organizations: Medical mission and village orphanage, pastor training, and agricultural ministry.	CEO and Founder	Resigned and Fired
Graham	Director of international mercy mission.	CEO / Founder	Fired

Some Theological Principles of Self-Differentiated Interaction

The first research question sought to determine the biblical-theological principles employees use to frame their practice of self-differentiation while interacting with toxic supervisors. Each participant was asked to consider what scriptural principles guided their interaction with the supervisor who practiced toxic leadership. Chapter Two considered four biblical passages, and the participants discussed these in the interviews and applied them to their experiences. Following are the participants' application of Matthew 18:15-20, Matthew 7:1-6, 1 Peter 2:18-25, and Psalm 55.

Matthew 18:15-20

In Matthew 18:15-20 Jesus outlines the process for confronting a brother who has sinned “against you.”⁵¹⁶ The participants in this study were asked if this passage was considered and applied in their experience with a supervisor who practiced toxic leadership. Two participants did not consider Matthew 18 applicable to their experience. Frances questioned its use outside of an “ecclesiastical structure,” and Isaac was not convinced there was specific sin involved in his experience with the founder that needed to be confronted. However, four of the participants considered Matthew 18:15-20 important to their interactions with their supervisor.

Though not considering Matthew 18 necessarily applicable, Frances said a pastor friend exhorted her to “not neglect... the noble role of a whistleblower,” referring to

⁵¹⁶ Matthew 18:15.

Ephesians where it says, “don’t walk in the deeds of the darkness, even expose them.”⁵¹⁷ She was encouraged to confront the chairman of her organization as Matthew 18 teaches. She sought to communicate privately with the board chairman of the organization several times, but the chairman “just would not respond.” However, she explained that communications the chairman had with others in the organization had been “critical” of her and Frances “had been left...out of important processes in which the CEO always, in the organization’s history, had been involved.” Though she did not consider the Matthew 18 principle to be necessarily applicable to a non-church setting, Frances did try to “directly” communicate “with the person.” However, she said, “I tried to knock on that door several times and that door was slammed shut.” At others’ advice, she “sought to lay out to the entire board in great detail interactions with this person over the preceding months.” When offered “hush money,” Frances said she “wasn’t going to take whatever money was involved at the expense of constructively speaking the truth.” However, the chairman “was able to manipulate the board somehow in ways I was never privy to,” she said.

Harris considered it a matter of “integrity” that he speak “directly to the person,” following the Matthew 18 principle of speaking “one on one” with the offender. He suggested, “When I was fired, this all could have been solved in one face to face conversation,” something he said never happened. While separated by several states and recovering from surgery, Harris wrote several emails to the board chairman. He added, “I

⁵¹⁷ Ephesians 5:11.

didn't go complain to someone else." Harris wanted to confront the chairman privately. In addition, he noted that he "wasn't insulting" or "making accusations" as he wanted to be gracious in his handling of the conflict. After exchanging three letters, the chairman began his third saying, "I appreciate your note, particularly the spirit of it." However, Harris did not experience the same treatment from the chairman. Several of the board members told Harris when the board voted to fire him, one of the members "stood up and pled with them and said, 'We cannot do this... We have a biblical principle; we must talk to him.'" However, the board chairman and board members did not speak with Harris prior to the termination. Several months after his firing, the new board chairman, new president, and the former board chairman came to speak with Harris. He said it "was a pitiful meeting." The plan of the new chairman and new president was for the former chairman to seek forgiveness from Harris. However, when the meeting had concluded, the former chairman had not asked for forgiveness.

Eugene, who considered the CEO a friend, would discuss issues privately with the CEO. He had several discussions with him regarding the amount of work the CEO was expecting him to accomplish. He described one time when he wrote the names of all the employees who reported to him on a long stream of computer paper and hung it on his office wall. Eugene then brought the CEO into his office and the CEO asked, "Who are they?" Eugene told him, "If you asked any one of those people who their boss is, they would name me." He then asked the CEO, "How many people are supposed to respond to you at most?" The CEO said, "Seven or eight at most" and went on to say they needed to work on that. However, the CEO never did work on it, only adding to Eugene's workload.

When Eugene wrote the 25-page document to the CEO, he explained he had no intention of going to anyone else with his confrontation. He said, “I am not going to share this with anybody...If someone is going to take the brunt of repercussions, it is going to have to be me.” Immediately following his forced resignation, Eugene asked for a meeting with the board chairman seeking to bring accountability to the CEO, but he “wouldn’t talk to me.” He remembered being surprised that the board chairman would not respond to him. Eugene said, “I’m a senior vice president. If that level person is resigning, or fired, or whatever, seems like you want to talk to them anyhow! Hear his side of the story. But, no. That was it!” Eugene “stayed around, waiting for the next board meeting hoping they would call” him in, but they did not. Approximately, three years later, Eugene received a message from the board chairman asking to talk. The board had fired the CEO and the chairman asked forgiveness from Eugene. The chairman said he “kept sustaining [the CEO] despite all the negative feedback he was getting about the financial state and from the staff.” He told Eugene, “You were right. I should have listened to you.” The board chairman resigned from the board, disappointed in his failures to protect the employees from the CEO.

Graham said they sought to follow the biblical principle of “going to someone sort of privately, one on one, and if necessary bring in a couple of the church elders, and if necessary” go further. However, he said they were “trying to avoid the going further.” He argued they considered the “three of us as going to him as the ‘private one,’ and then, later with the full board of going with the ‘elders.’” In seeking the help of the board as his “church elders” Graham was very disappointed. He said, “It was a long time before I

would join another Christian board. As far as I am concerned, I am swearing off Christian boards.”

When Isaac and his family were asked to “move on,” he explained, “We didn’t say anything” to the people in the villages around them. They did not want “to come across bad.” Isaac just told the people their family had to “move on.” A “young and misguided” man with whom they worked during their time at the mission had told the founder things about Isaac’s family that he said were false. Isaac said he “confronted [the young man] later” about “his version of the story.” Though his family was deeply hurt by the actions of the founder, Isaac added that “it wasn’t like anybody lashed out or really sinned. It was mainly the issue with [the young man].” He believed there was “nothing of benefit that [was] to come from” confronting the founder. When asked if he contacted the board of directors for the ministry, he explained,

I think they are completely disconnected with what he would be doing. They’re his board...probably just a few pastors somewhere in [the United States] and they know [the founder] and they all go way back and so I would be nothing more than some guy that was upset because he was asked to leave. Probably because I wasn’t fulfilling what they wanted me to do as an organization.

Several of the participants observed others who approached the leadership of their ministry and experienced difficulty. They did not think one-on-one confrontations would be of any value. Adam said he “had seen a pattern of other people attempting to bring concerns directly to leadership and they were excused or dismissed.” He observed, “It would become a counter attack.” He noted he was conscious of the Matthew 18 passage, but “was too cynical about the success of it to even try to go through that.” He considered a letter he sent to the board of directors part of this “process of trying to bring this to the attention of people.”

Ben had a very different approach to the application of the passage. He explained, “I just felt like the Matthew 18 principle was something that I needed to own in where I had leadership.” Like Adam, he had also seen a “hurting group of people who had really been shot down in their attempts to try to apply that to fix breaks however small, however gradual.” Ben said there was a group of missionaries he called the “Matthew 18 group...that were constantly butting heads, constantly trying to bring about change.” He said, woefully, “Many of them were in my office a great deal for counsel, encouragement – for prayer – because they were getting really worn out through that process.” Ben did meet with the CEO to present his resignation, but expected no resolution. Ben and Casandra signed the letter to the board that included “the major concerns we [had] with the organization.” The letter expressed the missionaries’ belief “it could be an amazing organization” if the board would hear the missionaries’ stories. However, the board never spoke with the missionaries.

Deirdre explained, “Many other people...were talking to [the founder],” including a pastor and school principal. She said she is “not a confrontational person and did not confront her with things.” A relative of the founder who worked for the organization “would confront [the founder].” Deirdre said the relative had no difficulty confronting her. However, “She couldn’t get her to do anything.”

Matthew 7:1-6 – Making Judgments

In Matthew 7:1-6, Jesus is coming to the close of his Sermon on the Mount. He challenges his hearers, “Judge not, that you be not judged. For with the judgment you

pronounce you will be judged, and with the measure you use it will be measured to you.”⁵¹⁸ In verse six, Jesus goes on to say, “Do not give dogs what is holy, and do not throw your pearls before pigs, lest they trample them underfoot and turn to attack you.”⁵¹⁹ The participants were asked if they applied this passage when interacting with their toxic supervisor. There were significant differences in both the applicability and application of both sections of this passage.

In consideration of the first part of the passage, Deirdre noted that “We were all judging her even though we shouldn’t have been.” However, she explained, “It was so continuous, all the little things she did, that it was hard not to.” On the other hand, Adam said,

I think I used it privately to calm myself after any perceived wrong doing or pattern of behavior. After grieving and being angry for a time that passage would come to mind and I would use it against myself to call me back into line. That I was as capable of the same kinds of things, same kinds of attitudes and actions, as the [CEO] was.

However, Frances warned, “Don’t let that passage be used in a way to make you afraid” to speak out. She believed she had to speak the truth “when it was so clear to me and other people about what was happening.”

When considering Jesus’ imperative, “take the log out of your own eye,” Graham said, “We tried very hard not to be doing any finger wagging. Like, ‘You are a horrible person and the rest of us are bastions of virtue.’ We tried in all humility to bring him to

⁵¹⁸ Matthew 7:1-2.

⁵¹⁹ Matthew 7:6.

an awareness of what he had done and its effect on the organization.” Eugene agreed, arguing it was “not a judging situation as [much] as a helping situation.” Eugene said he was trying to assist the CEO. He went on to say he was “trying to help him in his own development of his understanding of himself.”

Ben explained the “judging” section of the passage (Matthew 7:1-5) did not come to mind until after several months of being away from the organization. At that time, following writing letters to the board, CEO, and faculty, he said, “I recognized that I just needed to forgive them. I was never going to be asked for forgiveness...I didn’t need to be putting myself in the seat of judge.” While still with the organization, Ben said he “very much ruminated on” verse seven where it says, “Do not cast your pearls to the pigs.” He explained, “I began to feel more and more affirmed in my thinking that my job was not to try to change them. I was going to fry myself if I took that campaign on. It was a waste of time and energy to try to change the situation in that sense of casting pearls.”

1 Peter 2:18-25 – Submission to the Toxic

The apostle Peter begins a section on “submission” to various authorities in the second chapter of his first epistle. Starting in verse 18, Peter instructs, “Servants, be subject to your masters with all respect, not only to the good and gentle but also to the unjust.”⁵²⁰ The participants were asked if and how they applied this passage to their interactions with their toxic supervisor.

⁵²⁰ 1 Peter 2:18

Adam said, “I used it against myself just to guilt myself into submitting to his rule.” He said he related it to the Matthew 7 passage, telling himself “[the CEO] is very human. He is our director” and therefore, Adam should not judge or rebel against him. Because Adam was in mid-level management, mediating between the CEO and faculty and staff, he would recall this passage as he struggled in his own relationship with the CEO and when he spoke with those under his authority. He would say to himself and others, “The Lord puts you under even unjust authorities. And the way you reach those authorities is to be godly and submissive and humble.” He went on to say he was not sure it created “a genuine repentance” on his part “as much as a control to keep things normal so there wouldn’t be any real disruptions.” He noted there were “big consequences when you” challenged the CEO. Adam added, “You have to go home and go to bed and get up the next day. And the only way to survive the next day is to rally your head to think, ‘You know this is just the way Christians live or this is just the way life is and you have to accept it.’” Adam, felt he had an “obligation to mediate and so I would use things like that on them and it was amazing how it worked!” He said others would respond, “Oh, you’re right. He’s just human.”

Ben suggested that there were two “camps” of people at his organization. There were those who “camped out” in the 1 Peter passage, saying, “We’re just here to take it. It doesn’t matter what happens, it’s not our responsibility. We’ll take it. We’ll suffer. He is our master; therefore, we will be subservient to him.” The others were in the Matthew 18 camp, “constantly butting heads. Constantly trying to bring about change.” Ben said the 1 Peter passage he “thought about the most.” He said he “went back to it again and again and again. Sometimes looking for a loophole.” However, Ben argued their

positions with the organization were “voluntary” and received no funding from the organization. He suggested their “accountability” was “to those who put us there.” The churches and individuals who supported them financially were their “bosses.” Ben recounted a sermon given in the organization chapel by the founder that was a “tirade against the students” and spiritually “manipulative.” He sent the recording to several supporters who were his mentors for their advice. Ben said they all responded, “Something’s wrong. It’s not you...something’s broken.” He believed it was to these supporters he was “subservient to in his position.” He finished saying, “It is a very unique relationship to have. Because, yes, he is my boss. Yes, I answer to him. But my livelihood in no way depended on him.”

Rather than applying the verse to himself, Graham suggested, “I would say that it was more used against us. ‘Who were we to be going up against God’s chosen?’ That was thrown at me a lot.” He went on to explain how supporters and “leaders of projects from around the country” believed the organization’s founder “totally.” He went on to say,

The facts really didn’t matter at all. Anybody you talked to had a way of dismissing those facts whether it was based on [the founder’s] description of the women – one woman was simply too ugly to harass – or you know, those kinds of things. People would say, “I’ve talked to [the founder] about these women, and this is what he said, and that’s the fact and so you need to be under submission.”

Frances agreed, saying, “Being submissive to the board was one argument that was brought against me by the [board chairman].” However, she noted the board chairman “had become his own board and was operating against any awareness of the rest of the board.” Frances believed her “judgment about what was best for the organization” and the lack of accountability the chairman had to the board structure

trumped the view that she must submit without confronting the dysfunction of the chairman.

Psalm 55 – The Intimate Companion

King David wrote Psalm 55, an imprecatory psalm, praying for mercy as he suffered the “oppression of the wicked.” He says, “They drop trouble upon me, and in anger they bear a grudge against me.” In the middle of the psalm, David explains the enemy he has been describing is “my companion, my familiar friend.” David cries for God’s judgment saying, “Let death steal over them; let them go down to Sheol alive; for evil is in their dwelling place and in their heart.”⁵²¹ The participants were asked if this psalm, or the principles contained in the psalm, were considered applicable to their experience, but most the participants expressed discomfort with praying in the way David prayed.

Several of the participants considered their toxic supervisor to be a friend. Adam said, “I thought we were colleagues, respected professionals, fellow missionaries and Christians.” Graham said, “We really, really thought we were a Christian family, and that God’s will would be made crystal clear that [the founder] would seek the help that was available, that he would be restored, and life would go on just lovely.” Isaac added, “You think you have family, you think you have brothers, and then its ‘whoop,’ what just happened?” Eugene considered himself a friend of the CEO. He said, “We were close enough, I had never done anything to provoke him. We’d known each other for ten years,

⁵²¹ Psalm 55:15.

maybe he will listen.” When he was fired, he said, “It was really hard emotionally, because of the friendship.” Eugene had lost a job when he disagreed with the board before, but he said, “That wasn’t a very emotional experience at all. I was glad to get out of there. But this time, it really hurt a lot.”

As Adam worked under the CEO, he believed he “could be used by [the CEO] to make the campus healthy.” He believed they had “developed a friendship” and could see “him in a different way,” making it possible for Adam to call “people down from pure hate or misunderstandings.” In the end, Adam believed he “was playing for the wrong team and didn’t know it.”

Graham said the team that confronted the founder on sexual harassment and abuse charges “worked really hard to not think in terms of adversary and enemy.” Even while in meetings with a Christian reconciliation “team,” he “didn’t allow [himself] and those who were part of [the team] to think of him as an adversary or an enemy.” They were hoping for a response from the founder like “David’s contrite psalm...’Oh my goodness, against Thee and Thee only have I sinned and I am going to do whatever I can to have a clean and contrite heart.’” Unfortunately, according to Graham, “That never happened.”

A local villager shared Psalm 55 with Isaac after they were asked to leave the ministry. He said, “It really hit home.” He said,

In the ministry, you kind of feel like you have a common goal or vision or end goal. You are brothers and family and you also, I guess automatically expect some of the fruit of the spirit, some of the qualities of Christ in some of the people in the workplace, because some of your expectation is that you are in a relational setting. You are in a friendly, family setting, that maybe there is a common thread that binds you and goes beyond what you have to deal with...there’s a level of trust and faith in one another, then you realize it’s not there.

Harris said a good friend and well-known pastor told him a story of when the pastor was ministering in a church where he “encountered real difficulty from an elder.” He told Harris they “prayed about it” because they were “stymied by this guy.” The elder shortly after “died unexpectedly.” The pastor said they “never imagined that, but in a sense God solved it.”

Though Frances’ relationship with the board chairman was not considered “terribly close,” it was “collegial.” Frances was “asking for the Lord to bring judgment and thwart the purposes of this person.” She said there were others as well, when they “learned about the situation,” who “resorted to prayer,” seeking resolution to the toxicity of the leadership.

Summary

The participants of this study explained their experiences as they applied various biblical passages to their situation. Most of the participants sought to limit the scope of their criticism against their toxic supervisor by speaking or writing to him one-on-one. Several considered it too “dangerous” to confront the leader and sought help from boards of directors. In every case, there appeared to the participants to be no resolution of the larger relational issues involved. In the following section, the “risks of acting with self-differentiation” will be considered in the experiences of the participants.

The Risks of Self-Differentiation

The second research question sought to determine the risks employees face when practicing self-differentiation while interacting with toxic supervisors. Graham, one of the participants, expressed dismay at his “naiveté” in believing as fellow “Christians,”

there would be “healing and reconciliation” and in the end, “we would hug and get it done!” Graham’s experience was common in the stories the participants told.

No Impact

Sometimes confrontation or criticism resulted in little or no immediate response by the toxic leader. Though the risks in these cases were minimal, the failure of the supervisor to respond made ministry difficult for these participants. Deirdre explained that she watched as others confronted the founder, but normally they “couldn’t get her to do anything.” Eugene repeatedly said, until the final confrontation, the CEO was friendly and gracious when he would bring complaints to him. However, the CEO never took the action he said he was going to take. Conversely, Adam’s boss was dismissive or would justify his actions with an excuse. He said, “There was always an answer.”

Ben called his organization a “family business.” He said, “[I had] very little sense that I was part of something whose passion was building God’s kingdom. It was very much building ours,” referring to the family. He discovered “if you weren’t in the family, you were out of business.” Ben said the “family called the shots and it didn’t matter the thoughts, opinions, the ideas of anybody outside.” He explained, “Real decisions were made around the family table.”

The Volcano

In some cases, there was little response to confrontation or the participant had little say in the ministry, but in nearly every case, the toxicity of the leader’s behavior became apparent to the participants despite friendships and “cordial” working relationships for a period. There were varying degrees of intensity in the participants’ conflicts with their toxic supervisor.

Graham shared the depths of his disappointment when realizing that, though God “called [him] to this work,” his leader was not letting him do the job. He said, “That was not something any of us had dealt with before.” He went on to say, those he worked with had often “gone out in faith...sometimes in sacrificial ways. Now, all of a sudden, man intervenes and says, ‘It really doesn’t matter that it was God’s will or that you were called.’”

Harris told the board of the organization when interviewing, “I bet the most important relationship in any non-profit organization is the relationship between the CEO and the board chairman. They either push each other to a higher level and bring the organization with it, or they can drag the whole organization down into the swamp.” He said he had no idea “how bad that relationship would be” between he and the chairman. Harris was told repeatedly, prior to joining the organization, their board was “dysfunctional.” During the interview process, a “charming southern” member of the board said, “You probably heard that we have a dysfunctional board?” He told the board, “Yes, actually I have heard that, but I like to put the fun back in dysfunction.” He believed they understood there were problems and were “committed to correcting” their dysfunction. After several months of employment, it became apparent they were “not serious” when the board chairman began to dismantle Harris’ leadership.

Though Deirdre said she did not confront the founder of the organization normally, she said, “If I tried to say it to her, she would dig her heels in and do something different just because it wasn’t her idea.” She recounted an experience when a former student of the founder’s was seeking to return as a teacher in the school. He reached out to Deirdre to help him communicate with the founder because he had been having

difficulties with his own communications with the founder. Deirdre explained, “I have no say whatsoever.” The young man “just gave up” and Deirdre added she hoped “he has a good position someplace else. He did not come.”

Isaac experienced more aggressive toxicity in the final months of his ministry with another organization they served. Isaac said he had several meetings with the CEO and the meetings went through a “cycle...of flattery and guilt and threatening...He would flatter us – tell us how great we were – then talk about our obligation. Then he would talk about our supporters – what would they think – then [finish] with threats.” When Isaac resigned, he continued to work part-time for the mission. The CEO sent a letter to the immigration authorities at the airport asking them to reject Isaac and his family’s entry to the country on their return from a short trip to the United States. Though unsure the letter would have had any impact on their travel plans, Isaac explained they missed a connecting flight and flew into the country through another city, thereby circumventing the immigration at the local airport unintentionally.

Ben explained the responses of some staff to the toxicity of the CEO, “Some people were the fighters and some people were just apathetic.” In his experience, the fighters were “worn out” through a lack of change coming from their battles. Apathetic ones “put their heads down” and “counted the minutes when they could drive out the gates and do what gave them life and meaning, a purpose and joy.” He said many had ministry opportunities outside their work at the organization. Ben added, he determined that he did not want to “become apathetic to leadership” or “go find another mission somewhere for survival’s sake.” In the end, Ben and Casandra believed remaining at the

organization would mean being “a party to the abuse” and did not want to risk joining either of these “camps.”

Adam recounted an experience when his wife had purchased plane tickets for their trip home for furlough and the CEO’s wife “demanded that she change the flight.” Adam’s wife responded, “I’m sorry, I can’t.” Adam said, “That was the moment they realized we weren’t always going to say yes.” The CEO and his wife’s treatment of Adam and his family changed after that. He observed that future conflict “had to travel through my wife.” He said, “She took the brunt of all these incidences and I believe that they knew we were peace loving people...but, I really believed they used that against us, because they knew...like a bully they can get away with it.”

Though Eugene “felt like quitting,” he said, “If I accepted the position of Senior Vice President, I was responsible to the organization as well as responsible to my friend, [the CEO].” He added, “The organization has to be one of the leading international missions, and I just felt like, [the CEO] is bringing this mission down.” Though he had heard of the CEO’s failure to interact well with those under his authority, he believed, as a friend there could be a positive outcome to his confrontation. He was willing to take the risk of confronting the CEO with the hope there would be a positive outcome. In their final meeting, when Eugene was told to give over his laptop, credit card, and cell phone immediately, he said, “That was a huge slap in the face.” He said, “I couldn’t believe he could be that cold-hearted.”

Resulting Impact

The eight participants who left their organizations, either being fired or resigning, were asked what effects there were to them and their families. Emotional, physical, and

spiritual effects were discussed. Harris summed up the common results of the participants' experiences when he said, "I don't like to use inflated language, but some of these things really do have catastrophic consequences for an individual and their family." Ben suggested the negative effects their experiences had were not as great possibly due to "living off campus" and being there only two years. However, he said, their "jaws were on the floor with what other people needed to do and go through to unwrap their minds, hearts, and spirits from that experience." What follows are some of the "consequences" of toxic leadership.

Effects on Others

When the vice presidents of the organization told the CEO they were against his latest reorganization plan, Eugene was given the option of resigning or become "a senior director." The others were moved into lower positions. Eugene thought, "I don't like what you did to my colleagues" and felt "survivor's guilt." But, as a missionary on donor support, he believed he had no choice but to "go along" with the CEO's plan. Eugene spoke of the impact his later, forced resignation had on those who depended on him. He said,

Here are 250 missionaries you have been basically counseling for seven years, intimately involved with their lives...for some of them, I was the one key person on the way to some future they were looking toward. And, all of a sudden, that all disappeared. That was very hard. Basically, we had to trust the Lord knew what He was doing and that he would take care of those people too because it wasn't our responsibility any more.

After Eugene's firing, the organization was unable to fill his position because, "Nobody wanted the job. They figured, 'If Eugene is his best friend and can get fired, I don't want that.'"

Physical and Emotional Effects

Though Adam and his family resigned from the organization in 2012, he said, “The consequences are still unfolding for our family.” When he first resigned he “felt exhilarated, liberated.” Adam said he “enjoyed [the country] in a way that I had not up to that point.” He went on, “I don’t have to do that shit anymore. I enjoyed the [nationals].” But, the “long term was incredibly difficult.” He remembers watching his “family cry all the way to the airport,” knowing he had made the right decision but it was very difficult. Graham added that he and a few of his “main colleagues” who were fired suffered “various levels of depression” over the years since. Adam says he was “emotionally depressed” for “at least two years after” leaving. He said he was “physically irresponsible which goes with depression; Eat all I can. Drink all I can. Sleep all I can. Stay inside all I can.”

Considering his own difficulties following his firing, Eugene also suffered physically. He explained, “I had a really hard time getting over it. Physically, I got sick...I lost my voice. I couldn’t get a job.” He lost his insurance and so was unable to work with a speech therapist. Casandra pointed out that Ben had hives for a long time after leaving, adding, “Lots of wounds of internal stress from it all.”

Because Isaac felt there was a “common thread” binding those in ministry together and a sense that they were “in a friendly, family setting,” it was like “friendly fire...not really understanding why.” When the founder contacted Isaac, the founder told him, “I think we are going to go another direction. I think we are going to go all [nationals].” Isaac expressed a sense of betrayal having believed they were going beyond

what was required by the founder and had encouraged the founder to work more to bring the nationals into leadership.

As a leader of a major Christian organization, Harris had many speaking engagements that were cancelled. He said, “There is a sense in which I don’t have any value. I’m not part of the community. I’m a commodity and the value of this commodity just dropped to zero and I’ve been spit out.” He said, “There’s a sense of shock, denial,” referring to the “stages of grief.” Harris does not “feel the passion for world evangelization” he did once and for which he worked so hard. He said, “I have people who want me to mentor them and I have nothing to say. I’m rung out.”

Frances recalls “feeling a bit lost as to what was next.” As she went on unemployment following her firing, “There was a sense of hurt as I’ve tried to ponder it at different times.” Despite the hurt, Frances had a “sense of joy” knowing she was suffering unjustly.

Harris said, “It is very traumatic, because it involves not just a job, but a calling.” Harris considers himself a “very positive, cheerful, resilient person,” but that has made others assume he is “fine.” They think, “he’s doing great!” He said they do not “realize how much sorrow” he is feeling. Many people have expressed concern and encouragement, but Harris related the analogy, “You can tell a beautiful woman how beautiful and wonderful she is, but if she feels trashed as a child, she’s like, ‘I don’t care what accomplishments I may have had.’ I was told to get out and stay out and my life has been hard ever since.” At this point, Harris does not see an end in sight. He likens the experience to losing a child, “Because something like this was wrongly taken from you...you get past it, you get through it, but I don’t think you get over it.”

Financial Effects

Eugene was on unemployment for eight months, though all the while seeking a job. Though Frances has an exceptional background and experiences in missions and leadership, getting another job was a several months process and the new job involved separation from her family for long stretches of time. She was in her late 50s “and most organizations are not going to hire someone” at that “stage of life.” Frances noted the “financial fallout was pretty serious” with a “reduction in income [that] was pretty severe.”

Harris, despite receiving a larger salary than he and his family either needed or wanted, was financially “worse off than” when he joined the organization. He explained, he “had to hire a lawyer to get out” and spent “thousands of dollars” and did not “get a dime of severance.” He said he has “credit card debt” and bills he “can’t pay.” He went on, “I’ve never ever had financial trouble in my life...I always had good jobs.” Harris had many wonderful years with other organizations that he “said goodbye to” when he went to the organization. After being fired, those positions were all filled. Several years later, he is still without a full-time position.

Cynicism About Missions and Boards

Eugene’s “greatest disappointment in missions is the boards.” He said, “Leaders need good accountability. The boards I’ve had experience with do not provide that.” Graham agreed, saying he has “a real major cynicism about Christian boards,” though he continues to be a strong supporter of mission work. He explained that the organization had a strong commitment to “covenants” and when the “manure was hitting the fans” the board met. Everyone involved was asked to sign a covenant. He explained, “The

covenant was that, in effect, everyone would go forward honorably, and believe the best intentions about one another, and there would be no firings, no recriminations over this at all, guaranteed. And we signed a covenant. Six months later, all those people on the covenant are being fired.”

Harris recalled that for several months after being fired, “I could not read my bible. I sat in this chair every morning, for years...and have a prayer book and bible” enjoying the daily devotions. He realized he had been “betrayed” by an organization whose sole purpose was the promotion of the Bible. He said, “The worst experience I have had in my life was with a [Christian organization].”

Cassandra struggles “with how churches should really send missionaries.” She questioned, “What are good missions?” She noted, “Missionaries leave not because of the people they serve, but the people they serve with.” Because of that, she wondered, “How do you take care of missionaries when they come home? How do you support them when they go through what we went through?” She said, “It really did change my view of missions and missionaries and effectiveness.” Isaac agrees, “It has made us more cynical about where or how to serve.”

Adam also said he “became incredibly cynical about missions. [I] began to think, I don’t even know what that means.” He said he saw mission works “as paternalistic [and] colonialistic.” He said he is “totally against short-term [missions]. Incredibly sensitive to Africa in particular.” However, he said he is not “as cynical as some” he knows. He added, “I got to be John the Baptist – beheaded. [Another friend] got to be crucified!” However, he added, “It’s a thousand times better now.”

Coming Home

Isaac said they “learned a lot through this, but there’s little audience for that knowledge. No one wants to hear that knowledge.” So, he says they are careful who they share with unless asked, “because it can come across cynical or jaded or not with the program.” He noted they have had difficulty settling into the American church, though he is not sure why.

Ben and Casandra said they “were very fragile for a time. We were looking for and very much needed support and encouragement.” When they returned to the United States they had “hot and cold responses from different churches [that supported them] in terms of understanding and encouragement.” Ben said, “Some churches very coldly listened to what we had to say; ‘Well thank you for your service. God bless you as you go.’”

Summary

The risks the participants took as they practiced self-differentiation in their engagement with toxic supervisors were varied and numerous. In some cases, the toxic leader did little in response to the participant’s challenges, but in eight cases, the participants were fired or found it necessary to resign. The resulting effects of these experiences were also varied and numerous, including physical, emotional, spiritual, and financial. From difficulty with depression to difficulty reading the Bible to cynicism regarding missions and their boards, each participant suffered in unique and common ways. The next section considers how the self-differentiated actions of the participants impacted the organizations they served.

Self-Differentiated Impact

The third research question sought to determine the impact employees have on Christian organizations when practicing self-differentiation. The participants acted upon convictions in their engagement with their toxic supervisors in a variety of ways. Some had observed others confront the leader. Some confronted the leader directly. Some sought recourse through individuals or boards who had oversight of the leader. Some confronted through follow-up communication with the supervisor or their boards. Each spoke of how they sought to remain engaged in ministry while suffering under the toxic behavior of their supervisor. Their various approaches to their circumstances resulted in limited or no apparent resolutions in the short term.

Impact in the Short Term

Graham suggested the impact an employee has on a Christian organization is dependent on keeping the “purpose and mission of that organization front and center, crystal clear.” In his experience with his organization, he said the mission held a unique attraction to both evangelicals and liberals. He said, “Liberals worship a cause and conservatives worship an individual,” adding, “That’s an overgeneralization, but for the sake of what I am saying now, it fits.” When the confrontations with the erring founder took place, “liberals didn’t want to do anything to hurt the cause of [the ministry] and the conservatives didn’t want to do anything that hurt [the founder].” He explained both sides took their sight off “the original sense of mission.” He warned that if an employee’s impact is not focused on the “role and vision of [the] project,” they should “just get out. Because if it blows up, you aren’t going to win. By the time things blow up there are forces at work that are not good forces...To put it more simply, life is too short!”

As Harris considered joining the organization, he said,

I had been a turnaround specialist [with both organizations with which I worked before]. I took things that were in decline. It wasn't my intention but, in hindsight I realized, I was good at casting vision, defining mission and vision for the organization, recruiting good board members, and so forth. So, I thought this is a great organization. It's kind of in a mess and they are aware they are in a mess.

He received much encouragement that he was having an impact on the organization in his short time there. On the morning of his first "performance review," one of the employees "came into my office and said, 'Harris, I just want you to know how much I appreciate the way you lead. You are comprehensive. You are courageous. You are decisive.'" Two of the board members who presented his performance review told him the next day, "We think you are the right one for the job. There are many great days ahead."

Adam experienced limited short-term results as he sought to mediate between the leadership of the organization and his own family, faculty, and staff. He recalled an experience when his wife was asked by the CEO's wife to prepare bulletin boards in the school hallways. When the CEO returned from traveling, he began to criticize the boards to Adam's wife. Adam said, "It was an impossible environment to please. Even though there were titles, because it was a family ministry, there were a multitude of voices so you never knew where you stood. They didn't talk in the meantime, 'Oh, well I asked her to do that.'" Adam was, in this case, able to mediate between his wife and the CEO, bringing calm to the situation. However, he noted he did not solve the larger problem. "I began to see that dynamic at work which became a pattern."

Isaac explained he and his family sought to serve the founder of the organization when the founder visited the ministry for two months, "the first time they had ever stayed that long." He related, "We took care of them. [My wife] cooked for them. They ate with

our family...I drove all the way [to another country] with him in a flatbed...I was the guy that would beg to get across the borders...took care of all border issues.” However, it was shortly after this visit they received the call from the founder to leave.

Frances recalled an experience when she “was trying to just be responsible as the director” as she requested more information from the chairman about instructions to turn around a sizeable donation to pay a new client. The chairman’s indirect reply was a repeated directive to process the funds with assurances of auditor approval. Frances began sharing the incident with the board, both to document her relationship with the chairman and as a matter of being “honest” and having “integrity.” However, Frances “wasn’t hearing anything back,” like with other matters.”

Impact on Others

Whether the participants believed they had any impact on the toxic supervisor’s behavior or decisions or not, most recognized the impact they had on the organization and other employees of the organization. Both Adam and Ben had pastoral roles as they encouraged those also under the toxic leadership of their organizations. As explained above, Adam had many opportunities to calm other missionaries following conflicts with the leadership. He said, “A lot of the stages I went through, I was able to walk with them through it. It was helpful for me to be able to counsel them...To say there was light at the end of the tunnel. Those kinds of efforts are worthwhile.” He added, “I thought I was doing a pastoral work...to build the peace.” He saw his role as a mediator, “It is to translate the CEO to the people and translate the people to the CEO.”

Ben and Casandra viewed their mission as primarily “for the students.” Because of their involvement in the graduate program, Casandra said they sought to

“differentiate” themselves from the organization leadership, particularly when they chose to resign from the mission. She said they asked themselves, “Ultimately, what does my leaving the organization say to our Graduate Students, our supporters and to God.” Casandra said they “were very careful about bad mouthing [the CEO] to the students...we were very respectful of [the CEO].” Ben added, “It has been three years since we have been back.” He said he had received that day an email from one of his former students, they were going to be hosting another student at their house in a few days, and their church in the United States continues to support the ministry of another former student. Ben said, “We didn’t cut any ties with [the country], just with the organization. It is very much an ongoing part of our lives and always will be.” In the end, they believed their multiple communications to the leadership and board of directors provided opportunity for corrections to be made had those entities listened to their pleas.

Two years after Harris was fired from the organization, the board of directors invited him back to the headquarters. They said, “We want to apologize. We had a process that violated biblical principles. We didn’t allow you to speak into it. We rushed it. And we have put great harm on you. Will you forgive us?” Harris explained, “There were eight deliverables and every one of them were on schedule or ahead of schedule.” At that meeting, Harris met with two of the board members to apologize for emails he had sent that were “not flattering” to them. However, both board members said, “You don’t need to ask for forgiveness. You simply gave observations. We read them. We agreed with them!” Relationships were restored through those discussions. Harris explained that his approach to conflict in the organizations is “when you have an experience that doesn’t comport with expectations you have and it angers you or troubles

you, suspend judgment, rather than jump to judgment.” He went on to suggest talking about it and establishing a “baseline of facts. Do we agree on what happened and what order and who was responsible for what?” He argued in “healthy relationships...misunderstandings contribute to greater trust.”

Part of Eugene’s job was presenting the reorganizational structure to missionaries in the field. He remembered, following the final reorganization made by the CEO, traveling to another country “to explain the new work system,” a system the vice presidents had rejected. He said, “It got really hard to defend the home office.” He explained, “By that time, people were asking, ‘Does [the CEO] have any idea what he is doing, because we have seen this the last six years in a row?’” Yet, he fulfilled his responsibility to the organization.

Impact in the Long Term

Though only Deirdre survived the toxic supervisor’s reign in the organization, outlasting the founder, nearly all organizations represented by the participants were impacted in the long term. Only Isaac has seen no long-term impact on the organization, though he believes the orphanage has been turned over to the village. The founder, however, continues to lead the organization.

Adam’s organization also continues with the same leadership, though the CEO and his wife have moved to the United States where he leads from the home office. The local director is a national. This may have been the result of the board’s decision following the receipt of a letter from a group missionaries, though Adam does not have confirmation of this. Adam believes he had an immediate impact through his pastoral influence, mediating between staff and leadership, but he wonders now if he “should

have just stayed out of the way.” Had he not called “people down from pure hate or misunderstandings,” people may have left the organization sooner, giving them opportunity to suffer less dysfunction. He said, “I didn’t have full knowledge of where this was going, but after the fact, those were people who might have been used to bring sanity” by leaving.

The founder did finally leave the organization, according to Deirdre. She suggested counseling to the founder, but she does not know if the founder ever “followed through.” However, she explained,

She just picked up and left. Some part of her family was visiting in March or February a couple years ago. When they left, she went with them. At that time, she was going to seek help. I have just never seen her since. The mission had been working with her trying to get her towards retirement which they finally accomplished these last couple months, to cut all ties with her.

Graham has no regrets of taking the stand he took. He argued, “I don’t think you can, as a Christian in good conscience, be aware of something that’s going wrong and not try to address it.” However, he added, “It may be in a resignation letter.” It was many years later that the board of directors for the organization acted against the founder, firing him, but only after he was once again accused of sexual harassment.

Harris said the board chairman was voted out as the leader of the board of directors of the organization. However, he is still a member of the board. He spoke positively of the new board chairman and the new director of the organization. However, Frances explained the board chairman is still with the organization as chairman. But, there “has been significant turn over the past two years.” She said, “There were 13 board members when I was terminated. Currently, only six of those remain.” Though Frances is

unsure of the reasons for some of them leaving, “some at least were directly related to what happened to me.”

Eugene’s CEO, as explained above, was fired by the board of directors a couple years after Eugene’s forced resignation. Eugene believes his attempt to challenge the CEO did have an impact as his voice was added to other staff that the board finally listened to when it took steps against the CEO.

Frances noted the impact the experience has had on her own ministry, particularly in terms of widening her “networks.” She explained, “I think it furthered my attention to the margins, people who are weak, parts of the worldwide movement that we might not give attention to.” And she said that it has “lessened my attention on financial security.”

Summary

As each participant sought to engage in ministry, despite often being thwarted by their supervisor, they each saw results in their ministry. The impact they experienced was often limited, particularly in the long-term; however, all the participants noted the work of God in their lives through their ministry with the organization. In the following section, the participants describe ways they pursued “shalom” both in the midst of their ministry under toxic leadership and as they sought healing from the unwelcome effects of their service under their supervisor.

Pursuing Shalom

The final research question sought to determine how employees, who practice differentiation with toxic supervisors, pursued shalom in their lives and work. Both during and after their work with their organizations, the interviewees sought peace in a variety of ways. Sometimes, getting away from the toxic environment was important to

their wellbeing and sometimes it was engaging in subversion or confrontation that was necessary for peace. For most, a community of fellow-sufferers or those who would listen and advise was indispensable. In each case, shalom was difficult to achieve until they were free from the organization or the toxic leader.

Shalom in Conflict

Deirdre negatively learned from the example of the founder of the organization she served. She said, the founder would treat the national workers as “subhuman.” She said, “It was not nice. She would come out, open her door and stand there and scream at the top of her lungs.” Deirdre said, “I don’t treat them the way she did.” Despite all the frustrations Deirdre endured with the founder, she said,

In all of it – for all human beings are fallible in so many ways – I think there are so many good people out there doing different kinds of mission work and the few I have become familiar with and friends with are good people...But we’re all human beings with so many trials and tribulations that may be separate from what we are doing for the mission that affect our lives. I don’t want to give up. I didn’t and it’s my desire to be there until I’m done.

She noted that her mother passed away when she was only thirteen-years-old. Deirdre recounted the time her father asked her if he should get someone to help with “cleaning and cooking.” Deirdre said, “No, I’m going to do it.” She noted, “I have always been that way...I just plowed through these circumstances.” She was sure she had moments she wanted to “run away” from the mission, but as the guardian for a small boy from the country, it just never worked out to leave to another mission in the country where she serves. Since the departure of the founder, Deirdre says she is able now to “follow through with things” that the founder “didn’t allow me to do.” She said she has always

“needed to be doing something for somebody...I need to be needed,” and that motivated her during her time under the founder’s toxic leadership.

As he suffered through the conflicts with the CEO, the CEO’s wife, and the founders of the organization, Adam said he would “go home and go to bed and get up the next day.” He said, he would try to think of them as like himself: sinful and broken. In addition, when speaking of his pastoral role at the organization, Adam said, “I think the comradery of suffering became a comradery of healing as well.” He was convinced the sharing in the experience with others who were suffering at the time was important in the healing.

As Harris was facing his crisis, he found direction and comfort in knowing, “The one who called you is faithful and he will do it,” quoting Paul’s letter to the Thessalonians.⁵²² Harris considered God’s calling to be fundamental to confronting a “traumatic experience.” He said, “I didn’t come here because it was my idea. The Lord God called, he summoned me.” Harris also received the encouragement of friends, including well-known pastors who sought out individuals on the board or staff to help mediate the conflict. Though their efforts were refused by those they contacted, their support was encouraging to Harris.

Frances said she felt prepared for the experience as she experienced similar toxicity in a few other similar situations. She said it “gave me some perspective in how to navigate what was happening.” She said it “emboldened” her. Like Harris, Frances was

⁵²² 1 Thessalonians 5:24.

hearing from former trustees and friends of the ministry who were supporting her. She said, “Several people in those positions have been fully supportive and critical of the organization throughout.” Family and friends have not necessarily been “critical of the organization,” but have been “supportive of us, praying for us.” One former board member showed solidarity with Frances, rejecting an invitation to a planning meeting, to which Frances should have been invited but had not, “I can’t look Frances in the face if she isn’t involved in the meeting.” In addition, Frances said, “In the intense heat of the struggle...I had...a sense of the Spirit of God” as she awoke at night with “adrenaline flowing and praying.” She would take long “prayer walks...that were really quite moving.” In fact, she needed “time to recover physically a few months later because of sleep loss.” Though “feeling a bit lost as to what was next,” Frances was “really more focused on the ministry of the organization as well as the hurt [the situation was causing] people who had been involved in the organization for many years” rather than what hurt it was causing Frances’ family.

Shalom in Departure

Approximately a year after her termination from her organization, Frances said, “By the grace of God [I was] not looking over my shoulder and not wishing things were the way they were.” Francis relayed how an acquaintance, who had gone through a similar experience, had remarked that it was over two years before she was “starting to feel like myself again.” She was told by advisors that following these kinds of events, “You have got to be easy on yourself. You’ve got to realize the depth of hurt and confusion that’s gone on and it’s going to take months.” Part of the healing process has been seeing purpose in where God has brought her following the experience. She said, “I

am genuinely excited about and glad for and grateful for where we are now.” Frances noted she no longer believes she should be “critical of what has happened.” She said that “differences, fights, arguments, are not going to be helpful” to “the wider witness of who we are as a Christian community and a Christian mission.”

Graham remembered the first “two or three-month period” following the firings that everybody (who was fired) was “still in town and we would worship together.” He said, “We would have bible study together and so we had a lot of debriefing time together.” In addition, Graham was hired after two years of job searching by a church whose pastor had died. He said, “They were a wounded church...and I was a wounded puppy. We got together and licked each other’s wounds and I think that was good for both of us.” Graham said he began to “trust God’s will to direct [his] life again.” He also said writing a book about his experience helped “close the door firmly on that chapter” and he felt “100% whole again” despite having carried much “bitterness and cynicism” with him for “a lot of years.” He said it took him “20 years to get over this” and he added, “Don’t take 20 years to get over it. That isn’t worth it!” However, he believes the suffering he faced enabled him to go back to pastoring a church, what he believes was his “first love” and “first call.”

Casandra said,

I came to a point where I knew in my heart that spiritually, emotionally and professionally that ‘the person I am’ did not line up with who and what the organization leadership had demonstrated to me in the past two years. While, I loved the ‘mission of [my organization] and my role, I could no longer turn a blind eye to the leadership decisions and how the organization leadership treated its students and especially “the help” (i.e. nationals in general). The hierarchy of power and status based on race (“we are white and therefore superior”) and the lack of grace, humility, and servant leadership displayed by the organization leadership was directly opposite of everything I believed that God called me to be and

how he called me to serve. I could no longer be part of an organization that manipulated Scripture to promote its own agenda.

Ben and Casandra said they never “questioned their decision to leave.” They had comfort in knowing God had called them “there for that time...God has equipped us with the mission of what He wanted us to do. We felt we accomplished what we were there to do.” An important period of healing came when they returned to the United States. There was a “mission group” at one of their supporting churches who cared for them. Casandra said, “They just really embraced us and were willing to help.” Ben added, “They wanted to know how we were doing. How they could help us.” The group asked Ben and Casandra to come meet with them to “debrief with them, not to pick apart the ins and outs of the organization, but for us. It wasn’t about trying to fix what we left behind.” He said most “people didn’t really understand” and that made this mission group’s support so helpful. Casandra added, “There was a measure of failure you wrestle with. We moved our entire lives and sold our house...and two years? But, we were never made to feel like failures.” She noted, “We were able to make a difference at that time and whether it was two years or 20 years, we gave our best and we left when we could no longer operate there in good conscience before God and our supporters.” Ben added they were thankful for the “blessings of the students” and relationships with the other missionaries, but also for the CEO, despite his failures, for opening “the door for us to come.”

When Adam had turned in his resignation, but was still working with the organization, he said, “I [was] finally able to live with myself because I had watched so much abuse, excused so much abuse, explained to others the abuse they were enduring, but here it now visited me...that enabled me to say, ‘I’m with them, not you anymore.’”

As he seeks shalom, he said, “I think it is a lifelong process in terms of forgiveness.” He explained,

I have had to realize that forgiveness is not necessarily something communicated to the other but is settled in my own mind. I have had to conclude that forgiveness is selfish. So, that I can move on and cease to allow these people to have control over my thoughts, my daydreams, my conversations, my fantasies of what could have been.

Adam had the “impression for there to be forgiveness, there had to be a sit down...there had to be some personal interaction.” But, he realized “that would be impossible knowing...they wouldn’t come with the same motives in place. Theirs would be to just keep things quiet.” He believes forgiveness is “being able to accept their humanity and to...not hold them accountable” for how his “life has gone.” He said it has been very difficult, but he “has made great progress in that arena.”

Deirdre is struggling to forgive the founder. She believes her difficulties with getting the young boy she is caring for to the United States may be because of the founder’s failure. She added, “at some point, hopefully, I can say all is well and I have forgiven her.”

Isaac and his family, following their termination from their organization, moved for two months to a city nearby in the country in which they served. During that time, they sought shalom by seeking greater “cultural clarity” through the help of national friends who were “reading it from the outside.” They could say to them, “Just cut the crap. Tell us what’s going on.” However, these “counselors...didn’t know why it was going on.” When they returned to the United States, they “hid down at a condo on the beach.” While there, they “tried to sort out what was next” as a family. He said they “grew a lot as a family.” He believed it could have been a “bad time for relationships,” but he said it helped he and his wife to be more “vulnerable and go through a lot of hard

things and not really have the right answers.” He believes the experience was “great, even the bad stuff.” He said it “helped us understand ourselves better...strip away some of the ways we read the bible obviously from our culture.” Isaac and his family have been encouraged by God’s sovereign work in their lives throughout the experience. He explained he had received a call from a former employer on the same day they received the “move on” call from the founder. Though he did not return that call, they had a position waiting for him when he and his family had finished working things out in the condo. In addition, there was a certain vindication when the young man, who they enjoyed working with so much and then lied about them to the founder, “ended up back in the states a year later than us.” He had experienced the same difficulty with the founder as Isaac’s family. Isaac had the opportunity to tell the young man he forgave him for lying. However, when they returned, their own mission-sending board was not very helpful, “They didn’t have any sort of understanding or context.” Even a pastor they sought counsel with was not very helpful. But Isaac has found the most healing when they “talk to people who have been through similar situations.” In addition, Isaac said time in prayer and reading the Bible was very helpful, “Be broken for a while without a whole lot of self-help or guidance. I guess that is what kind of helped us.”

Eugene did not doubt “it was the Lord’s will for us to” resign from his organization. He said, “It was just a matter of trusting him.” In the long term, “It had no long lasting detrimental effect.” He added he did not have negative attitudes towards mission, though he “wasn’t interested in missions leadership anymore.” He said, “Leadership positions tie your hands more than give you more ability to serve.” He hopes to retire soon and use his Social Security benefits to do short term missions work.

Harris noticed he “was talking about the story more” than he wanted. “But,” he said, “I realized I had to talk about it. I had to tell the story in order to gain mastery over it. Otherwise, it was inside of me and it didn’t make sense.” When the new board chairman and new president of the organization asked for Harris’ forgiveness, he knew he had no “option” but to forgive knowing he had received forgiveness from the Lord. He realized he had many advantages having been “born into a loving family” – five generations of pastors – and “having a healthy body and healthy mind.” He recognized them as “gifts from God.” These realizations helped him have “compassion” for the chairman and he felt like he “had to honor the relationship.” He said, “I was grateful for a group of friends that came around initially and then helped us.” A few months later, he and his wife “brought together a group of people we called the ‘discernment team’ just to help us think about what God might have for us next.”

Participant Recommendations for Shalom

The participants of the study provided guidance to others who are facing toxic leadership. Graham says of confronting toxic leaders, “I still think we...owe our allegiance to God and so you go forward...Take as much fact and support with you, lay it out, then be prepared to duck!” He went on to say, “Most organizations don’t want to hear it, but I still think we have a responsibility.”

Harris said, “Bring a group a people around you. You will need someone to do triage immediately and initially. Just to protect you from yourself; you are in a very vulnerable position.” Graham would not suggest going to “Christian boards” as “you can’t count on the goodwill even of a Christian board.” He added, “They’re just too afraid...especially in voluntary organizations.” Though the board may be made up of

“men and women of goodwill,” they are not usually “professionals” and may simply “have great affection for the founder.” Harris argued, “They just want everybody to get along. And they are not going to be able to do the hard stuff.” So, his conclusion is to “get a lawyer.” He suggests, “Deal with it in a professional, legal way.”

Eugene similarly suggested, “Don’t believe God’s will is spoken through the agency leaders.” If working for a mission, he suggests being “very close to people in [your] church so [you] can talk about what’s going on.” He added, “Don’t go into it naïve. It’s no paradise. There are just as many good and bad leaders in missions as anywhere else. Keep your eyes open. Don’t just be quite as trusting.”

Summary

Shalom was found by each participant through a variety of means. Of importance to each was the recognition of God’s sovereign working through their experiences. Though suffering greatly under toxic leadership, each expressed a knowledge of how God was clearing the way for them to new ministry. The most common source of healing to these participants was interaction with and care from a group of friends or family members who listened and did not judge their circumstances. Spending much time talking about the experience provided help in the healing process. In time, most of the participants found a peace that surpassed understanding.

Summary of Findings

This chapter explored the experiences of nine participants who served Christian organizations under toxic leadership. Interviews with each participant sought to understand their theology as they engaged their supervisor, the risks they faced as they

sought to be self-differentiated, the impact they had on the organization, and finally, how they found peace in their relational conflicts and then freedom from the toxic leader.

In the next chapter, the researcher will conclude his findings, bringing together the experiences of the participants, the findings of the literature reviewed, and his own personal experiences under toxic leadership.

Chapter Five

Discussion and Recommendations

In a perfect world, every part of the body would function in the way in which it should. Like Paul describes in 1 Corinthians, every Christian, gifted by God, has a place in God's kingdom-building work.⁵²³ Some believe they were called by God to pursue that kingdom-building work as an employee in a Christian parachurch organization as my wife and I did. Sometimes those Christian organizations are led by a charismatic, charming, and visionary leader. However, some of those organizations are an environment full of toxins created by an abusive CEO, founder, or board. That is not the way it is supposed to be, as Plantinga entitled his book about our broken world.⁵²⁴

Business leadership has been transformed in many ways over the past 100 years. What grew out of Henry Ford's mechanistic, and largely authoritarian, factory phenomenon in the early 1900s, has given way, in some cases, to a more egalitarian business leadership, concerned with team efforts of problem-solving.⁵²⁵ As a result, the process of problem-solving has become a focus for some experts in business leadership. These authors suggest employers build upon the gifts of their employees to create

⁵²³ 1 Corinthians 12:1-31.

⁵²⁴ Cornelius Plantinga, *Not the Way It's Supposed to Be: A Breviary of Sin* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1996).

⁵²⁵ Edmondson, *Teaming*, Chapter 1 (locations 589–90), Kindle.

solutions. They suggest employers provide an emotionally safe workplace where engagement at all levels of the hierarchy can strengthen the production of the company.⁵²⁶ This kind of safe interaction between employer and employee, according to the experts, can only take place when leaders have a genuine appreciation for the subordinate and humble ability to hear criticism of their own ideas.⁵²⁷

However, there are bosses and supervisors who, due to character flaws or pathologies, are demanding, deceptive, demeaning, and eschew the gifts of their employees. Unfortunately, these abusive leaders are just as present in Christian organizations as in non-Christian ones.⁵²⁸ Many descriptions of abusers, psychopaths, and narcissists overlap with how some Christian missionaries and parachurch workers describe their own leaders. The nine participants communicated the brokenness they experienced in Christian organizations.

When I began this study, I wanted to know how Christian employees should respond to these sources of fear and frustration in their workplaces. How are employees to interact Christianly with these bosses who often seem no better than the psychopaths Hare says occupy secular board rooms?⁵²⁹ How or should the employees confront their bosses, who claim Christ as Lord, yet seem oblivious to the relational damage they are

⁵²⁶ Edmondson, *Teaming*, Chapter 8 (locations 5043–44), Kindle.

⁵²⁷ Lencioni, *The Five Dysfunctions of a Team*, 196.

⁵²⁸ Hay, “The Toxic Mission Organisation: Fiction or Fact?,” 1.

⁵²⁹ Chamorro-Premuzic, “Why Bad Guys Win at Work.”

causing with those under their authority? The purpose of this study was to explore how employees of Christian organizations practice self-differentiation while interacting with toxic supervisors. The following research questions guided this study,

1. What are the biblical-theological principles employees of Christian organizations use to frame their practice of self-differentiation while interacting with toxic supervisors?
2. What are the challenges employees of Christian organizations face when practicing self-differentiation while interacting with toxic supervisors?
3. What is the impact on Christian organizations of employees practicing self-differentiation while interacting with toxic supervisors?
4. How do employees of Christian organizations who practice self-differentiation with toxic supervisors pursue shalom in their workplace?

Summary of the Study and Findings

This study reviewed relevant literature in three areas and analyzed interview data from nine current or former employees of Christian organizations. The literature review focused on leadership, the theology of conflict management in relation to submission to authority, and self-differentiation. Many scholars agree that effective leadership is, in part, the result of sincere humility and the development of employees' gifts. In addition, the identification and diagnosis of toxic leaders and forms of dysfunction in leadership were considered from the texts. Second, biblical-theological literature analyzing four scripture passages correlated to relational conflict were studied: Matthew 18, Matthew 7, 1 Peter 2, and Psalm 55. Third, literature was reviewed that discussed how employees practice self-differentiation in work environments made toxic by supervisors.

Nine participants who served Christian organizations under toxic leadership were interviewed. Interviews with the participants sought to understand their theology as they engaged in conflict with their supervisor. Analysis was made of the risks taken by each

participant when acting with self-differentiation and the impact they had on the organization. Finally, the researcher asked how they found peace in their relational conflicts and freedom from the toxic leader's abuse.

Discussion of Findings

Graham, a former director of a large parachurch organization, thought becoming part of a Christian mission organization was like being part of a family. Like other participants in the study, he expected to share similar goals and relate to the organization's founder with at least some intimacy as brothers in Christ. What he experienced, when he needed to confront the founder for sexually harassing female employees, was quite different. Like the supervisors of the other participants, Graham's boss was unresponsive to criticism and unwilling to consider his character flaws. I have met many people who share the frustration Graham and other participants felt when they discovered their boss, rather than feeding sheep, was "feeding on the sheep," as one church worker described.

The following section discusses the research question's findings, accounting for the interviews, literature, my own experience, and my conversations with fellow-sufferers.

Biblical-Theological Principles of Engagement

Edwin Friedman, who wrote extensively about self-differentiation, argues, those who focus on their own integrity and steer away from seeking to manipulate the actions of others, have the ability to impact anxious environments and are less likely to be caught

up in the anxiety present in the relationships.⁵³⁰ In his writings, he recommends what sounds like stoicism;⁵³¹ however, other authors have drawn correlations between his psychological views and a biblical form of differentiation seen in Jesus' actions.

Herrington, Creech, and Taylor say, "Differentiation is the ability to remain connected in relationship to significant people in our lives and yet, not have our reactions and behavior determined by them."⁵³² They note Jesus' unwillingness to do what people wanted when it conflicted with his father's will. Herrington, et. al., suggest Jesus was unmoved by the crowds' pleas if it was contrary to correct practice.⁵³³

The participants in this study exhibited many traits of self-differentiation. Though struggling emotionally with the treatment they received from their toxic supervisors, in often significant ways, each displayed biblical integrity in their responses to the dysfunction. Each thoughtfully considered how biblical ethics should form their engagement, though coming to different conclusions.

Self-Differentiation in the Fire

When experiencing a supervisor who practices toxic or abusive, leadership, the employees' ability to remain connected in the relationship without allowing their anxious interactions to determine their reactions and behavior makes it possible for the employee to act with biblical integrity. Though the participants sought a change in their toxic boss'

⁵³⁰ Friedman, *A Failure of Nerve*, Introduction (locations 341–42), Kindle.

⁵³¹ The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines stoicism as an "indifference to pleasure or pain."

⁵³² Herrington, *The Leader's Journey*, Chapter 2 (locations 273–74), Kindle.

⁵³³ Ibid., 322–23.

behavior, in time they realized they were powerless to change the supervisor. The participants were only able to take actions to govern their own responses. This kind of attached-detachment in relationships with toxic individuals is difficult to attain. As Friedman says, “It is a lifetime project with no one ever getting more than seventy percent there.”⁵³⁴ It is challenging to retain a concern for others as Jesus did and reject the impulse to be controlled by their emotional fluctuations.

Though I would suggest every participant had significant self-differentiation, everyone also had significant struggles with fear and emotional pain when facing the abuse of their supervisor. In addition, most suffered from the physical effects of stress in some way.

When engaged in ministry under a toxic boss, subordinates may ask many questions. Because this study’s participants sought to be responsive to scripture, they asked biblical questions of how to respond in the midst of the fire of trial. In my own experience, some of those questions focused on Bible passages that, at least appear to, limit the scope of reactions to the leader. Are employees required to confront their boss for sin as Matthew 18:15 seems to suggest, even when they have seen previous, unhealthy responses? Such as humiliating, demoting, or even, firing the employee who confronted? In my experience, I wondered if the CEO was beyond my criticism, as 1 Peter 2:18 might be applied? Was it acceptable for me to call a professing believer a

⁵³⁴ Friedman, *A Failure of Nerve*, Chapter 5 (locations 3376–77), Kindle.

“pig,” as Matthew 7:5 seems to recommend? Or, even worse, should I pray for the demise of my leader as David seemed to do in Psalm 55?

Both the literature and the participants’ experiences revealed an expectation that two individuals who are professing Christians should follow Matthew 18:15-20 as a process for resolving sin issues. Also, submission to those who have authority, like a supervisor, was important in both the literature and interviews (1 Peter 2:18-25). The literature and participants acknowledged the harm of judging a sibling in the faith. However, viewing their boss as a pig, as Matthew 7:1-6 says, was rare among the interviewees. The imprecatory Psalm 55, though reflected upon by some participants, created discomfort for those under toxic supervisors.

Matthew 18 and the Toxic Supervisor

Matthew 18 was considered most among the participants in the study. In my own experience, it was a fundamental struggle for my family. Watching as others were run away from the mission for disagreeing with the CEO gave us reason to hesitate to confront him. We had sold our house. We were dependent on the organization to provide housing for our family and school for our children. We joined the organization expecting to serve until our retirement. Most the literature took for granted its applicability to all Christian relationships, as most of the participants took for granted its applicability to their interactions with their toxic supervisor.

One writer and one participant, however, questioned the use of Matthew 18:15-20 in conflicts with someone of greater authority. In addition, one participant believed he was primarily responsible to use the principles in Matthew 18 with those under his leadership. The commentator, France, suggested it was intended for professing Christians

on “equal footing.” He argued Jesus was giving directions to two professing believers, neither of which has greater authority.⁵³⁵ Frances said it did not apply to non-ecclesiastical environments, though she did seek to communicate early in the conflict with the board Chairman in a private, one-on-one manner. Ben believed he was not responsible to confront his supervisor, the CEO, using these principles, but did have the opportunity and responsibility to use the Matthew 18 principles in his interactions with his subordinates.

When I began this study, I expected to find more written about this question. Would Jesus apply Matthew 18 to an employee, under the authority of a Christian boss? I expected to find that most would agree with France; this passage applies only to two brothers, equal in authority, and under ecclesiastical disciplinary structure. However, this was not the case. In one discussion, my advising professor shared another perspective. He suggested Matthew 18 be applied in these circumstances, but in a more principled nature. Rather than legalistically demanding its application in the specific steps outlined by Jesus, the process should consider the non-threatening nature (to the offender) of one-on-one confrontation, and proceed to broaden the scope of involvement of those who have the authority to discipline the non-repentant.

As I interviewed the participants, this is in fact what I found. Despite disagreements in interpretation, most of the writers and participants believed the process of an employee approaching a boss, who has sinned against him, should be modeled on

⁵³⁵ France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 691.

Matthew 18. However, the steps of going to the offender one-on-one, then taking one or two others along, and then telling it to the church was not a clear or simple process for any of the participants. There was no consistency in how they applied the passage to their given circumstances except in principle.

The participants said it was rare the boss responded with a change of behavior to the one-on-one confrontations. Adam and Ben, for example, noted their CEOs always justified or explained away their sin, often blame-shifting. They saw this happening both in interactions with him and as others approached the boss. Deirdre and Eugene explained their bosses would not respond at all. Frances' boss cut off all communication with her.

Sometimes the second step of bringing two or three along to confront the boss was unclear. In most cases, there were multiple individuals confronting the leader at different times one-on-one, though Graham said he began immediately with this step when he brought two others with him to confront the CEO on sexual harassment charges.

Few of the participants took the matter to a higher authority like the ministry's board of directors. In none of the experiences did the leader repent of their destructive sin after various kinds of confrontations. And in every case, no formal church authority was informed, such as the local church to which the leader was a member. As parachurch and mission organizations, no one ecclesiastical governing body was given authority by the organizations to act as "the church" found in Matthew 18. Considering this inconsistency in applying the third step of this biblical text to these situations, Ben suggested the only authority he believed he could be accountable to were the stakeholders in his ministry – his donors.

Judgments and Naming It – Matthew 7:1-6

In Matthew 7, Jesus is finishing the sermon on the mount. He tells the disciples that they must be careful in their judgments of others, always considering their own sin first. He suggests the offended party view the sins of the other as a little sliver of wood, while viewing their own sin as a log. He then goes on to say they should not throw their pearls before pigs.⁵³⁶ Not only would this be a waste of time and effort (the pigs will trample them), Jesus explains, it is also dangerous; the pig may “turn to attack you.”⁵³⁷

The commentators agreed, there should be humble self-evaluation when determining to confront another Christian in sin. The commentator, Hendriksen said, “A person may be ever so good in his own eyes; yet if he is not humble, then, as God sees him, there is a beam in his eye, the beam of self-righteousness.”⁵³⁸ Lenski said any judgments made about others should not be made in hypocrisy.⁵³⁹ Graham, a participant, said the team that confronted the founder of the organization worked very hard to remain free of believing they were “bastions of virtue.” Adam tried to keep this same attitude when struggling with the offences of the CEO or founder of the organization.

However, Frances said Jesus’ exhortation to be careful about judging others should not stop individuals from speaking when there is wrongdoing. As Eugene noted, confronting the offender is important for the leader’s growth. This in turn, is good for the

⁵³⁶ Matthew 7:6.

⁵³⁷ Ibid.

⁵³⁸ Hendriksen, *Exposition of the Gospel According to Matthew*, 358.

⁵³⁹ Lenski, *Interpretation of St. Matthew’s Gospel*, 288.

organization and the participants all believed they should seek the wellbeing of the ministry. They believed overlooking gross negligence by the leader was considered unconscionable.

Just as Matthew 7:6 had always confused me regarding application, the participants provided little application of it. Only one participant considered confrontation with his boss as throwing “pearls to the pigs.” Following my resignation from a Christian organization, a pastor friend advised my wife and me to consider Matthew 7:6 when deciding whether to have discussions about our resignation with the CEO. Before that time, I had only considered sharing God’s word with someone who strongly opposed as a waste of time, what I understood to be “trampling under foot.”⁵⁴⁰ However, it was pointed out to me that the pig may also “turn and attack” as is mentioned by Jesus in the text.⁵⁴¹ Matthew Henry, commenting on this verse, said self-protection is one of Jesus’ own laws, therefore, it is important to recognize, when confronting an individual, if it will be self-destructive.⁵⁴²

Submission and the Harsh Boss – 1 Peter 2:18-25

There was significant disagreement among both commentators and participants regarding the application of 1 Peter 2:18-25. Peter instructs “household servants” to voluntarily submit in action and attitude to their master.⁵⁴³ Stibbs and Henry disagree on

⁵⁴⁰ Matthew 7:6.

⁵⁴¹ Ibid.

⁵⁴² Henry, *Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible*, V:89.

⁵⁴³ Stibbs, *The First Epistle General of Peter*, 110.

the identification of household servants. Where Henry argues broadly for any employee,⁵⁴⁴ Stibbs suggests the Greek terminology means a slave, one who is under “absolute ownership and uncontrolled power.”⁵⁴⁵ These distinctions are very important to employees of Christian organizations. It can mean the difference between continuing to work for a toxic boss in silence or confronting and possibly leaving the organization.

Among the participants, there was disagreement on the application of these verses if the verses were considered at all. Ben believed the authority to whom he was accountable were the donors to his ministry, not the CEO. However, his wife, Casandra, disagreed, saying they were under the authority of the ministry leaders. Graham, when asked about this passage, said he was told by others, the founder is “God’s chosen.” These critics may have been referring to when David refuses to allow his servant to kill King Saul.⁵⁴⁶ The supporters of the founder were arguing it was unbiblical for Graham’s team to challenge the founder because of the founder’s position of authority. Adam noted that he and some employees of his organization at times believed the ministry belonged to the founder or CEO; therefore, they should simply live with the difficulties created by them.

Sproul argued that, as Peter and the apostles refused to obey the dictates of the “senate of the people of Israel” in Acts 5:27-32 when told not to “teach in [Jesus’] name,”

⁵⁴⁴ Henry, *Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible*, V:101.

⁵⁴⁵ Stibbs, *The First Epistle General of Peter*, 114.

⁵⁴⁶ 1 Samuel 26:11.

so the authority of any man is not absolute over God's people.⁵⁴⁷ However, the commentators would only consider disobedience appropriate in the case where the employee was ordered by the boss to do something against biblical ethics. The literature agreed the apostle Peter taught obedience would possibly bring change in the leader's behavior. They said the goal of Peter's instruction to submit to a harsh "master," is to produce conviction of sin in that master.⁵⁴⁸ The commentaries pointed to Jesus' example of patience when suffering violence. As Peter writes at the end of the passage, "Doing good and suffering for it" may bring conviction to a harsh boss.

Yet, Astrauskaite, et. al., noted the dangers involved in engaging a toxic boss or seeking cooperation from him. They said it may make matters worse. Jesus was, after all, crucified in the end. As Sproul said, "We cannot control what other people do."⁵⁴⁹ Experts in abuse give little or no hope that silent submission will ever have this intended effect on an abuser's behavior.

Imprecatory Praying – Psalm 55

The final passage discussed with the participants and considered in the literature was Psalm 55. Like Matthew 7:6, there was apparent discomfort both among commentators and participants in the judgmental character of this passage. In my own experience, it was not until serving under a toxic boss and doing this research that I began

⁵⁴⁷ Sproul, *1-2 Peter*, 78.

⁵⁴⁸ Howley, Ellison, and Bruce, *New Layman's Bible Commentary*, 1636.

⁵⁴⁹ Ibid, 76.

to understand the imprecatory Psalms. Where, in Matthew 7, Jesus calls those who do not respond well to confrontation, pigs, David in Psalm 55, takes it a step further, praying for the judgment and destruction of his enemies. He says with apparent assurance, “But you, O God, will cast them down into the pit of destruction.”⁵⁵⁰

For several of the participants, David’s struggle was very familiar, as it was for my wife and me. David noted that the enemy, that is bringing “oppression and fraud” to the city and taunting him, is not an unknown person. He is David’s friend. David calls him “my equal, my companion, my familiar friend.”⁵⁵¹ Some of the participants believed they had good relationships with their leader. Many, like my family, worshiped, recreated, and socialized with their leader. Again, the Christian organization is sometimes a family-like setting. Adam believed his relationship with the CEO was professional and respectful, but he also recalled being taken to dinner and enjoying family outings together. Graham said, “We really, really thought we were a Christian family.” In my experience, our family went on vacations, to dinner, to concerts, and to church with the leaders of our organization.

When the toxins appeared, the participants were often surprised and always confused by the dysfunction in their relationship. They, like abuse victims Bancroft describes, were perplexed by the cruelty displayed by these “friends.”⁵⁵² However, like

⁵⁵⁰ Psalm 55:23.

⁵⁵¹ Psalm 55:13.

⁵⁵² Bancroft, *Why Does He Do That?*, 68.

Guthrie, et. al., the participants were hesitant to pray as David prayed in their situation. Guthrie, et. al., only allow praying for judgment on enemies in David's case because David was God's anointed king, which the authors distinguished from normal relational conflict.

Graham specifically sought to keep such thoughts of adversary or enemy out of the team's thinking as they went through the steps of confrontation, and to this day refuses to use this terminology. Though Harris would not apply the Psalmist's prayer of judgment to his circumstances, he noted being told by a well-known pastor of an experience when an elder in the pastor's church was creating division and strife. People were praying for the pastor and the elder died unexpectedly. However, the pastor was unwilling to suggest it was due to God's judgment.

One of the commentators, Vos, believes it is appropriate to ask for God's judgment on evil. He says, "The total destruction of evil...is the prerogative of the sovereign God, and it is right not only to pray for the accomplishment of this destruction, but even to assist in effecting it when commanded to do so by God himself."⁵⁵³

Risks of Engagement

My research into serving under toxic leaders led easily into the fields of business and psychology. In the secular workplace, there is much written on bullying and toxic employers. Such writers as de Vries, Austrauskaite, Onorato, and Lipman-Blumen have done much to diagnose workplace leader dysfunction. In psychology, there are writers

⁵⁵³ Vos, "The Ethical Problem of the Imprecatory Psalms," 135.

describing the character and personalities of those who abuse and mistreat others such as de Vries, Bancroft, and Simon. These authors have helped clear up much of the confusion for those suffering under toxic leaders. The stories of this study's participants assist us to understand the emotional, spiritual, and physical upheaval brought by their unique, yet common, experiences.

When a Christian's livelihood is dependent on the favor of their boss, there is an obvious risk in creating friction, through confrontation, in that relationship. The potential loss is often too great a risk to take when determining whether to confront a toxic leader. Sometimes, the loss entails more than a salary. In the case of overseas mission work, the missionary's housing, children's schooling, and social interactions may also be at stake. As more than one participant experienced, being seen as a failure by donors keeps Christian employees silent and refusing to confront their boss.

The literature and interviews reveal important lessons to be learned. Unfortunately, little has been written from a biblical perspective regarding these destructive people. Allender, Simon, Langberg, and Chapman are among the few. Those leaders who leave a trail of broken relationships behind them need to be identified and those who suffer from their dysfunctions must be given aid.

Toxic Personalities

As my wife and I began to experience a particularly toxic boss, we had little understanding of how someone could be incredibly malicious in one moment and act like our best friend soon after. The interplay of charm and cruelty is a common experience of those who face off with toxic leaders. These confusing behaviors make it difficult at times to identify abusive individuals. Published by the American Psychiatric Association,

the *DSM-IV-TR* describes various personality disorders, one of the possible problems a toxic boss may have. The Association maintains that a personality disorder is “an enduring pattern of inner experience that deviates markedly from the expectations of the individual’s culture.”⁵⁵⁴ The authors agreed that a personality disorder is a consistent attitude, not simply a one-time failure to act nicely.⁵⁵⁵

Most writers would not use the term, “evil” to describe these people, but Christian psychologist, Dan Allender does. He says, “All of us are capable of doing evil things, but evil people are driven by a self-interest that is so heartless, conscious, and cruel that it delights in stealing from others the lifeblood of their soul.”⁵⁵⁶ Greenfield further defines evil people, saying, “The central defect of evil persons is not their sin but their refusal to acknowledge it.”⁵⁵⁷ The literature was clear that these dysfunctional people were deeply unbalanced.

Whether the toxic leader has a personality disorder or is better diagnosed as an “abuser,” they are exceptional manipulators and refuse to humbly admit their failures.⁵⁵⁸ Though the bosses of each participant had their own characteristic weaknesses and the participants did not all readily describe their supervisor as “evil,” none of the leaders

⁵⁵⁴ American Psychiatric Association, *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders DSM-IV-TR*, 689.

⁵⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 686.

⁵⁵⁶ Allender and Longman, *Bold Love*, 233.

⁵⁵⁷ Greenfield and Faulkner, *The Wounded Minister*, 51, Kindle.

⁵⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

acknowledged their sins that were destroying relationships with their subordinates. None were described as self-evaluating or humble, though at times changing their decisions after consultation with the employee. Nonetheless, a change in course was a rarity.

Psychologists assure, diagnosing psychological dysfunction is not for the layperson. Alan Goldman warned, true diagnosis usually can only be made by a sufficiently trained individual.⁵⁵⁹ However, multiple texts provide useful descriptions of the characteristics found in various toxic personalities making it evident that the layman can at least try to understand the toxic personality of his boss and then be better prepared to interact with the boss.

Rather than focus on specific personality disorders as defined by the American Psychological Association, I have found it more helpful to describe the various types of toxic leadership presented in the literature and described by the participants. In Chapter Two, I described characteristics of alpha males, queen bees, abusers, bullies, autocrats, narcissists, psychopaths, and Machiavellians. Each of these personality types or leadership styles are found among CEOs, founders, and board members. Much of the literature agrees, these leaders can be very charming and gregarious. They can be friendly and driven. Machiavellian individuals can sell their vision and convince others quite readily.⁵⁶⁰ It is no wonder that they are often leaders of organizations. They can be very impressive individuals.

⁵⁵⁹ Goldman, *Transforming Toxic Leaders* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009), 11, Kindle.

⁵⁶⁰ Siegel, "Machiavellianism, MBA's and Managers: Leadership Correlates and Socialization Effect," 405.

When I began to interview Eugene, I was surprised to hear him describe the CEO of his organization as friendly, easy to get along with, visionary, and gregarious. I asked him how a toxic leader could be described this way. Over the course of the interview, it became apparent Eugene received affable treatment for most of his ten years in relationship with the leader. However, others did not. In the end, Eugene had the unfortunate experience of tasting of the bitterness others had experienced all along.

The literature was clear, often this is the case. The leaders were very specific in their abusive strategies, just as psychologists describe abusers.⁵⁶¹ Were they continually rude, abusive, manipulative, divisive, deceptive, and isolating, it would be rare that they would retain their positions of power. However, often, the leaders wielded extraordinary emotional control over their subjects by showing charm and concern for the participants, continually creating a fog of confusion, called by some psychologists “gaslighting.”⁵⁶² And often, boards were dazzled by their skills and unwilling to bring help to those under their destructive leadership.

The Failure of Boards

Though I had personally experienced a board of director’s failure, the extent of dysfunction and lack of accountability boards brought in the participants’ experiences surprised me. Whereas, the boards of these organizations were likely given authority and responsibility for keeping their CEOs and chairmen accountable, there appeared to be

⁵⁶¹ Bancroft, *Why Does He Do That?*, 68–69.

⁵⁶² Stern, “Are You Being Gaslighted?”

only one board that took that responsibility seriously. Deirdre's board apparently removed the founder from leadership, but other boards represented by the participants either did little or took steps to remove the leader when it was long overdue and many subordinates were already injured. Eugene's board took more than two years to remove the CEO. Graham's took approximately ten years. One of the toxic leaders, a board chairman, has not been removed from his board and one toxic chairman continues in his position.

Following my resignation, one stakeholder told me the organization did more harm than good. Yet, when confronted by an employee, one of the directors under the CEO suggested the leadership had done so much good, they should not be challenged. What clouds the vision of boards or others in authority such that they refuse their responsibility to remove leaders who create so much damage? What stops them from taking a stand against, what many victims would call, oppression?

The participants and literature notes how boards are often hand-picked by the leaders, particularly if those leaders are the founders of the organization. They may feel beholden to the leader for their position.⁵⁶³ Sometimes, the leader is a member of the board and, as Mulvey and Padilla suggest, it is more difficult for the board to remove one of their own.⁵⁶⁴ In Adam's experience, three of the eight board members were the founders of the ministry, and those board members who disagreed with how the

⁵⁶³ Chapman, White, and Myra, *Rising Above a Toxic Workplace*, 111.

⁵⁶⁴ Schyns and Hansbrough, *When Leadership Goes Wrong*, 59.

organization was being directed resigned from the board rather than go to battle with old friends. Lipman-Blumen quite accurately described these kinds of boards, saying they have a “clubby composition.”⁵⁶⁵

Therefore, boards are quite often not a safe place to seek relief in toxic organizations. When a board member traveled to visit one friend’s organization, my friend sought him out to explain the dysfunction of the leadership. After listening to the employee’s story, he went directly to the leader and recommended the employee be fired. When Eugene sent his document to the CEO explaining his desire to help him in his leadership, the CEO sent his letter on to the board chairman who recommended Eugene’s firing. Boards at times are not safe places for employees to seek help.

Emotional, Physical, and Spiritual Damage

The effects of working under toxic employers are legion. Allender says, “Evil...strips people of their hope.”⁵⁶⁶ A study in Sweden found up to fifteen percent of suicides committed in Sweden were “due to isolation and victimization at work.”⁵⁶⁷ The stories told by the participants, in the literature, and by the many contacts I have had with victims depict a range of damage wrought by abusive bosses. In my experience, there are emotional, physical, and spiritual effects on the subordinates of toxic bosses. Each share in some kind of injury.

⁵⁶⁵ Lipman-Blumen, *The Allure of Toxic Leaders*, 174, Kindle.

⁵⁶⁶ Allender and Longman, *Bold Love*, 241.

⁵⁶⁷ Astrauskaite, Kern, and Notelaers, “An Individual Psychology Approach to Underlying Factors of Workplace Bullying,” 223.

In a recent email, a victim described the migraines, nightmares, vomiting in staff meetings, depression, insomnia, and decision-making struggles she had while serving under a toxic church pastor. His manipulation, slander, and control had completely debilitated her by the time she resigned. My own heightened anxiety prior to leaving my organization resulted in chest pains and other physical symptoms.

One participant, Harris, described the spiritual wreckage from his experience. Having been shattered by a Christian organization, he struggled to regain an appreciation for the Bible, something that had been fundamental to his calling for more than thirty years of service in Christian ministry. A recent note from another acquaintance, who had served under a toxic pastor, said he was

in serious denial, believing the best about this guy, and actually holding out hope that he would be a significant mentor in my life. [He] caused all sorts of spiritual wreckage. [I] kept feeling completely inadequate and spiritually dismissed.

Often victims feel isolated. This can be created, in part, by the intentional actions of the abuser or by the natural result of the victim standing up to the leader while others do not. Hare says psychopaths are effective at convincing others “it is they who are suffering and the victims are to blame for their misery,” thereby gaining followers and isolating the victim.⁵⁶⁸ During our final two months with the organization, the CEO lied about how others in the organization did not agree with my wife’s and my position, seeking to isolate us from our coworkers. This may be one of the reasons that a large

⁵⁶⁸ “This Charming Psychopath,” under “A Survival Guide.”

percentage (38%) of co-workers do nothing to help the target of bullying in the workplace.⁵⁶⁹

Adam was emotionally depressed. Eugene lost his voice. Ben got hives. Harris described going through the stages of grief. Frances felt lost as to what to do next. Isaac felt a sense of betrayal. And Eugene and Harris shared the financial strain it placed on their families following their termination.

After hearing these stories, the use of the term, “oppressive” to describe a toxic boss may be too polite. The lying, manipulating, deceiving, demeaning, and controlling behavior of supervisors who practice toxic leadership has long-term emotional, physical, and spiritual effects on their subordinates.

Impact from Engagement

Despite being deeply hurt by their supervisors, the participants in this study sought to have an impact on the toxic system in which they were engaged. As Friedman argued, the self-differentiated individual has an ability to calm an anxious system.⁵⁷⁰ By rejecting the temptation to fix others and focusing on their own integrity, they have opportunities to create peace in the relationships that surround them, he argues. However, various statistics and the experiences of the participants were in agreement; though Friedman believed differentiation can calm the system, he also said, “Self-Differentiation always triggers sabotage,” particularly if the one who is not self-differentiated is a

⁵⁶⁹ Namie, “2014 WBI U.S. Workplace Bullying Survey.”

⁵⁷⁰ Friedman, *A Failure of Nerve*, Introduction (location 124), Kindle.

leader.⁵⁷¹ Friedman notes self-differentiation can create backlash from those who are not self-differentiated. The participants of this study believed they had little impact on their leaders or their organizations through their differentiated actions.

Removing Toxins

As my wife and I prepared to leave our organization, we were approached, on condition of anonymity, by a long-time employee, asking that we seek help from the board of directors. His act of subversion, as Burns, et. al., call it, encouraged a large group of leaving and former employees to send a letter to the board of directors.⁵⁷² However, there did not appear to be positive results from that letter. It would be hard to imagine the board not sitting up a little straighter when receiving a letter from a large number of current and former employees, but the signers of the letter heard of no substantive changes made.

It takes a great deal of self-differentiation to seek the removal of toxins from an organization. The effects of the negative behaviors of toxic leaders make it clear, the risks are great when acting with integrity. Though, “keeping your head down,” as my wife and I sought to do, may help for a time, in the long run there is no hiding. When the toxic leader cannot control the minds and hearts of followers, there will be conflict and at times demotions, forced resignations, and firings.

⁵⁷¹ Ibid., 4488-89.

⁵⁷² Burns, Chapman, and Guthrie, *Negotiating Ministry: The Politics of Working with People*, 9.

The participants sought justice, in the form of getting free from a toxic leader while staying in the organization, through a variety of means. Nearly all participants had confrontational experiences with their leader before asking a higher authority to become involved. In Deirdre's case, the founder of the organization was removed by the board. This was not due to her actions, but others reporting to the board. Ben, Adam, and Casandra appealed to their boards regarding the leaders, but only after leaving the organization. However, others in their organizations had approached the board prior to their families leaving the organization with no success.

According to a Workplace Bullying Institute survey, these experiences are not unusual. In a 2012 survey, only 3.5 percent of those who confronted their bullies at work experienced a change in bullying.⁵⁷³ They found that there was little recourse for those under toxic leadership. In another WBI survey, 61 percent of the victims lost their jobs, while only 15 percent of the perpetrators lost theirs.⁵⁷⁴

One acquaintance told me, rather than directly confronting a toxic leader, he resigned his position while making known the toxicity to coworkers and the board of his organization. This act of sacrifice can be effective. In his case, change was brought about by his actions added to complaints by many other employees. In my experience, there seemed to be little effect from our noting our disagreement with the leadership to

⁵⁷³ Namie, "2013 Instant Poll - D: The Timing & Results of Targets Confronting Bullies at Work."

⁵⁷⁴ Namie, "2014 WBI U.S. Workplace Bullying Survey."

coworkers, but my wife and I seemed to become a safe place for the nationals and coworkers to share their own experiences of abuse.

Burns, et. al., provide other biblical examples of non-confrontation, in particular subversion. The authors draw attention to David's subversion when he cuts off a piece of Saul's cloak. Another biblical act of subversion is the Hebrew midwives refusing to kill the children of the Jews when the king of Egypt ordered it. God "dealt well with them" for their subversion and their lying to the king about the circumstances.⁵⁷⁵ As Matthew Henry suggests in his commentary on Matthew 7:6, there is a legitimate concern for self-protection in scripture. The Hebrew midwives may have only saved the children and then died for their rebellion when confronted. But God praises their acts of faith and blesses them for both saving and subverting, through lies, the oppressive behavior of the king.

Getting Others Free from Toxins

Though Adam spoke somewhat derisively of his many attempts to help others find peace in their battles with the CEO or founder, he could encourage them to be forgiving and self-reflective. In hindsight, Adam only realized this course of action was not helpful when his ministry came to an end with the organization. He had no way to know that overlooking the leadership's sins would not change through the subordinates' submissive and gracious influence.

The greatest help the participants received came from those who came alongside them, listening to them, and believing their stories. Graham had a small group that helped

⁵⁷⁵ Exodus 1:19-20.

him confront the founder. They stood together, facing the brunt of his rejection, criticism, and final firing. As my wife and I were trying to make a decision about resigning, we met regularly with another couple to “stiffen each other’s backs,” as my wife put it. In my experience, women, who have been abused by their husbands and had the greatest success in getting free of the abuse, were surrounded by those who supported them, especially the church. It is evident both in the statistics and experience, standing with others helps strengthen their resolve to reject the abuse, an important part of being self-differentiated.

Shalom

Ben told the story of returning home from the mission field and experiencing two different responses from church supporters. Some seemed to have little concern and apparently did not understand the difficulties he and his family had faced. Ben and Casandra’s sense of failure for returning so soon from their mission seemed to be exacerbated by these responses. However, one church welcomed them back, sought them out, spent time with them, and supported them fully. This was a very healing time for them.

How do people seek shalom in the midst of the trials they are facing under toxic bosses? How do they seek shalom when they leave or are fired from their work with the Christian organization? Though the means by which the participants sought peace are varied, there are many similarities both in the literature and their experiences.

Changing Yourself

Chapman, et. al., encourage those under toxic bosses to be strong.⁵⁷⁶ They suggest the subordinate seek opportunities to “gain perspective” and develop their internal strength.”⁵⁷⁷ When in the midst of a toxic organization, several of the participants sought to gain perspective through self-evaluation. Most of the participants expressed some form of Matthew 7 as they described their reactions to the boss. They asked themselves, “Am I not a sinner just as he is?” Adam not only asked himself this question, but encouraged others to recognize the log in their own eyes as they expressed their frustrations with the boss. He wanted to help them, as he had been helped, when struggling with the same issues.

They hoped these changes in self would eventually eradicate the toxins of the leader’s actions. Friedman seems to agree. He gave the analogy of modern medicine’s work to get rid of diseases not by ridding the body of the disease, but helping the body to “limit the toxic agent’s invasiveness.”⁵⁷⁸

The participants humbly pursued a gracious response to angry outbursts, moral failure, and foolish leadership exhibited by their supervisors. Chapman, et. al., agree with this approach. They argued, responding in anger and threats to the toxic boss only “ignites the dysfunctions.”⁵⁷⁹ The participants wanted to change themselves if that would

⁵⁷⁶ Chapman, White, and Myra, *Rising Above a Toxic Workplace*, 43.

⁵⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁷⁸ Friedman, *A Failure of Nerve*, Chapter 2 (locations 1425–27), Kindle.

⁵⁷⁹ Ibid., 126.

bring peace to their circumstances. They wanted to be unhindered in pressing on in the ministry to which they believed God had called them.

Standing Straight

While self-evaluation, recognizing their own sinful tendencies, and gracious responses may limit the conflicts experienced by some with their boss, for many there comes a time when standing up to the boss is desired or necessary. They may be forced into conflict by the continual aggression of the employer or they may believe justice demands a response to the abuse as others are hurt.

Both the literature and the participants in this study noted the need to confront evil. The participants were not able to stand by continually being abused or watching others being abused. Adam sought to mediate the negative attitudes the CEO had towards other employees. Ben made clear the unreasonableness of the CEO and his wife's demands on his family. Isaac reminded the founder of their agreement when the founder began requiring unreasonable work for the mission. Harris challenged the board chairman's unwillingness to communicate. Frances sought the help of the board, challenging them to hold to their policies. Graham confronted his boss for sexual immorality.

A popular blogger, who uses the pseudonym, "Futurist Guy" says Christians are complicit if they do not speak up regarding abuses in ministry.⁵⁸⁰ There were times when the participants felt they had no choice but to challenge, even in a mild manner, the

⁵⁸⁰ "Capstone 2-8."

abuses of their leaders. O'Donnell says there are times that people “must stand firm and say to dysfunction what Gandalf said to the monstrous balrog in the Mines of Moria:

‘You cannot pass!’”⁵⁸¹ Lipman-Blumen added leaders may become even bolder in their misdirection if they are not confronted by their subordinates.⁵⁸²

Life is Too Short

However, as noted above, the risks are great. Many, who have experienced the extraordinarily destructive nature of evil people, will say it is not worth the trauma. The losses can be extensive, and many will choose to leave their job. According to Hay, 80 percent of employees who serve a toxic boss will leave their job.⁵⁸³

When discussing abuse in marital relationships, the experts are very clear; it is rare that abusers change. According to Bancroft, “It is more common for abusers to stay the same or get worse.”⁵⁸⁴ The likelihood of bringing true change in a toxic leader is minimal. Though there have been success stories, as noted in Deirdre’s experience and some of the literature, the employee may need to get free from the organization to find real healing and shalom.

Chapman, et. al., give the helpful advice that leaving is better than wasting too much of your life under abuse.⁵⁸⁵ O'Donnell agrees, saying, “Sometimes the wisest thing

⁵⁸¹ O'Donnell, “Wise as Doves and Innocent as Serpents?,” under “Final Thoughts.”

⁵⁸² Lipman-Blumen, *The Allure of Toxic Leaders*, 148, Kindle.

⁵⁸³ Hay, “The Toxic Mission Organisation: Fiction or Fact?” 4.

⁵⁸⁴ Bancroft, *Why Does He Do That?*, 359.

⁵⁸⁵ Chapman, White, and Myra, *Rising Above a Toxic Workplace*, 145.

to do is...to move on.”⁵⁸⁶ Every participant, but Deirdre, was either forcefully removed from their employment or eventually resigned. It is telling that none of the participants were able to continue their ministry under the toxic boss.

When they got free from the toxic supervisor, the participants found healing in the words of scripture, from those individuals who supported them, and in new vocational directions. Ben and Casandra’s small group of supporters has been mentioned already. They listened uncritically to Ben and Casandra. Harris intentionally gathered people around him whom he respected and would give help in finding God’s future direction for him. He also found it necessary to talk through his experience frequently with others who would listen. Eugene found healing in trusting it was God’s will for him to be out of the organization. He has found fulfillment in further ministry with other organizations. My wife and I needed to hear our story was not uncommon and that the physical and emotional struggles we were facing were not unusual. We needed safe people with whom to share our story like the others.

Forgiveness plays a key role in the healing process. Though most of the participants struggled with forgiving their tormentors, they recognized the need to give the judgment of their leaders over to God. Harris said, “Though we want to bring justice ourselves, it is important to give God the right to vengeance.” Most would agree with Kibble, who argues repentance of the offender is not a pre-requisite of forgiveness.⁵⁸⁷ In

⁵⁸⁶ O’Donnell, “Wise as Doves and Innocent as Serpents?,” under “Final Thoughts.”

⁵⁸⁷ Kibble, “On Preaching the Need for Repentance,” 345.

the case of serving under toxic leaders, this was a difficult order to fulfill. None of the participants' leaders have sought forgiveness. Even when a meeting was scheduled and intended for that purpose, Harris' leader did not ask for forgiveness.

Daniel Wilson says, "forgiveness does not eliminate all consequences in this life."⁵⁸⁸ As Julie Douglas notes, some Christian groups believe forgiveness means a person completely overlooks the sin; there should be no consequences.⁵⁸⁹ She says a full forgiveness cannot really be experienced until the issue has been fully addressed. But, Enroth argues it is important for the victim's health to forgive the offender no matter the offender's response.⁵⁹⁰ Robert Burns, in his book, *The Adult Child of Divorce*, provides a middle way of sorts. He argues forgiveness is given in two ways: legally and relationally.⁵⁹¹ He points to Ephesians 4:32, noting we are to forgive "even as God in Christ forgave us." Burns says, God's forgiveness is offered to all (legally), but received only by some (relationally).⁵⁹² Though all are offered forgiveness, the sinner must receive the forgiveness. In a like manner, Burns suggests we have a responsibility to forgive the offender, but until they repent of their offense, the relational side of forgiveness is reserved. His perspective provides important direction to those who believe healing

⁵⁸⁸ Wilson, "God's Definition of Forgiveness."

⁵⁸⁹ Douglas, "The Subtle Power of Spiritual Abuse," 322.

⁵⁹⁰ Enroth, *Churches That Abuse*.

⁵⁹¹ Burns and Brissett, *The Adult Child of Divorce*, 140.

⁵⁹² Ibid.

comes with forgiveness, yet may never have the opportunity to fully forgive their toxic supervisor due to the boss' lack of repentance.

Healing takes time. It is possible that none of the participants have fully healed from their experience. Each one walked out of their offices with brokenness that complicated their lives. Graham said he hoped others would not take twenty years as it did him. Others had a sense of emotional and spiritual healing after a couple years. The effects of trauma are abundant and there is no deadline for the Lord to bring the healing each person needs. But, as Adam said, it softens over time.

Recommendations for Practice

I hope this study will bring both direction and healing to those who are suffering or have suffered under toxic bosses who claim to be followers of Christ. In addition, it is my intention to bring to light the destruction caused by these leaders that the church may seek to be a source of healing and justice for these laborers in Christ. As I struggled with the frustrations and confusion of serving a toxic Christian organization, I discovered many connections between my faith in Christ, the social sciences, and business practice. These three disciplines of study seemed to speak seamlessly to the broken human conditions found in Christian organizations led by bosses who abuse their spiritual authority.

One of the questions we asked ourselves often was how such an oppressive environment could exist in an organization that claimed Christ as ruler and savior. Jesus Christ, the ultimate, counter-cultural, opponent of oppressive church authority, must have

something to say to these organizations that aid and abet abusers of God's people.⁵⁹³ In the following paragraphs I will present summary recommendations for the church and her people. It is my desire that Christian organizations, and their employees, will have their "backs stiffened" to confront in love those who are "feeding on the sheep, rather than feeding the sheep."

Diagnose

When struggling to relate to a supervisor, whether they are mid-level management, a CEO, or a board member, an employee must first determine what is fundamental to the conflict. Is the conflict being created by the sinful actions of the supervisor or, what the employee considers to be, unwise leadership? Every ministry has a culture that has been formed by its intended mission and the personalities of those who lead, among many other factors. At times, employees must determine if the particular ministry they serve holds the same work values as they do and if they can serve using their gifts and calling effectively in submission to their boss. Conflicts often originate from mission and vision, not because of sinful actions or attitudes. However, the responses to these disagreements may be sinful. The employee must consider whether to submit to leadership, discuss the differences with them, or leave the organization graciously.

Because it is through conflict and the resulting communication that God's people grow in sanctification and the use of their gifts, it is reasonable to assume going to a boss

⁵⁹³ Matthew 23:27.

about issues of sin, decision-making, or leadership approaches may be helpful to the leader's growth in Christ. We must operate on the assumption that God is working to sanctify the boss, and the employee may be God's means to that end. There is a brotherhood and sisterhood of believers that, though broken through sin, can at times, act as a family in respect and intimacy.

However, the conflict may be created by an evil supervisor. I use the term, evil because, as Dan Allender notes, there are some people whose evil actions are so pervasive, it is difficult to describe them in any other way. Determining the extent of their evil is very important. The literature makes clear some disturbing personalities are found along a continuum of concentration. There are those who have a tendency to look out for themselves, some who seek their own comforts more often than not, and those who expect the world to revolve around them regularly. When considering the dysfunctional behavior of another, Jesus says to take the log out of our own eye before considering their sin. We know by experience and scripture we have our own dysfunctions. We all have narcissistic tendencies if we are honest with ourselves. We tend to look out for ourselves to some degree.

Recognizing whether a boss exhibits evil, that the Bible, Allender, and other experts in human brokenness describe, is paramount to determine how the employee is going to move forward in the conflict. Various behaviors should be considered by the employee to determine the extent of the toxicity exhibited by their boss. Consider the following list of toxic behaviors found in the literature and discovered by the participants of this study.

1. When discussing differences of opinion with subordinates, the boss exhibits very little approachability or humility.

2. The supervisor will rarely, if ever, admit failure, either in matters of sin or decision-making.
3. The boss lies about decisions he has made. Bacal says, “Decisions and direction can change suddenly and without apparent rationale.”⁵⁹⁴
4. The boss frequently manipulates his subordinates.
5. The boss frequently demeans or expresses anger at subordinates.
6. The boss isolates those who disagree with him by untruthfully suggesting coworkers of the employee are in agreement with the boss.
7. The boss takes credit for or discredits the subordinate’s work.

Depending on the consistency of some, or all, of these relational behaviors of the boss, the employee may determine, imperfectly, whether the supervisor is truly toxic. To establish if these behaviors are common to a boss, it is necessary to be in settings where the supervisor has the opportunity to act in these ways or the employee must have reliable information from others who have experienced them.

Self-Differentiate

Employees can determine if their bosses are evil by noting how they respond to employees and others as explained above. This will help determine how the subordinate approaches the boss. As is clear in experience and the literature, most abusive individuals will not change. It is very unlikely an employee’s self-differentiated actions of confrontation will help supervisors recognize their need to change or stop their abusive behavior. I would argue, if the supervisor has exhibited a complete unwillingness to respond humbly to criticism in the past through confrontations and discussions with the

⁵⁹⁴ R. Bacal, “Toxic Organizations - Welcome to the Fire of an Unhealthy Workplace.”

employee or others, the principle of one-on-one confrontation has been satisfied. He has already shown an unwillingness to repent when given the opportunity.

Though it is clear in the literature, a manager's abusiveness is not the responsibility of the employees, it is also clear, abusers often seek out certain personality types as targets.⁵⁹⁵ People-pleasers are commonly pounced upon by the wolves, and in the experience of Lundy Bancroft, friendliness does not help an abuser.⁵⁹⁶ If abusive individuals have a sense of their destructiveness on those around them, they may take the difficult steps necessary to throw off the old man, according to Bancroft.⁵⁹⁷ According to the experts, the necessity for change must be made unequivocally.

Therefore, the self-differentiated employees have the best opportunity to bring toxic bosses to their senses, but it will be by a tough love that is not manipulated by the boss' charm or faked confessions. Toxic supervisors must be held to a standard, and there must be clear consequences for their continued, dysfunctional behavior. However, because of the power difference between employees and bosses, it may be difficult or impossible to wield the necessary influence to bring bosses to their knees. Threats of resignation, making their sin public, or going over their head may be effective, but employees must be reminded, the odds of success are very small.

⁵⁹⁵ Namie, "2014 Instant Poll - A: Personal Attributes of Bullied Targets at Work," 1.

⁵⁹⁶ Bancroft, *Why Does He Do That?*, 335.

⁵⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 361.

Confront

Some consider 1 Peter 2 as teaching a silent, subservient submission to employers. As noted in Chapter Two, most commentators suggest an employee is to quietly submit to his supervisor, believing Peter's use of the term slave can be broadened to apply to an employee of a business or organization. However, as Stibbs notes, the Greek term used by Peter for "master" implies "absolute ownership and uncontrolled power."⁵⁹⁸ Circumstances are different for a slave than for an employee. In Peter's context, though the slave may have voluntarily sold himself into service to a master, there was no allowance for criticism or departure. Peter's instruction provides comfort and encouragement for living in servitude, causing as little conflict as possible with a harsh master, with an attitude of serving God, who would one day judge the boss' treatment of his slave.⁵⁹⁹

An employee of a Christian organization is not under this type of authority. Though it is biblical to submit to any who have authority over us according to 1 Peter,⁶⁰⁰ there are significant interpretive difficulties broadening the master-slave relationship to apply to voluntary employees of organizations. An employee has the ability to challenge the supervisor for arrogance and heartlessness. The employee may resign his position and seek other employment. This is quite unlike Peter's audience in the first century. I would

⁵⁹⁸ Stibbs, *The First Epistle General of Peter*, 114.

⁵⁹⁹ In 1 Peter 2:23, Peter uses the example of Jesus: "When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly."

⁶⁰⁰ In 1 Peter 2:13a, Peter says, "Be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution."

suggest the application of this passage to common modern-day employment is unconvincing. Suggesting an employee remain quiet and in submission to a toxic boss is tantamount to supporting an oppressor, who God so frequently condemns in the minor prophets.⁶⁰¹

In addition, Howley, et. al., say the goal of meek submission is to produce repentance in the harsh boss. They are to be won over, as Peter emphasizes to wives later in the passage, “without a word.”⁶⁰² However, as Psalm 55, Matthew 7:6, and psychologists emphasize, meekness before an abuser is unlikely to cause any change in his behavior.

If employees choose to confront the toxic supervisor, there are a number of things to consider. Bearing in mind the process of confrontation developed in Matthew 7 and 18, there are principles that become apparent as the stories are told and scripture is studied.

The Hazards of One-On-One

When pondering the possibilities of confronting a toxic supervisor, Matthew 7:6 and Matthew 18 must be considered. Is the boss a pig or is he a brother? Will the boss turn and attack or be strengthened in faith in Christ? Both sociologists and scripture give guidance we must heed to seek shalom in our vocation.

When contemplating whether a one-on-one confrontation is necessary or desirable, employees should consider the interpretive difficulty of Matthew 18 in its

⁶⁰¹ Micah 2:1,2; Zechariah 7:10; Malachi 3:5.

⁶⁰² 1 Peter 3:1,2.

application to uneven power structures. Employees should take into deliberation the confrontations others have had with the boss. If both Matthew 7 and 18 are considered in tandem, the safety of the offended brother must be measured against the benefits of confrontation. If managers have been found to be vicious or manipulative in their tactics with others, they should be considered dangerous and a one-on-one confrontation should be avoided. In my experience, and others from whom I have heard, the boss used what was said in confrontations to bring further hurt and confusion. They proved to be pigs who turned to attack those who sought their good. The results were greater harm to both the offended employee and others caught in the tangle of their toxic behavior.

In addition, one-on-one confrontations give the leader the opportunity to further isolate the employee. This is a common tactic of toxic individuals. Bosses are able to keep their behavior insulated from others that might bring them to accountability. Toxic bosses may even admit some failure or seek to calm the employee's anger through self-justification when meeting, continuing to keep the toxicity "under wraps."

What About Two or Three?

Therefore, the first step may be to bring two or three witnesses for accountability. If the supervisor has manipulated or turned to attack others, it is time for the accountability to be broadened. However, it is important to remember that most will not respond even to these confrontations. Both of the supervisors of Graham and Adam had been confronted by groups more than once without success. The response was consistently to manipulate the information shared in those meetings and seek the demise of those who had the valor to confront. I observed one toxic boss suggest to his subordinates he was available to hear complaints and would listen. However, following

one such session with individuals under his authority, the subordinates were put on probation. When challenged by another subordinate for his duplicity, the employee was told her “thinking was dangerous.”

Even the step of directly confronting a boss with the aid of others is dangerous and can result in job loss or more cruelty. Again, toxic bosses must come to recognize the seriousness of the charges and their eyes must be opened enough to see their destruction and desire to make changes. This kind of accountability may have to come from those who have the power to terminate their employment.

Accountability

What are possible ways of bringing this level of accountability to the leader? The employee should consider how ministry supporters, churches, or the board may lend aid to those who are oppressed by toxic leaders. Several of the participants in this study desired to limit the scope of information in their communication with others. However, others believed the leaders should be held accountable, and they sought opportunities to share their experiences with other stakeholders who would possibly have influence to bring lasting change.

In the church’s understandable concern to remain free from gossip, it has failed to appreciate the difference between gossip and accountability. Though the communicating of falsehoods or unnecessarily hurtful information about another person is condemned in scripture, those who lead as Christians should be held to a standard of behavior that is in

keeping with the words of Jesus to the church leaders of the time.⁶⁰³ The world's witness to the fall into gross sin of leaders in the church – both in ecclesiastical bodies and parachurch organizations – has horribly damaged the world's view of the church's relevancy to their lives. As boards and other leaders of Christian organizations fail to call to account the moral failures of their management, the words of Jesus ring out,

Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs, which outwardly appear beautiful, but within are full of dead people's bones and all uncleanness. So, you also outwardly appear righteous to others, but within you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.⁶⁰⁴

Rather than whitewashing over the profound damage of toxic leaders, those who have authority over them should be bringing into the light, as Frances sought to do, the cruel behavior of these leaders. As David cried out for God to bring judgment upon his oppressors, so organizations should be seeking all lawful and biblical means of bringing relief to the oppressed under their care. Where illegalities have occurred, both employees and responsible Christian authorities should be seeking legal aid and accountability. The church should learn from recent debacles experienced by the Roman Catholic Church and Protestant organizations where there have been failures to act in accordance with state law. The damage caused to the witness of Christ through these failures to act is unfathomable.

⁶⁰³ In Matthew 23, Jesus pronounces judgments upon the "scribes" and "Pharisees," the church leaders of the day. Jesus says they were preaching, but not practicing the truth in verse 3. In addition, James 3:1 says, "Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness."

⁶⁰⁴ Matthew 23:27-28.

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Some authors note the difficulty of leaving a toxic Christian organization.

Douglas said, “sometimes victims feel they are to blame for their suffering.”⁶⁰⁵ Some feel foolish that they have “been taken advantage of.”⁶⁰⁶ Some employees of organizations hear from their leaders that loyalty does not exist in organizations anymore. However, Hay said, leaders who give this excuse for the mass-exit of their workforce, are likely toxic.⁶⁰⁷

As employees stream out of organizations seeking safety and healing, toxic bosses will often manipulate the information that reaches those who stay or their boards. There were several examples among the participants of this form of maneuvering. Often, the board only hears what the toxic boss wishes for them to hear. One board was told, by their toxic CEO, the large number of exiting employees were psychologically unsound and needed counseling. The board, rather than develop an anonymous and safe exit interview strategy to determine for themselves the truth of these claims, considered the implementation of a policy that all applicants be psychologically evaluated as recommended by the CEO. Boards need to be trained to identify and root out toxic leaders, whether they be a manager or a fellow board member. This begins with

⁶⁰⁵ Douglas, “The Subtle Power of Spiritual Abuse,” 320.

⁶⁰⁶ Enroth, *Churches That Abuse*.

⁶⁰⁷ Hay, “The Toxic Mission Organisation: Fiction or Fact?,” 1.

understanding their legal and spiritual responsibilities to those under their care and leadership.

When the board and leadership are co-dependent, as Eugene's appeared to be, the only safe strategy is resignation. But, even when there is a hint of hope in gaining justice and change, employees must consider their own wellbeing, and that of their families, first. The toxic founder of Graham's organization, called supporters throughout the country following the confrontation to slander his accusers. One email I received described a boss who contacted the subordinate's current employer, angry that the new employer had hired her.

Sometimes, emotional, physical, and spiritual safety is more important than the risks associated with remaining in the organization and the conflicts inherent in staying.

Places of Peace

If being self-differentiated is staying connected to others and yet, not being controlled by them, what might this look like as the trauma of abuse takes its toll on the targets of the abuse? No one is completely self-differentiated. And, according to Robert Burns, 100 percent self-differentiation may not be the goal of the Christian. On Friedman's view, empathy is not helpful to the self-differentiated. This may be why Herrington, et. al., define a Christian application of self-differentiation as staying connected to people – could this be their way of saying, “empathetic” – and yet, not controlled by them.

In my experience, there are no survivors of abuse in any form that are un-scathed. Each has suffered one or more effects from their trauma. Maybe the empathy, created by our understanding of all of mankind being God's image-bearers, creates a connection to

the toxic boss. However, in the end, this empathy produces deep disappointment when the radical breeches of trust occur. How do employees find shalom when leaving the organization to which they may have committed their lives?

We can learn from Harris, who shared his story often to all who would hear it. Or from Isaac, who took time with his family away from everyone, to pray, read scripture, and contemplate their future. Or Ben and Casandra, who found a small group who cared deeply for them and helped them process their experience. Or Frances, who received support from those who cared for the organization and wanted to bring change. My wife and I found invaluable aid at a missionary training center with trained counselors, where our whole family was able to debrief and share our story with others facing, or having faced, similar situations.

One means of shalom that the participants rarely considered was asking God to bring judgment on the boss. When toxic bosses are preying on their employees and claiming to do so in the name of Jesus Christ, there is a place for imprecatory praying. The softening of David's prayers for justice by commentators and many church leaders is stripping those watching or caught under the evil practices of toxic leaders an important means of shalom. Though an employee may feel uncomfortable praying for the destruction of her boss, praying for the boss to be stopped may be more palatable. Is it not reasonable that God would desire our prayers for his will to be done in stopping horribly destructive individuals from hurting his people and the witness of the church? God's grace is exhibited both in his saving evil people from their sin and his destruction of those who bring hurt and ruin to his church. In either case, it is in God's sovereign choosing to determine how the boss will be stopped.

Finally, forgiveness is likely to bring long-term healing to those who have suffered under toxic employers. There is disagreement among theologians whether forgiveness is to be granted before or after repentance by the offender. Luke 17:3-4 appears to instruct those who are wronged to offer forgiveness following repentance by the offender. However, Mark 11:25 says, “And whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone, so that your Father also who is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses.”⁶⁰⁸ The Luke and Mark passages provide an important guide to the process of forgiveness. Forgiveness may be granted before God (Mark 11), yet the completion of that process will only come when the supervisor has sought forgiveness from the offended employee (Luke 17).

In the experience of the participants and research of sociologists and theologians, there is a need for forgiveness to move forward in the healing process. Adam said he needed to forgive his leaders, whether they knew it or not, for his own health. As one writer said, “Biblical forgiveness involves ‘letting go’ of bitterness or revenge.”⁶⁰⁹ It is important to realize, just as in imprecatory praying, God is the ultimate judge and the employee needs to trust that God will bring justice in his time and in his way. Adam gave good advice when he recounted the process of slowly getting rid of his constant thoughts about the toxic leaders. It was not only an evidence of his process of forgiving their offenses, but also a discipline in his thinking.

⁶⁰⁸ Mark 11:25.

⁶⁰⁹ Wilson, “God’s Definition of Forgiveness.”

It is important to know our God is a powerful and loving God, who is reconciling and healing his broken world. Shalom is found in Jesus, who said, just before he would be beaten and nailed to a cross, “Let not your hearts be troubled.”⁶¹⁰ He went on to explain to his disciples that he was going to “prepare a place” that would be a home of rest and peace for them in the future.⁶¹¹ In the meantime, he left his Holy Spirit to indwell, comfort, and guide his people.⁶¹² Dan Allender says, “Faith, hope, and love free us (to a degree) from the regret of the past, the fear of the future, and the emptiness of the present.”⁶¹³ There is hope through Christ for those under oppressive leadership. He uses our past, works in our present, and leads us on to a future of hope. It is my desire the church will be a means of hope to these employees who serve or have served under toxic supervisors in Christian organizations. Will the church and parachurch organizations stand up before a watching world and bring accountability to those who seek to destroy her people and come alongside to comfort those deeply hurt by injustice?

Recommendations for Further Research

Many questions have come to mind as the research and writing of this paper developed. Some have been answered in my own mind, and I have sought to present those with as much clarity as possible in these pages. However, there are many questions

⁶¹⁰ John 14:1.

⁶¹¹ Ibid., John 14:2-3.

⁶¹² Ibid., John 14:25-27.

⁶¹³ Allender, *The Healing Path*, 189.

unanswered through this research; in some cases, because of space and some because of time.

There was a limitation, due to the need to focus on my primary research questions, which prevented me from a broader exploration of scripture. Four passages were considered in depth because of the frequency of their use by participants. The limitations of this study did not allow a fully developed biblical/theological examination of texts that speak into interaction with toxic leaders. For example, Job was spiritually abused by his friends. There are other imprecatory psalms that can be considered. And the apostle Paul gives greater weight to the master's responsibilities to his slave than does the Apostle Peter. Clearly, more research needs to be done to develop a biblical theology of toxic leadership.

A helpful analogy was suggested to me from the pages of scripture, as I struggled with how we, as a church, respond to our leaders. In the research on spiritual abuse, it is often mentioned a common tactic to control congregations is referring to the leader as the "Lord's anointed." When David was being chased by Saul, he rejected multiple opportunities to kill King Saul because Saul was God's anointed king.⁶¹⁴ Two participants in this study were confronted for going against the Lord's anointed – their

⁶¹⁴ In 2 Samuel 1:14, David tells a young man, who has come to him to report of King Saul's death on the battlefield. The young man lies that he was the one who killed Saul, though Saul, when wounded, took his own life. David has the young man executed, explaining, "How is it you were not afraid to put out your hand to destroy the Lord's anointed?" David had spared Saul's life twice when he was being chased by the king recounted in 1 Samuel 24 and 26 for this same reason.

toxic bosses. It would be very helpful for there to be research on the applicability of this concept to toxic bosses of Christian organizations.

Considering a fundamental aspect of this research, self-differentiation, further study needs to be done on biblical self-differentiation, especially in regard to trauma. Does self-differentiation help lessen the effects of trauma when serving under toxic supervisors?

Under the heading, “Recommendations for Practice: Accountability,” I suggest, “The employee should consider how ministry supporters, churches, or the board may lend aid to those who are oppressed by these leaders.” There are difficult questions asked by those under abusive leadership regarding avenues for justice and change through accountability. There is a need for study on the biblicalness of seeking aid from donors of organizations and churches. Is it ever appropriate to inform donors of the brokenness in the organization when the leader and board have rejected employees’ pleas? Taking this a step further, is it appropriate to seek publicity through secular media sources? Or social media? Would these steps be a legitimate application of the principle of telling “it to the church?”⁶¹⁵

Similarly, is it reasonable to expect a Christian organization employee to pursue accountability through the leadership of his supervisor’s home church as instructed in Matthew 18? There are many barriers to this including cost of travel to meet with church leaders, differing church membership of employee and boss, lack of relationship with the

⁶¹⁵ Matthew 18:17

leader's church, and likely inability for the church leaders to impact employee care of an independent Christian agency. In addition, often church leaders have little relational knowledge of the organization's leader when the leader is serving on foreign soil.

There are many examples of toxic leaders in the church, parachurch, business, and biblical history that should be further studied for their relevance to diagnosing and response. Such leaders as King Saul, Herod, Pharaoh, Mark Driscoll, Bill Gothard, and Doug Phillips could be considered, to name a few. What are the common marks of their leadership? How did they respond to confrontation?

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder needs to be considered as the effects of toxic leadership are studied. The efforts to bring healing to those who have suffered under abusive bosses should include a thorough study of PTSD. Diana Langberg has done much study on trauma in relation to sexual abuse and it would be helpful to determine types and severity of trauma on survivors of toxic workplaces.⁶¹⁶ There is a significant need for Christian therapists who understand abuse, and its affects, to more adequately provide direction for those seeking healing from their experiences under toxic bosses.

It is important Christians, looking for an organization in which to serve, carefully investigate the organization prior to joining. However, there is little that I have seen in the literature to give this guidance. What aspects of the ministry need to be investigated to determine a suitable fit for the Christian employee? What questions should be asked of

⁶¹⁶ Diane Langberg has written two important texts: *Suffering and the Heart of God: How Trauma Destroys and Christ Restores* and *Counseling Survivors of Sexual Abuse*.

leaders? How can questions be asked to best encourage honest answers from organizational leaders or employees?

More research should be done to develop means of identifying toxicity in applicants for leadership positions. Early in this research, a friend and I discussed the merits of an instrument for detecting negative leadership factors in an applicant. This could have a significant impact on hiring practices of Christian organizations.

Several of the participants' leaders were financially irresponsible or unethical. One friend believed his leader was creating a smoke screen for his toxicity by pursuing multiple building programs that were deemed irresponsible because the organization was struggling financially. There appears to be possible connections between financial irresponsibility and toxicity. This would be a helpful area of research for the identification of toxic leadership.

My hope is that a wealth of research be made by biblically-minded Christians for the purpose of assisting those who are isolated and hurting from their experiences under toxic bosses in Christian organizations. There is much to be considered by Christian organizations as they recruit quality leaders and seek the shalom of their employees.

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