

GROWING IN GRACE: HOW A PASTOR'S PERSONAL GROWTH IN HIS VARIOUS
VOCATIONS INFLUENCES AND ENHANCES MINISTRY.

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ABSTRACT

The pastor is tasked with a multitude of duties in his ministry that he strives to do well. The pastor's vocational responsibilities do not stop at the church's door. He has various vocations outside of ministry that will need the same amount of attention. The pastor aims to better himself as a husband, father, citizen, and most importantly, a child of God through personal growth. The concept of personal growth has been around since the Greek philosophers, and the interest in bettering oneself is still prevalent to this day. The secular world has countless advice and resources for the pastor, but he will constantly review these methods in light of God's Word. As sinful human beings, pastors will continuously fall short of perfection in their vocations. Even though perfection cannot be reached, aiming towards growth in his various vocation through accountability, reading, life planning, and organizations such as Grow in Grace and CrossTrain Ministries, etc., will help enhance the pastor's ministry. This thesis seeks to explore the concept of personal growth in the vocations outside of ministry and how they influence and enhance ministry.

INTRODUCTION

Personal growth was a multi-billion-dollar industry in 2020, and projections show more monetary gain next year.¹ A person can look at the latest New York Time’s Best Seller list and see various books on productivity, coaching, management, health improvement, family, and business growth. The coaching companies for entrepreneurs, health, and life in general, are only a quick internet search away. There are so many podcasts, blogs, and hacks available on personal growth that anyone could use to better themselves with relative ease.

Personal growth is one phrase for describing the concept of bettering oneself. There are multiple phrases, words, and ideas used interchangeably, independently, and interdependently. This thesis will begin by exploring the history of personal growth and what it means. This thesis will also discuss the primary vocations a pastor simultaneously holds. It will then prove that a pastor can grow in his various vocations outside of ministry in order to influence and enhance his ministry. The secular world has many resources for the pastor in his personal growth. This thesis will examine some of the resources offered by the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran

1. Grand View Research, Inc, “Personal Development Market Size, Share & Trends Report
Personal Development Market Size, Share & Trends Analysis Report By Instrument (Books, e-Platforms, Personal Coaching/Training, Workshops), By Focus Area, By Region, And Segment Forecasts, 2020 – 2027” *Grand View Research, Inc*, July 2020,
<https://www.grandviewresearch.com/industry-analysis/personal-development-market#:~:text=The%20global%20personal%20development%20market%20size%20was%20estimated%20at%20USD,USD%2039.99%20billion%20in%202020.&text=The%20global%20personal%20development%20market%20is%20expected%20to%20grow%20at,USD%2056.66%20billion%20by%202027>.

Synod(WELS). It will also show the pitfalls that come along with the desire for personal growth. The essayist conducted interviews with some recognized WELS leaders in the fields of personal growth and vocation. Throughout, this thesis will show their thoughts and advice.

PART 1: WHAT IS PERSONAL GROWTH?

A Definition

Personal growth goes by a multitude of names. Some names are self-growth, personal development, self-improvement, and self-help. These words can serve as synonyms, but they can also serve as different facets of personal growth. The following definitions will help clarify personal growth for this thesis. “Personal growth is the process by which a person recognizes himself or herself and continually develops himself or herself to reach his or her full potential.”² “Self-growth is a desire to become a better version of oneself every day. A timeless pursuit, self-growth refers to a life-long process to improve one’s own performance through formal and informal approaches.”³ “Personal development is a process concerned with specific aspects of the individual: the development of ‘what,’ and the ways this can be planned, achieved, and evaluated. Personal growth, on the other hand, is a more generic process having to do with the totality of the individual; it is always judged in terms of values.”⁴

This thesis defines personal growth as the process of becoming a better version of oneself through improving one’s performance with formal and informal methods throughout one’s life to better serve one’s neighbor in one’s God-given vocation.⁵

2. Furqan Ashiq, “Personal Growth: A Definite Guide To Self Growth,” *Thrive Global*, 8 April 2020, <https://thriveglobal.com/stories/personal-growth-a-definite-guide-to-self-growth/#:~:text=Personal%20growth%20is%20the%20process,%2C%20maturity%2C%20success%20and%20happiness>.

3. Chaya R. Jain, Daniel K. Apple, Wade Ellis, Jr., “What is Self-Growth?” *International Journal of Process Education*, June 2015, <https://pcrest.com/recovery/articles/selfgrowth.pdf>.

4. J. A. Irving and D. I. Williams, “Personal growth and personal development: Concepts clarified,” *British Journal of Guidance & Counselling*, 16 October 2007, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/03069889908256287>.

5. If there is a quote used in this thesis with these terms; self-growth, personal development, self-improvement, or self-help, this author intends that personal growth be read in its place.

History of Personal Growth Philosophy

Personal growth may be a multi-billion-dollar industry in 2020, but it has been around longer than this century alone. Thousands of years ago, the ancient Greeks began to establish various ideas of personal growth. LQ McDonald III, a present-day writer on motivational philosophy, sees the origins of personal growth in the ancient philosophers' philosophies of life. McDonald attributes Socrates⁶, Diogenes the Cynic⁷, Epicurus⁸, and Epictetus⁹ as four of the earliest and most influential philosophers of personal growth.

Socrates is widely known for questioning everything and famously said, "The only true wisdom is in knowing you know nothing."¹⁰ Socrates wanted society to improve, and he believed the first step was looking at oneself to see where one was lacking. McDonald bases all his writing on personal growth with Socrates' philosophy in mind,

Just like Socrates, I believe we can know ourselves, change ourselves, and make ourselves happier through rational and reasoned thought. I believe that the more you consider and experience and dissect and analyze the world, and everything in it, the easier it is to see a path open up for you that will help you to make lasting change in whatever direction you want to go. That means science, spirituality and philosophy. Nothing is outside the scope of reasoned speculation and understanding and everything can have an impact on how we live our lives and who we become. We have to be open, inquisitive, skeptical but always seeking.¹¹

6. Socrates' Death: 399 BC

7. Diogenes' Death: 323 BC

8. Epicurus' Death: 270 BC

9. Epictetus' Death: 135 AD

10. Thomas Oppong, "Socratic Ignorance: The Beginning of Wisdom," *Medium*, 10 June 2020, <https://medium.com/personal-growth/socratic-ignorance-the-beginning-of-wisdom-4d490685b56d>.

11. LQ McDonald III, "About," *Modern Mojo*, 2016, <http://modern-mojo.com/about/>.

McDonald believes the philosophers following after Socrates developed his philosophy and defined it further.

Diogenes, the father of the philosophy of Cynicism, believed a person needed the courage to stand up for what they believed in for personal growth. They needed strength and conviction to press on for growth.¹²

Epicurus' philosophy is often summarized as, "Eat, drink, be merry for tomorrow we die." McDonald believes this is a misrepresentation of Epicureanism. Today many people misinterpret Epicureanism as "living the good life" or "only for the rich." But Epicurus wanted people to focus on the little joys of life. McDonald uses the examples of a pleasant conversation, a small meal gathering, a warm fire on a cold night as the little joys. McDonald sees the world full of fleeting promises. He sees the need to recognize what one has already and then immerse oneself fully in those things. Focusing on those little joys allows for personal growth.¹³

McDonald lastly mentions Epictetus as an influential proponent of personal growth. Epictetus belonged to the school of Stoicism. A few general characterizations of Stoicism are internalizing emotions, carrying a universal negativity, and resignation about life. McDonald believes that Stoicism is one of the best philosophies since it focuses on personal growth. Epictetus and Stoics believe in internalizing one's goals and not worrying about things out of one's control. He recognizes these four philosophers as the most influential in promoting personal growth because they go beyond knowledge and ideas. They put their thoughts into practice, and they encouraged the same of their followers.¹⁴

12. LQ McDonald III, "The Philosophy Of Personal Development," *Modern Mojo*, 7 September 2016, <http://modern-mojo.com/philosophy-of-personal-development-part-1/>.

13. McDonald, "The Philosophy Of Personal Development."

14. McDonald, "The Philosophy Of Personal Development."

Personal growth concepts are not only found in antiquity. They have also been evident since the founding of this country. Benjamin Franklin¹⁵, in 1727, helped found a group called the Junto Club. This group of twelve men gathered weekly to discuss different topics such as morals, politics, and philosophy. Franklin came up with a list of questions to start the discussion and give each meeting a structure.¹⁶ The meeting's goal was not just a discussion of ideas but the personal

15. Franklin's Death: 1790

16. List of Benjamin Franklin's questions at every Junto Club Meeting:

1. Have you met with anything in the author you last read, remarkable, or suitable to be communicated to the Junto? Particularly in history, morality, poetry, physics, travels, mechanic arts, or other parts of knowledge?
2. What new story have you lately heard agreeable for telling in conversation?
3. Has any citizen in your knowledge failed in his business lately, and what have you heard of the cause?
4. Have you lately heard of any citizen's thriving well, and by what means?
5. Have you lately heard how any present rich man, here or elsewhere, got his estate?
6. Do you know of any fellow citizen, who has lately done a worthy action, deserving praise and imitation? or who has committed an error proper for us to be warned against and avoid?
7. What unhappy effects of intemperance have you lately observed or heard? of imprudence? of passion? or of any other vice or folly?
8. What happy effects of temperance? of prudence? of moderation? or of any other virtue?
9. Have you or any of your acquaintance been lately sick or wounded? If so, what remedies were used, and what were their effects?
10. Who do you know that are shortly going [on] voyages or journeys, if one should have occasion to send by them?
11. Do you think of anything at present, in which the Junto may be serviceable to mankind? to their country, to their friends, or to themselves?
12. Hath any deserving stranger arrived in town since last meeting, that you heard of? and what have you heard or observed of his character or merits? and whether think you, it lies in the power of the Junto to oblige him, or encourage him as he deserves?
13. Do you know of any deserving young beginner lately set up, whom it lies in the power of the Junto any way to encourage?
14. Have you lately observed any defect in the laws, of which it would be proper to move the legislature an amendment? Or do you know of any beneficial law that is wanting?
15. Have you lately observed any encroachment on the just liberties of the people?
16. Hath anybody attacked your reputation lately? and what can the Junto do towards securing it?
17. Is there any man whose friendship you want, and which the Junto, or any of them, can procure for you?
18. Have you lately heard any member's character attacked, and how have you defended it?
19. Hath any man injured you, from whom it is in the power of the Junto to procure redress?
20. In what manner can the Junto, or any of them, assist you in any of your honourable designs?
21. Have you any weighty affair in hand, in which you think the advice of the Junto may be of service?
22. What benefits have you lately received from any man not present?
23. Is there any difficulty in matters of opinion, of justice, and injustice, which you would gladly have discussed at this time?
24. Do you see anything amiss in the present customs or proceedings of the Junto, which might be amended?

growth of the individual that led to the betterment of their society.¹⁷ Franklin knew the benefit of a group discussion and accountability in personal growth. This group was a structured or formal method of mutual growth.¹⁸

Recent History of Personal Growth Philosophy

More recently, in the nineteenth and twentieth century, three philosophers are notable for their involvement in personal growth. McDonald identifies them as Jean-Paul Sartre¹⁹, Friedrich Nietzsche²⁰, and Albert Camus²¹.

Sartre contributed to personal growth by advocating a person was only responsible for their actions. McDonald says, “The way we act is our mandate to the rest of the world in how we believe that everyone should act. If I am kind, I am suggesting to the world that I believe everyone should be kind.”²² McDonald also believes that Sartre suggests that a person has “radical freedom,” i.e., every choice, whether an action or thought, is up to the individual.

The second modern philosopher is Nietzsche. He is known for his famous quote stating, “God is dead.” Nietzsche wrote against the church’s doctrines as soft and opposite of what the world needed. “Nietzsche’s case against Christianity was that it kept people down; that it

17. A lending library, a fire company, the University of Pennsylvania, and the Pennsylvania Hospital were all proposals from the meetings of the Junto Club.

18. “Junto Club,” *Benjamin Franklin Historical Society*, March 2018, <http://www.benjamin-franklin-history.org/junto-club/>.

19. Sartre’s Death: 1980

20. Nietzsche’s Death: 1900

21. Camus’ Death: 1960

22. McDonald, “The Philosophy Of Personal Development.”

smothered them with morality and self-loathing. His ideal human is one who is free to express himself...Morality is for the little people. It's the way the weak manipulate the strong."²³ Some individuals and groups take Nietzsche's philosophy to the extreme.^{24 25}

McDonald acknowledges the controversies surrounding Nietzsche, but he also points to the underlining philosophy that some misinterpret. He notes,

We... find a man searching – grasping – for a love, appreciation and acceptance of life in all things. Even those things that may bring us harm. We find a man who understood that the painful things in our life, physical and mental, are the things that make us who we are and coming to accept that makes all the difference.²⁶

Nietzsche's other famous phrase, "That which does not kill us makes us stronger," summarizes his philosophy of personal growth. Scholars often characterize Nietzsche as a complete Nihilist. In reality, he is a semi-Nihilist. A complete Nihilist believes in the denial of any value, truth, or meaning in the world. Nietzsche only denied traditional belief systems.²⁷ If nothing mattered, then Nietzsche wouldn't believe in the worth of personal growth. Nietzsche sees the temporary sacrifices and hardships as necessary for ultimate growth. According to Nietzsche, even if the task is difficult and hurts at the time, it will make the person happier and have a more fulfilled life. McDonald summarizes Nietzsche's thoughts by talking about the happiness of the process or struggle instead of the goal,

23. Giles Fraser, "Nietzsche's passionate atheism was the making of me," *The Guardian*, 5 February 2012, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2012/feb/05/passionate-atheism-me-christianitynietzsche#:~:text=Nietzsche's%20case%20against%20Christianity%20was,artist%20or%20a%20Viking%20warrior.>

24. Fraser, "Nietzsche's passionate atheism was the making of me."

25. Nietzsche admired those with power. He thought power was the ultimate form of abundant creativity. The Nazis, for example, took this thinking to the extreme in their quest to establish the Aryan race.

26. LQ McDonald III, "Embracing The Pain: A Love Affair With Fate," *Modern Mojo*, 28 July 2016, <http://modern-mojo.com/embracing-pain-fate/>.

27. Hatab, Lawrence J. "Nietzsche, Nihilism and Meaning," *The Personalist Forum* 3, no. 2, 1987, 91-111, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20708503>.

When we elect to tackle the really difficult stuff – raising a child, being in a relationship, fighting for a cause or making ourselves better people – we are going to endure some suffering and hardship, but in the end, we know that that struggle is worth it because the accumulation of all the moments of happiness that can come from taking on something so important will always pile higher than the tiny, fleeting pleasures of empty happiness.²⁸

Albert Camus is the final influential personal growth philosopher that McDonald mentions.

Camus believed that life is meaningless to a certain extent. He saw that people's work becomes entirely undone by time, death, or outward circumstances beyond the person's control. In the end, time kills all efforts on earth. It sounds like Camus believes there is no point to life. But McDonald believes Camus still sees a point to life,

Despite the fact that life seemingly amounts to nothing in the end, that does not mean it is not worth living. What's more, there is an infinite amount of pleasure and joy to be had from living if you know where to look... It is worth living because, it doesn't matter if the things we strive for are undone in the end, what matters, is the simple, honest and frequent pleasures that can be enjoyed by simply living.²⁹

Concluding Thoughts on the History of Personal Growth

The personal growth philosophy is not a recent fad of this generation. The brief overview of personal growth history shows how it has been around for more than two millennia. Many components and motivations for personal growth in the secular world have not changed drastically over the years. Looking at the history of personal growth gives the pastor insight into the secular world's wrong motivation for growth and its intended outcome. The world often wants to grow in order to have a better experience on earth because they don't believe in an afterlife. The secular information gives different ideas to the pastor's growth in his various vocations motivated by the gospel instead of ethics and philosophy.

28. McDonald, "The Philosophy Of Personal Development."

29. McDonald, "The Philosophy Of Personal Development."

PART 2: VOCATION

Vocation in General

A proper understanding of Vocation is essential to the topic of this thesis. In the broadest sense, it means "calling."³⁰ The secular world's definitions usually include paid occupation, career, or lifework as examples.³¹ These definitions of an individual's job include more than just a paycheck to the individual. There is interest, joy, and fulfillment usually involved in the secular meaning of vocation. What a person does separate from their vocation is known as an avocation.³² This thesis will instead make use of Martin Luther's definition of the word "vocation."

Martin Luther helped reestablish the doctrine of vocation in Germany in the 16th century. The Roman Catholic Church(RCC) had a misunderstanding of this doctrine. The RCC believed the monastic calling was the superior vocation. Jonathon Schroeder, pastor at Faith Evangelical Lutheran Church in Sharpsburg, Georgia, wrote about the doctrine of vocation in the Roman Catholic's mind, "The thought process (of the RCC): if our good works play a part in salvation, then those people who devote their lives to good works, must be closer to God."³³ Laypeople did not possess an equal vocation. The monks' works were superior to all laypeople because they focused solely on serving God in their vocation.³⁴

30. Translated from the Latin word "Vocare" meaning "to call"

31. "Vocation," *Merriam Webster*, 2020, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/vocation>.

32. Jonathon E. Schroeder, *Our Calling: Christian Vocation and The Ministry of the Gospel* (essay written for the 60th Biennial Convention of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod June 2009), 6.

33. Schroeder, 7.

34. Schroeder, 7.

Luther became a monk because of his terrified conscience. The RCC terrified Luther because they taught an uncertainty of salvation. When God led Luther to realize the problem with the superiority of a monk's works compared to a layperson's works, this influenced him to leave the monastery. Luther's significant reform redefined the doctrine of vocation through the lens of Scripture.³⁵ Luther called the various vocations "masks of God, behind which He (God) wants to remain concealed and do all things."³⁶ Kenneth Cherney, Professor at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary (WLS), wrote a *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* article on Luther's Doctrine of Vocation. Cherney shows what Luther meant by vocation, "It (vocation) refers to the particular station in life which God has assigned to each individual Christian."³⁷ This thesis looks into the various masks/callings/stations/vocations a pastor holds, but first, it will inspect the purpose of vocation.

What is the Purpose of Vocation?

Luther stated that the various vocations are masks of God, but why would God want a Christian to be His mask? The simple answer is service. God serves the world through the vocations of everyday Christians. He serves His children but also those who are not part of his family. God serves the whole world through the Christian's vocations. Cherney notes,

The gospel, faith, and the good conscience that results all belong properly to heaven. When we consider these things, we turn our backs on everything in this world and look upward, toward God. On the other hand, our earthly tasks, our vocation, and our cross

35. Kenneth A. Cherney, "Hidden in Plain Sight: Luther's Doctrine of Vocation," *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* 98, no. 4 (Fall 2001): 285-286.

36. Martin Luther, "Selected Psalms III," *Luther's Works*, 1999 Saint Louis: Concordia, 114.

37. Cherney, 279.

belong to this world. When we are occupied with them, we turn our backs toward heaven to face the earth which is the home of our neighbor.³⁸

Cherney goes on to talk about how the doctrine of vocation is law, not gospel. Serving in a vocation is not the reason for salvation. It is not through vocation that a person is saved. Jesus saved the Christian pastor, and then he calls him to serve in his various vocations. The pastor is not worrying about himself and his growing sanctification. He is not living a life in a legalistic manner. The pastor is instead concerned about serving others. He sees his neighbor, his wife, his child, his member, etc., and he asks, “How can I serve them?” God has placed these individuals into the pastor’s life in his various vocations in order for him to serve them. He is acting as God’s mask to them. The pastor is not only serving the people in his life but God himself.³⁹

The pastor praises God through his acts of service. Consider Jesus’ words in Matthew 25,

I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.’ “Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?’ “The King will reply, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.’⁴⁰

Knowing that the work done for the pastor’s neighbor is also done for Jesus changes the attitude or view of the work. A blessing the pastor receives through his vocations is that he becomes “a conduit through which divine blessings reach others.”⁴¹ The pastor knows that his service in his vocation is praise. But it is also thanks to God, “As enlightened children of God, we know that we don’t give to God of our time and abilities, or wealth in order to incur his favor. We do so out

38. Cherney, 281.

39. Cherney, 281.

40. Matthew 25:36-40, All Bible quotations are taken from the NIV 2011.

41. Cherney, 282.

of thanksgiving to him who gave all, even his Son, for us. We serve others because Christ served us.”⁴² The first vocation⁴³ sets the stage of service for all the other vocations a pastor holds.

The First Vocation

The 60th Biennial Convention of the WELS gathered under the theme, "Christ's Love, Our Calling" in 2009. The WELS logo has featured this phrase since 2015.⁴⁴ But before the WELS made "Christ's Love, Our Calling" their public identity, every Christian already had this phrase as their mission statement.⁴⁵ They received it from the great commission given by Jesus, "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely, I am with you always, to the very end of the age."⁴⁶

The word "call" in the Old and New Testament has a specific purpose behind it. In the Old Testament, the word, קרא , can mean "to name." God is usually the subject when the word is used. God is naming or calling with a purpose. In the New Testament, the word κλησις, "calling," is used when God is inviting someone to enter the kingdom of God.⁴⁷ Schroeder says, "The primary meaning of our calling in Scripture is the promise of God to adoption as his children through faith in the promises of Christ's work. Therefore, our calling is not primarily

42. John Schuetze, "Doctor of Souls," *Northwestern*, Milwaukee, 2017, 327.

43. i.e. The call to faith.

44. Briana Lambrecht, "WELS Identity Guidelines," *WELS*, 20 May 2015, <https://wels.net/about-wels/history/leadership/identity-guidelines/>.

45. A person's mission statement defines who they are and what their purpose is in life.

46. Matthew 28:19–20

47. Schroeder, 1-2.

about what we do, but about what God gives us.”⁴⁸ God calls a person to faith and makes them his child. This is the first vocation or calling that any Christian is given.

The pastor possesses this mask by the grace of God alone. When the Holy Spirit planted faith in the pastor’s heart⁴⁹, he became a child of God. For most pastors, this mask was given through the washing of water, while the words "In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" were said over him at his baptism.

Those interviewed for this thesis all believed that the starting point when thinking about vocation for pastors was the vocation of being God’s child through baptism. Gurgel put it this way, "The first and most important vocation is that of a child of God. If we get that confused, everything goes haywire after that."⁵⁰

Boehm, in an interview with this writer, talked about the pastor’s need of knowing his identity as a child of God, “Knowing who I am in Christ, that’s my identity. Not even that I’m a pastor or husband or father; those are all secondary. But first and foremost, I’m a child of God, and that’s why I wake up in the morning. That’s why I can sleep peacefully at night. And to embrace that frees me to give my best in pursuing all the other goals and growth too.”⁵¹ The way a pastor can grow in this first vocation is through his personal devotional life.

48. Schroeder, 3.

49. or was called to faith

50. President Richard L. Gurgel Zoom Interview

51. Pastor Aaron Boehm Zoom Interview

Personal Devotional Life

Those interviewed unanimously emphasized the importance of a personal devotional life.⁵² Rev. Thomas Kock notes how everything else in a pastor's various vocations stem from this.

I can't overstress the value of your devotional life in regards to this. Do you know what finally is going to motivate you to be the best husband you can be? Let God build it. What's going to motivate you to be the best father you can be? It's God building you up. And what's going to motivate you to take care of your body and use your time in somewhat of a wise fashion? It's God building up through his Word. Even though it doesn't sound like it's direct, it just is. And when the devotional life slips away, a lot of the other stuff tends to slip away too.⁵³

In the busyness of life, there may be a temptation to let the personal devotional life become less of a priority or to see it as just another part of the pastor's job. Professor Kock and President Gurgel both admit that some men can do this well simply because of their motivation and drive, but they are the exception. Gurgel said, "I just need to remember this (having a personal devotion life) is first of all because I need this. I don't want to turn it into just something I'm doing to get an insight to put it in an email."⁵⁴ A pastor may make their devotional life an email or message to send out to his flock every day or week. He may use his sermon preparation as his devotional time. But Kock also cautions,

Preparing a sermon is part of my job. I'm not doing it because it's my job, but ultimately, it is part of my job. Same with confirmation class, Bible class, etc. Finally, we sit down with the word of God because I want to sit down with the word of God. That's a "me

52. For an excellent senior thesis on the pastor's devotional life see, *Spiritual Energy Management: Avoiding Pastoral Burnout by Developing a Healthy Devotional Life* by Ross Chartrand.

53. Professor Thomas D. Kock Interview

54. Gurgel Interview

thing.” That’s a me and God thing, and that is different, and it just impacts you in ways that are pretty amazing and flows into all this stuff (various vocations) in so many ways.⁵⁵

The personal devotional life is daily growth in a pastor’s first vocation in which God fills up his child with His grace and truth.

The Pastor’s Various Vocations

A pastor has a call from God facilitated through the church to be a pastor. This vocation is not the first vocation that the pastor has held; that was becoming a child of God. For most pastors, there are several other vocations that a pastor possesses before he becomes a pastor. Some are a son, a brother, a husband, a parent, a man, a citizen, a financial steward, a friend. The apostle Paul talks to the Corinthians about these callings, “Each person should remain in the situation they were in when God called them.”⁵⁶ John Schuetze, Professor at WLS, comments on the relationship between the first vocation and the others as Paul describes in 1 Corinthians 7:20, “Paul often gave specific instruction to Christians regarding their callings—husbands, wives, children, parents, slaves, masters, and so on. As they carried out their callings in this life, they were to do so in view of their greater calling in Christ. So we see that these two vocations are closely connected.”⁵⁷ The primary vocations this thesis will focus on are husband, parent, and citizen.

The Pastor as Husband

55. Kock Interview

56. 1 Corinthians 7:20

57. Schuetze, 326.

For those who are married, a pastor's vocation as a husband needs to be a priority in his life. After the pastor's personal life with God, his interpersonal life with God and his wife will be just as present. A pastor's marriage life is rooted in God's Word. The perfect marriage between Christ and his church serves as the model for the pastor as well, "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her."⁵⁸ Being Christ to his wife is an impossible task for imperfect husbands to fulfill, but God still tells imperfect husbands to carry it out. A pastor grows in his marital vocation in various ways. He grows spiritually through his devotional life with his wife. Loewen also emphasized the importance of a devotional and prayer life with one's spouse, "I take time as a husband to do devotions every day with my wife, that's intentional."⁵⁹ Through these means, God builds the marriage upon the solid foundation of his Word and promises.

Gurgel makes an interesting observation on why being a pastor does not necessarily supersede the vocation of husband, "I was a husband before I was a pastor, and someday, if God grants me health to the point of retirement, I'll be a husband after I/m a pastor."⁶⁰ Boehm similarly notes, "If you just think of the order of things, first God made me His in baptism, so that's my identity before anything else and everything else flows from that. I was also married before I was installed and ordained as a pastor."⁶¹ Kock also says, "I keep my life priorities as God, my wife, kids, pastor. That doesn't mean I gave half-effort at being a pastor. I gave it 100%

58. Ephesians 5:25

59. Rick Loewen Zoom Interview

60. Gurgel Interview

61. Boehm Interview

... But just having it (the order) in mind is super valuable.”⁶² The personal growth of a pastor is deeply connected with his marital growth. He is ever striving to be Christ to his wife, serving and loving her as Christ loved the Church. The pastor grows in his faith and marriage through the study and prayer of God’s Word.

More than half of the men graduating from the WLS are married before they receive their first call. The abundance of married students did not use to be the case at WLS. Up until recently, many pastors did not come to or attend WLS married. This fact has created differing views on the relationship between marriage and ministry among WELS pastors. The idea of sacrificing the family for the ministry is not always a healthy one. A common theme from those interviewed was a caution against sacrificing personal marital growth for ministry. They also cautioned against sacrificing parental growth for ministry.

The Pastor as Father

God may bless the pastor with his own children. The blessing comes with the responsibility to raise his children in the way of the Lord, "The pastor who preaches and teaches the Word of God, but fails in his duty as a father has failed to be the mask of God for his children.”⁶³ These words are a stern reminder to the pastor as he looks at his vocations of pastor and father. The pastor, in his vocation as father, must continually remind himself of its importance. Gurgle notes, “If I’m trying to urge people to love their spouses and love their children and be a Christian father or mother, but my own conscience is troubling me because I’m not practicing what I

62. Kock Interview

63. Schroeder, 10.

preach, that's not entirely helpful."⁶⁴ As Schroeder and Gurgel note, the pastor's duty to his people extends beyond the church's walls.

The pastor practices what he preaches and teaches to his children as well as his congregation. Paustian said about practicing what the pastor preaches, "One of my favorite Kierkegaard⁶⁵ quotes is, 'What good would it do me to construct a world in which I did not live, but only held up to the view of others.' This is to say that the world is at the whole the beauty of Christian theology and truth. What a shame not to live in that world yourself. In any vocation, I'm learning to make that real."⁶⁶ Paustian goes on to talk about being ruled by sin and the effects that it has on the ministry. If a pastor is terrible at home, how can he get up in the pulpit and preach against anger? His wife and kids are sitting in the pews, and then he is supposed to preach about being loving and serving when he is a "monster" at home. That doesn't add up. Paustian points out that the pastor knows that he is sinful, and it is a daily struggle. But if he is ruled by a sin, he won't be able to be honest or transparent. The pastor will be a hypocrite in front of his people. That way of life and ministry will not last or be fruitful.⁶⁷

The Pastor as Citizen

In the interview with Kock, he recounted the various positions he held in his vocation as a citizen. Three roles that stood out to him were being a landlord, being in charge of the community pool, and being a police chaplain. In his role as landlord of a lower-income

64. Gurgel Interview

65. Søren Aabye Kierkegaard was a Danish philosopher, theologian, poet, social critic, and religious author. Many consider him to be the first existentialist philosopher.

66. Paustian Interview

67. Paustian Interview

apartment building, he learned a lot about people, “Boy, did that keep me grounded. I saw a slice of life that was just different (from what I knew.) It was people who were just surviving. It helped me to know there was another group of people out there.”⁶⁸ As the one in charge of the community pool, he had to oversee the lifeguards and make sure they were doing their job. Because of this, he said,

“I learned what it meant to live in the sphere of the law because we pastors don't do that. We live in the sphere of the gospel. We filter everything through the sphere of the gospel, and rightly so... I was still a gospel guy (in my role), but you still had to do things under the law. It helped me to understand what it's like to live under that (the law) all the time, which is where most of our people are at.”⁶⁹

Kock also served as a police chaplain. He was able to meet numerous pastors of various denominations. This vocation allowed him to learn more about what the other pastors taught. He gained a better grasp of how to witness to diverse people. Another added benefit of being a police chaplain was the professional Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder training that they offered. This training and the opportunities to witness that arose from serving people as they went through terrible situations greatly benefited him and those he was trying to reach.⁷⁰

The pastor can use this vocation of a citizen as a way to create relationships and improve opportunities for outreach and evangelism. The pastor can also learn more about his community and grow to love it like the people he desires to reach with the gospel and serve.

68. Kock Interview

69. Kock Interview

70. Kock Interview

Balancing Vocations

The word “balance” is often used when talking about vocations. Boehm believes that the use of “balance” can be misleading and suggests a new word, “rhythm,” be used in its place,

The idea of achieving balance is challenging because of the always-present tension that exists between the vocation of husband/father and pastor. When a pastor feels he is spending adequate time on his marriage and family, he often feels guilty about not spending more time on ministry. When he feels the ministry is running on all cylinders, he often feels guilty about neglecting his wife and kids...The concept of rhythm better captures the ebb and flow of different seasons of life and ministry. The hours spent in various areas of ministry will vary widely between a first-year pastor and a pastor who has been serving twenty years. A pastor with a stay-at-home wife and four small kids will be needed at home more than an empty-nester pastor with a working wife. These different seasons of life will require a different rhythm to navigate - and that's OK. But if we are convinced that a set-in-stone permanent schedule that seems to promise perfect balance will somehow serve each of those pastors the same, he will find himself guilt-ridden, burned out, or at the very least giving either his family or his church his leftovers. Rhythm acknowledges that our commitment to family and ministry will vary depending on whichever season of life we're in. It's flexible and much more forgiving than the mirage of balance.⁷¹

Telling a pastor that he must balance his vocations makes the vocations independent of each other. Recognizing the rhythm of the pastor's various vocations shows that his vocations are interdependent⁷². This interdependency helps shape the pastor's view of growth in his vocations.

Paustian is also not inclined to describe vocation with the word balance. He suggests,

“If balance means that these two vocations are opposed to each other or in competition with each other, (then we need another picture). The picture in my head is more like a wheel. The center of the wheel is your mission, your purpose in life, and the spokes are your different callings. It just rolls along. It goes from one to the other, but not from one competing. It is instead, “here is the way I express my mission now.”⁷³

71. Boehm Email

72. More will be said about this in the next part.

73. Paustian Interview

The picture of a wheel or the idea of rhythm both point to the interdependency of vocation.

These vocations grow together. The third part of this thesis will dive into what growth is for a pastor.

PART 3: WHAT IS GROWTH?

A Definition

What is growth? To answer the question positively, we need to see what growth is not. Paustian warns against thinking growth is something that supersedes Jesus' work, "We don't have a way of growing past the cross or growing past our desperate need for mercy."⁷⁴ Growth will not gain a person heaven; however, a person's life on earth is not meant to be stagnant.

First of all, God tells Christians to grow. Peter's final exhortation of his second letter says, "But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ."⁷⁵ For one to know what growth is, one must also know what the goal is. Paustian states what we mean when we talk about growth, "We are talking about crucifying ourselves and then rising with Christ and living that cruciform life, we are talking about a deeper grasp of that and of knowing Christ and his truth...To grow in any vocation. In that vocation, I am expressing that, (growth in Christ and his truth) in that vocation I'm realizing that."⁷⁶

Boehm mentions growth in Jesus' disciples, "Ministry means growth. I think that is evident as you look at Jesus' disciples. Why did he spend three years with them? They not only grew in their understanding of his teaching but also what it looked like to be a minister of the gospel by looking at Jesus and caring for people."⁷⁷ Just as Jesus' disciples grew in their various vocations because those vocations were interdependent, so also a pastor can have interdependent growth in his vocations.

74. Paustian Interview

75. 2 Peter 3:18

76. Paustian Interview

77. Boehm Interview

The Interdependency of the Pastor's Vocations Means Interdependent Growth

Once the pastor sees his vocations as interdependent, he does not need to feel guilty for spending time in his various vocations. When the pastor remembers that the purpose of his vocation is service to others, he remembers his mission in life. His ultimate mission is to grow in the grace and knowledge of his Lord Jesus Christ throughout all his vocations. Paustian says, "How could you grow in one vocation that you wouldn't be growing in them all? It would not be something that would just turn off and leave you as you turn to some other aspects of your life."⁷⁸

Paustian also notes that the pastor does not leave the mission behind in his changing rhythm of vocations. If the pastor learns "to see vocations as one thing, then they are all organically connected. I think the Scriptures lean this way."⁷⁹ The apostle Paul said to the Thessalonians, "Because we loved you so much, we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well."⁸⁰ The writer to the Hebrews also wrote, "Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith."⁸¹ Paustian notes, "That is why I would never call ministry a job. It really is a life that you live."⁸²

Boehm also points to the interdependency in vocation,

"The word we use is "interdependent." All of those things are physical, emotional, spiritual resiliency, and even mental, how I think about things too. They're all interdependent. So, if one is deficient, it will impact all the others, primarily spiritual, but

78. Paustian Interview

79. Paustian Interview

80. 1 Thessalonians 2:8

81. Hebrews 13:7

82. Paustian Interview

all of them. If I'm up too late, I'm not sleeping. If I'm not eating well, I'm not feeling well; then I'm not going to give my best in ministry.⁸³

Paustian states that vocations are all different, but their connecting piece is that every vocation is waiting to be transformed by the Christian sense of calling, "That's why my own focus is to not to grow in one, but it has to be to grow in all."⁸⁴

Why Does a Pastor Grow?

Why does a pastor grow? If the Holy Spirit is responsible for salvation, what is the point of growth in the ministry? Why can't the pastor just read the Bible to people rather than spend time preparing a sermon or bible class? The answers lie in the instrumental cause and the ministerial cause of salvation.

Pastor Jon Hein uses Johann Andreas Quenstedt's definition for the instrumental and ministerial cause of salvation, "The instrumental cause of salvation is the Word and Sacrament. These are the tools by which God creates faith and gathers the Church. The ministerial cause of salvation is the ministers God calls. They become God's agents, playing a vital role in his saving work, by utilizing the Word, i.e., the instrumental cause."⁸⁵ This distinction gives great comfort to the pastor. His responsibility is not to convert or change hearts by himself; that's the Holy Spirit's work. Hein goes on to say, "However, it is equally important that we don't attribute to the Word that which is the minister's responsibility. The Word doesn't carry itself to pagan lands. The Word doesn't preach itself in our churches' pulpits. That is work for the minister to

83. Boehm Interview

84. Paustian Interview

85. Jonathan Hein, "Treasures in Jars of Clay: The Synergy Between the Instrumental and Ministerial Causes in God's Plan of Salvation" (essay presented to the Institute of Worship and Outreach, 2011), 2.

do. The Word works... at doing its job. But it does not work at doing our job. Thus, the ministerial cause is vital to God's plan of salvation."⁸⁶

God has entrusted the pastor to perform in his vocation and do it to the best of his ability. Boehm remarks about this, "Personal growth and ministry, I would say the one drives the other. We get the privilege of communicating the gospel, but it's the same gospel that says I want to always be at my best so that I can give God's people my best, and that means growing across the board. Really, in every area of life."⁸⁷

A pastor is striving to enhance his preaching and teaching. He wants to improve on how he does evangelism and shut-in calls. The pastor wants to grow in the way he ministers to his people. Once again, this reminds the pastor of the purpose of vocation, service. What reasoning does a pastor have to continue to develop his vocations? A pastor grows so that he can serve the people of the earth better. He grows so that he can understand where his people are in their own vocations. He grows, not because he is the instrumental cause of salvation, but because he is the ministerial.

A pastor also needs to recognize the need to evaluate himself in his role as the ministerial cause. Paustian points to the doctrine of *simul iustus et peccator*,

We can really be caught in certain illusions. That we are further than we think we are along that path (of growth). That's why I think that the doctrine of *simul iustus et peccator* is such a saving one because we are at the same time sinner and saint. I have to continue to know myself in both ways. A sinner through and through, but knowing that I am a baptized child of God gives me hope in this place.⁸⁸

86. Hein, 16.

87. Boehm Interview

88. Paustian Interview

The pastor has the hope that he is saved, but he also recognizes that he is not perfect. His life of sanctification is growing in all things for Christ as he awaits the day that personal growth will not be needed.

How is Growth Done?

When asked, “What are some ways in which a pastor can grow?” Paustian responded,

My dad always said you could tell a pastor who reads from who doesn’t. Read and nurture a love for books. Always be in five or six, and you can reach for whatever one you are in the mood for. I would be so impoverished if I confined myself to my own thinking. My habit has been, read widely, but come home to a Lutheran voice.”⁸⁹

When one thinks of books and personal growth, self-help books come to mind.

Self-Help Books

When asked about the place of the secular “self-help” books in a pastor’s personal growth, Gurgel said, “Books like that can be reflective. A little introspective. They attempt to make you slow down and ask the tough questions of life, the big questions. Where am I headed? I know I’m headed to heaven, but as far as my vocations, where am I going? Am I just drifting along? Where is there a place for growth that would be good?”⁹⁰ Secular self-help books like *Traction* by Gino Wickman or *Free to Focus* by Michael Hyatt give a logical system a pastor can use in his life. Michael Hyatt produces a planner that includes an area to record how you are doing in all your life domains or vocations. Even the secular world realizes the need to grow in other areas of life and not just in one’s job.

89. Paustian Interview

90. Gurgle Interview

Another book that stresses the importance of growing in various vocations is *Atomic Habits* by James Clear. Clear advocates for creating small habits and replacing bad habits with good habits. Loewen says about this,

I think you can always take components of that (self-help books) and put them into your life. A great example from *Atomic Habits* is, don't just quit a habit, but replace a bad habit with a good habit. But that's also biblical. The bible says, "Stop thinking about these things," certainly, but it also says to redirect your thoughts on good things. We're replacing a bad habit with a good habit, so there's a lot that we can learn from other areas as long as it doesn't contradict God's word. If it does, it's not true. And why would we want it? So, we extract things from that, and we study that, then we contrast it and apply it to make sure it is in line with God's Word, and we do it. The big difference is the difference between leaning on my own understanding and willpower or leaning on the strength of God, no comparison.⁹¹

Loewen continued by talking about the lens a pastor uses while he reads secular books. When the pastor looks at personal growth suggestions from the secular world, he is always filtering the material through God's word.⁹²

Accountability

Another way pastors can grow is through accountability. First, thinking about the spiritual life, Boehm says, "The New Testament church is community. It's togetherness. It's each other. There's no loneliness. There's no me by myself. There's always community. The church gathers, encourages, and supports, so that ought to translate into our spiritual growth as well."⁹³

Paustian recommends, "getting in a group with pastors, no matter how many it is, or where, or how. Make it something regular with brothers that you care about. It doesn't have to be

91. Loewen Interview

92. There will be more said about self-help books later.

93. Boehm Interview

specifically about ministry.”⁹⁴ With accountability, there can be a sense of uneasiness. Being open and transparent can cause one to feel vulnerable, but the personal growth that the person gains by being accountable and vulnerable with others is worth the risk of uncomfortableness.

Life Planning

The need to plan the year and reassess can be a vital component of growth as well. A personal retreat to step back, pray, think, and write about how one is doing in each vocation can be extremely useful. Gurgel gives an excellent example,

Every January, I sit down with all my vocations, and I evaluate them one by one. What are the biggest challenges that I’m facing as a husband, father, or grandfather, or a steward of my health or finances? I want to be a model example to my people, but also for my sake and my own family, a good steward of the resources God has given me.⁹⁵

Gurgel continues by talking about the agency God gives through the personal retreat. The personal retreat,

is a place to be thoughtfully introspective, in a proper way, not just stuck. Some people call it navel-gazing but spending some time every year taking stock of life, thanking God for the blessings. Thanking God for where we’ve grown. And at the end of the year, they won’t all have happened, but it’s quite amazing once you take time to write these things down, how even when you’re not thinking about them, growth begins to happen. Just because you thought it through in the mind God has given you is an incredible thing. More than you know it’s aware, “I had this goal. I’m going to be working on that.”⁹⁶

God gives responsibility in the pastor’s vocations that can be better realized through a personal retreat or time of reflection.

94. Paustian Interview

95. Gurgel Interview

96. Gurgel Interview

How Does the Pastor's Growth Influence and Enhance Ministry?

Shared Struggle

The pastor's growth in his various vocations is not worth much to him if there is no ministry correlation. Paustian talks about how the pastor's own vocations help him relate with his fellow Christians in their Christian struggle,

The practical habit⁹⁷ of the theologian is the way he translates theology into real life, and that extends beyond pastoral duties. The special duties outside of ministry and the way he goes about them is an extension of the life of faith, but the truth is taken up into his life. The examples are obvious, the credibility of his preaching and teaching. He knows what he's talking about when he talks about the realities of marriage, for example. The vocations draw deep into Christian struggle.⁹⁸

When the pastor speaks out of his own Christian struggle in his vocations, it humbles him. He shows himself in ways that might not be comfortable but will be beneficial to his congregation.

Paustian notes,

And if he speaks out of that (struggle), then I would think his ministry only becomes more authentic and especially as he pursues the right sort of transparency, appropriate kind of transparency, that all of that becomes available to those people, especially the vocations he shares with them. There are fathers out there and sons out there and husbands out there, citizens out there who are listening.⁹⁹

Citizen and Fatherly Growth Makes Connections for Ministry

Kock points to the combination of a father/coach for a major enhancement of ministry is, "I've always looked at coaching as a great ministry opportunity because it got me into the community in ways that I met people I would have never ever met before. They had a chance to meet me. I

97. *Habitus Practicus*" - a Latin phrase common in Dogmatics texts to describe, in part, the effect of theory in reality.

98. Paustian Interview

99. Paustian Interview

had a chance to give witness to my faith without saying anything about Jesus.”¹⁰⁰ As Kock grew in his vocation as a little league coach for his children, he grew as their father and spent time with them. He grew in his availability to people not found in his church. His time spent with the people of the community influenced him on how to best reach out to their souls. Kock could have an easy and open conversation with parents and fellow coaches. It was not a forced situation but a natural bridge for presenting the gospel.

Kock saw another benefit of coaching. It provided him a brain-break. Instead of thinking of the hundreds of things going on at church, he was able to take some time to rest and ponder other things such as, “should we steal or should we bunt or should we just play it straight up or should I move Jonathan from midfield to goalie?”¹⁰¹ Paustian also sees this time spent outside of the church as vital. Some may ask, “How much should a pastor invest in other vocations besides his ministry?” Paustian answers, “Being a dad, being a husband, those things are worthy of our best and worthy of real time.”¹⁰²

Being a citizen of the pastor’s community is also worth real time. Kock notes that growing as a citizen by getting to know the community is technically part of a pastor’s vocation. The pastor grows to appreciate and embrace wherever he is in ministry. He grows in his love for the area and people, which drives him to want to share the saving message to that community that he is a part of and cares about deeply.¹⁰³

100. Kock Interview

101. Kock Interview

102. Kock Interview

103. Kock Interview

The Influence of Relational Growth

A pastor cannot be isolated from his people. Paustian sees this as another essential part of a pastor's growth. Can he grow in his friendships and relationships with his laypeople and his leaders? Asserting that a pastor must be above his people is not beneficial. It can frighten off members from reaching out to the pastor when they need help. The pastor is, of course, held to a different standard in that vocation. But that does not mean separating himself from his people. Paustian recalls his relational growth with his lay leaders, "For example, the pastor invests time in laypeople, invests time in his leaders. Like meeting Tuesday 6 AM at Perkins, we did for years and years."¹⁰⁴ This investment of time gains the trust of his people. The pastor wants his people to view him as available to them. Paustian warns against the pitfall of thinking busyness is essential. The pastor's ministry cannot be defined by busyness, "When busyness equals effectiveness, then we fall into this trap (of intimidation)."¹⁰⁵ But Paustian also believes that a pastor cannot spread himself too thin. He thinks that focusing on growing in a smaller amount of areas in ministry is of greater value than trying to grow in every part of the ministry at the same time.¹⁰⁶

A pastor can also share the growth methods that work for him with his people. Boehm shows one way that he does this with his elders. Boehm meets with his elders once a week to discuss their vocational growth as husbands, fathers, children of God, and leaders. This is another form of accountability for the pastor as he helps his elders grow. He can also look to see if he is growing in the same way and meeting the goals he sets with his elders.¹⁰⁷

104. Paustian Interview

105. Paustian Interview

106. Paustian Interview

107. Boehm Interview

Emotional Growth's Influence

Since humans are sinful, their emotions do not always align with the way God wants them to feel, but they can also be a wonderful blessing. Loewen sees emotional growth as a key area of growth in all vocations,

There is an importance of proactive and reactive growth. Many mistakes are made in relationships within the family, within the congregation because someone is emotionally out of balance. There are only two ways you can live. You can live by the Spirit, or you can live by your emotions. And Galatians is pretty clear when we're living outside the Spirit. We're short-tempered, argumentative, bitter, unforgiving, not very fun people to be around, nor effective ministers of the gospel...So emotional growth is huge, and it's got to be daily for emotional growth to happen. It's again not independent of spiritual growth. Out of confession, out of contrition, out of restoration comes a healthy spiritual person, which then addresses a lot of emotional issues, which are often around pride. The two heads of pride are boastfulness and insecurity. A lot of emotional dysfunction and mental health issues come out of those two things.¹⁰⁸

The pastor's ego, pride, and boastfulness cannot be found in growth.¹⁰⁹ They are the exact opposite of vocational growth. Vocational growth is selfless. Emotional growth in a pastor's vocations helps the pastor stay focused on others instead of getting worked up. He is able to stay focused on serving his congregation and family.

Physical Health and Growth

It is not easy for a pastor to grow physically. Skipping workouts and slipping into an unhealthy diet are frequent habits pastors form. It can be hard for a pastor to maintain physical health, but it is not impossible. The busyness of ministry will often throw physical health to the bottom of the pastor's to-do list. Loewen sees this as a grave danger. It can even lead to unfaithfulness in a pastor's vocations,

108. Loewen Interview

109. There will be more said on the challenges of growth later.

I believe as a husband, 61 years old, it's very important that I take good care of the gift of good health that God's given me. As a called worker, I should be an example, not only to the guys I work with but to other people. God values the temple that he dwells in, being me, far more than he values the church building. And I think too often we take better care of the building than the human temple that he dwells in.¹¹⁰

Boehm echoes a similar thought, “There is something to be said for this is the body God's given me. I'll take as good of care as I can to enable him to use me as long as he chooses to here on earth.”¹¹¹ A pastor who does not have the stamina, the health, or the awareness of what he says when he is out of shape can give a bad message. A pastor does not need to spend countless hours sculpting his body into perfection, but his apathy toward physical health has the potential to spill into other areas of his life.

Gurgle notes that there is a temptation to think self-care is a waste of time, especially ministry time, but that is not the case,

I think there can be a faulty idea of selfishness. Is it selfish to sleep? If that's my whole existence, yes. But to get a good night's rest means I'll work better tomorrow. To actually get some exercise may mean I keep my stress down... I may have one hour less of work today because I went out and worked out and got some lifting in, but that actually will pay me back over and over again. It's a faulty idea of selfishness that to do any kind of self-care is in itself wrong. Or to think, “If you were a really good pastor, you wouldn't pay any attention to that. You would just be out with your sheep all the time.” Well, there's enough truth in that to make me be careful that I don't become a narcissist, but there's enough lie in it to cripple my ministry.¹¹²

110. Loewen Interview

111. Boehm Interview

112. Gurgel Interview

Challenges to Growth

There will be challenges with growth. The greatest challenge to growth is the pastor's own sinful flesh. There is a real danger of making personal growth selfish pursuit. A pastor can be tempted to use personal growth as a way to gain praise and recognition instead of using it to better serve others. He can fall into the ditch of growth because he believes he is part of the instrumental¹¹³ cause of salvation.¹¹⁴

Another challenge to growth is the "tyranny of the urgent."¹¹⁵ Paustian states, "There are always so many things calling for attention. It's hard sometimes in the midst of all of that to pull away and to say I just need to read and study the Word a little bit here, or I need the rest. (He does this in order) to stay focused on what actually is important for him, for his ministry, and for his own health and welfare too."¹¹⁶ When the pastor needs to reevaluate his growth and his vocations, he can be pulled away.

Boehm points to the difference between gathering information and performance. At some point, there will need to be action taken after the information gathering stage,

You might think the information is there, but transformation and growth don't happen just because I have the information. If it did, then we'd all be exceptional Christians because, especially in our church body, that's our thing; doctrine and teaching. We know the right answers, which is good. But knowledge is just knowledge without the application of it. And if we're not applying it, then really, there's not a whole lot of change that happens. And that doesn't undermine the Holy Spirit in any way.¹¹⁷

113. Refer back to page 23 for the previous discussion about the instrumental cause of salvation.

114. There is a narrow Luther middle road with this thought. A pastor can't fall into the ditch of nihilism (nothing he does matters) or fall into the ditch of believing he is the Messiah to his people. The narrow Lutheran middle is working hard as a pastor as if Jesus never came to save, but knowing the whole time that only God saves and my efforts are only good and able because of him.

115. The tyranny of the urgent is the belief that a pastor needs constantly to do the thing on his task list. He never steps back to reevaluate his personal life.

116. Paustian Interview

117. Boehm Interview

The pastor can read every book¹¹⁸, watch every video on growth, and go to all kinds of presentations on growth. But it is vital that he puts the information into practice. Not only will this enhance the gifts given to him by God, but it will also benefit his family and congregation.

A Caution for Growth

It is healthy to recognize the need for growth, but one cannot become obsessed to the point of it becoming an idol. He cannot become so focused on seeing results in his growth that it becomes addicting. Loewen cautions pastors to be aware of the amount of time and effort they are spending on personal growth and identifying the source of their motivation,

“I have to be careful that I do things 110% that shouldn’t be done 110%. So, at times I’ll overinvest in something because I strive to do it well. I don’t think it’s always from a spiritual standpoint. When it is, it’s good. When it’s more about me and my pride and wanting recognition, that’s when I get in trouble.”¹¹⁹

On his own, the recognition of idolatry cannot always be easy to spot. This is an excellent time to recognize the need for a partner to hold one accountable.¹²⁰

A Caution for Self-Help Books

Those interviewed expressed the usefulness of self-help books, but it always came with a caution. Paustian, while talking about reading self-help books, said,

118. The writer of Ecclesiastes 12:12 cautions, “Of making many books there is no end, and much study wearies the body.”

119. Loewen Interview

120. An accountability partner may encourage the pastor to take time to be with his family and community instead of always thinking inward about growth. He can help steer the pastor back to his motivation of service instead of praise and recognition of growth.

There is never going to be a right spirit behind them. It's going to be self-reliance, civic righteousness, pure pharisaism. It is law, not gospel, which you know going into it. So, you can bring your gospel heart, and say in the peace of forgiveness, "I'm just here to learn some techniques and some different ways of thinking about how to attack my life, then I think we're OK. I think you can profit from those things and not be too led astray."¹²¹

Gurgel sees a subtle millennialism¹²² in the books.

If I just do the right things, everything's going to work outright. If I just get the right Daniel Harkavy or Michael Hyatt book and I just follow it, everything is going to be great... am I going to cancel the cross somehow? I have no troubles, no difficulty because I got it all figured out now? So, I think there is a caution for the Lutheran Christian and especially a Lutheran Christian pastor to be thinking about that. I'm not going to somehow, if I follow all this just right, achieve perfect growth in every area, and I will have indeed banished the cross from my life because I have reached full maturity in Christ, no, not going to happen... All these books are helpful, but I will never banish the reality of a fallen world or my own fallenness and achieve perfection and perfect growth or the perfect year or the perfect day. So, if I don't keep that in mind, I can drive myself to discouragement, or I just beat myself up.¹²³

The drive to discouragement is a genuine problem among pastors today. This can lead down a path that has no growth.

A Caution about Faithfulness

A simple definition of faithfulness is serving as a good steward of the time, vocations, and talents God has given. When the bible talks about faithfulness, does it always mean that definition? Jesus says in Matthew 25:21, Well done good and *faithful* servant, and then in Revelation 2:10, be *faithful*. If Jesus is saying faithfulness is being full of faith, that is one definition. However, the way *faithful* is often used is closer to "fulfilling your role perfectly." A common thought

121. Paustian Interview

122. Millennialism is the thought the Christians life is going to be great and everything will work out for the Christian. In a millennialist thinking, the Christians will be ruling the earth with Jesus. The idea of heaven on earth is very prevalent.

123. Gurgel Interview

among the interviewees was to avoid using the phrase "be faithful" to describe how a person carries out his vocations,

I often have thought that we need to do a little bit of thinking there when we urge that (faithfulness) on pastors. Because the pastor with the sensitive conscience will never go to bed thinking, "I've been entirely faithful today, wouldn't you know it, I finally achieved it," unless he wants to lie to himself. There will always be something that could have been done in one of those vocations God has given.¹²⁴

Paustian states, "We say to each other 'just be faithful' as if this is some kind of comfort. Why would that be comforting?"¹²⁵ A pastor is not able to be completely faithful in his vocations. If there is no complete faithfulness, is it really *faithfulness*?

Someone may bring of 1 Corinthians 4:2, "Now it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful," as a measuring stick for pastoral ministry. It seems like a pastor is caught having to prove himself as faithful. The Apostle Paul would disagree. Paul continues on in verses three and four, "I care very little if I am judged by you or by any human court; indeed, *I do not even judge myself*. My conscience is clear, but that does not make me innocent. *It is the Lord who judges me.*"¹²⁶ Paul notes that he doesn't judge himself on his faithfulness to God. No one can judge the heart except the Lord. Faithfulness will be revealed on the last day. So how should we think of the word faithfulness?

Paustian suggests when we think of faithfulness, we turn to 2 Timothy 2:12–13, "If we disown him, he will also disown us; if we are faithless, he remains faithful, for he cannot disown himself." Paustian said,

What's the difference between disowning and being faithless? Disowning is something that you know you've done it when you're done it. You have disclaimed Jesus. So, what is being faithless? I think being faithless is just being weak. And you weren't faithful in

124. Gurgel Interview

125. Paustian Interview

126. 1 Corinthians 4:3-4

every way because you didn't speak in every possible circumstance. You didn't seize every possible moment, and we didn't use every possible hour. Not that you could because you are human. You are a sinner, and so you're weak. You haven't disowned Jesus in those acts of weakness. That's not disowning. This thing is something more violent and more intentional. You know when you've done it.

So now the question is, how should one mention faithfulness? In his interview, Paustian discussed a conference for missionaries on "faithfulness" that he once attended. The conference pleasantly surprised Paustian,

The whole conference was about how God is faithful to us. They have an entire conference devoted to that and not 'Do this better, or do that better to be more effective.' And when missionaries come together, burden and guilt come with that you think, "I have never done enough. Instead he sees, God is faithful."¹²⁷

Gurgel remarks that often when one mentions "faithfulness" to encourage, one is trying to say that the pastor is not the instrumental cause of growth,

Whether that's as a parent or husband or pastor, you can't reach into people's hearts and make them grow in faith. You can't reach into their lives and make them live their faith. You preach, teach, share, and pray for them, and you urge. But finally, God grants the growth¹²⁸, so I think we mean well when we say just be faithful. But there's a double-edged sword there because that still keeps the attention on me.¹²⁹

Gurgel, like Paustian, would like our stress to be on God's faithfulness instead of our own, "I wonder if we could grow in learning not to emphasize our faithfulness so much, but rather God's. It's His faithfulness to us that enables us to do anything. And if I can just get my eyes off myself long enough to remember that, that actually empowers faithfulness."¹³⁰

127. Paustian Interview

128. One cannot help but think about Paul talking to the Corinthian Christians about their division over leaders. 1 Corinthians 3: 6-8, "I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God has been making it grow. So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow. The one who plants and the one who waters have one purpose, and they will each be rewarded according to their own labor."

129. Gurgel Interview

130. Gurgel Interview

A pastor realizes that he cannot and will not ever be completely faithful, so how can he legitimately attribute faithfulness to his vocations? Paustian sees faithfulness in the daily struggle of those in the faith, “You don’t give up. You’re going to see on every page of scripture we live in repentance and in grace. It’s not something you can quantify that was right.”¹³¹ A pastor’s daily life would be defeating, depressing, and destroying if he had to answer the question, “have I been faithful compared to God’s faithfulness?” God is the faithful one. God asks the pastor to be filled with the faith that God gives and then daily struggle to live according to that faith by relying on God.

What happens when there isn’t growth?

Burnout

Bill Gaultiere, a psychologist and pastor, began a training and counseling institute, *Soul Shepherding*. He founded *Soul Shepherding* to help pastors and laypeople. “Soul Shepherding offers resources and training for you and the people you influence to thrive with Jesus.”¹³² In 2009, Gaultiere gathered statistics. Seven different surveys compiled of pastors from various Christian denominations made up the statistics. They were conducted at various times from as early as 1991 and as late as 2013. They asked the pastors questions on church life, home life, and burnout. The statistics are eye-opening,

75% report being “extremely stressed” or “highly stressed.”

90% work between 55 to 75 hours per week.

90% feel fatigued and worn out every week.

70% say they’re grossly underpaid.

40% report a serious conflict with a parishioner at least once a month.

131. Paustian Interview

132. Bill Gaultiere, “Pastor Stress Statistics,” *Soul Shepherding*, 2009, <http://www.souldshepherding.org/2009/11/pastors-under-stress/>.

- 78% were forced to resign and 63% at least twice, most commonly because of church conflict.
- 80% will not be in ministry ten years later and only a fraction make it a lifelong career.
- 100% of 1,050 Reformed and Evangelical pastors had a colleague who had left the ministry because of burnout, church conflict, or moral failure.
- 91% have experienced some form of burnout in ministry and 18% say they are “fried to a crisp right now.”
- 70% says they have a lower self-esteem now than when they entered ministry.
- 70% constantly fight depression.
- 50% feel so discouraged that they would leave their ministry if they could, but can’t find another job.
- 80% believe their pastoral ministry has negatively affected their families and 33% said it was an outright hazard.
- 80% of ministry spouses feel left out and unappreciated in their church.
- 77% feel they do not have a good marriage.
- 41% display anger problems in marriage (reported by the spouse).
- 38% are divorced or divorcing.
- 50% admit to using pornography and 37% report inappropriate sexual behavior with someone in the church.
- 70% do not have someone they consider a close friend.
- 50% do not meet regularly with an accountability person or group.
- 72% only study the Bible when preparing for sermons or lessons.
- 21% spend less than 15 minutes a day in prayer – the average is 39 minutes per day.
- 16% are “very satisfied” with their prayer life, 47% are “somewhat satisfied”, and 37% are either “somewhat dissatisfied” or “very dissatisfied” (spending more time in quiet prayer or listening to God versus making requests was correlated with high satisfaction).
- 44% of pastors do not take a regular day off.
- 31% do not exercise at all, while 37% exercise at least three or four days a week as recommended.
- 90% say they have not received adequate training to meet the demands of ministry.
- 85% have never taken a Sabbatical.¹³³

These statistics show an unhealthiness that can come with ministry.¹³⁴ The ministry may lead to burnout. Burnout has two main outcomes: A lack of will, desire, and passion to give God your best in your calling, or it could ultimately lead to leaving the ministry.

Why is there Burnout?

133. Gualtiere, “Pastor Stress Statistics.”

134. Many of the statistics would more than likely be better if those surveyed were only WELS pastors.

Two main factors may cause burnout. There can be an overemphasis on looking at oneself and noticing the total depravity that one has. There can also be an unhealthy comparison to others. The despair and feeling of inadequacy from these factors are a simple way a pastor will burnout. Paustian sees two other possible reasons for burnout, “Burnout comes from doing things you don’t really believe in or that are not being appreciated.”¹³⁵ A pastor’s lack of desire to do the work because he is going through the motions, not living his life of faith, not practicing what he preaches can cause a pastor to ultimately give up. There are people in WELS who want to help fight against burnout among pastors. Two organizations in particular that want to help are Grow in Grace and CrossTrain Ministries.

135. Paustian Interview

PART 4: GROW IN GRACE AND CROSSTRAIN

A Look at Grow in Grace

WLS established Grow in Grace in 2010 to fulfill its second purpose. The first purpose is training pastors for the ministry, and the second is to continue educating pastors once they leave campus. Grow in Grace, “offers resources and support for the growth of pastors in all their God-given callings with a special emphasis on spiritual and professional growth.”¹³⁶ Grow in Grace has four main goals,

Events & Courses—Deliver Christ-centered, accessible, and ministry impacting events and courses built around the four theological disciplines of biblical theology, systematic theology, historical theology, and practical theology.

Retreats & Mentoring—Provide collaborative opportunities for pastors to learn from one another and to gather with peers celebrating similar ministry milestones.

Strengthening Ministry—Deliver gospel-rich resources that assist pastors to partner with others in honestly evaluating all their callings and to plan for growth with confidence.

Growth Resources—Deliver informal resources useful for individual or group study that assist pastors to grow in all their callings.¹³⁷

The existence and purpose of Grow in Grace is common knowledge amongst most WELS pastors. A less familiar resource to help pastors who would like to continue in their personal growth is CrossTrain Ministries.

136. “Who are we?” *Grow in Grace*, 2010, <https://www.wisluthsem.org/grow-in-grace/about-us/>.

137. “Mission, Vision, Goals,” *Grow in Grace*, 2010, <https://www.wls.wels.net/grow-in-grace/mission-vision-goals/>.

CrossTrain Ministries

Rick Loewen, one of the men interviewed for this thesis, started CrossTrain Ministries. Loewen spoke for Grow in Grace events for several years. He recognized a need for a more specialized ministry of pastoral care. He recognizes a few differences and similarities between CrossTrain and Grow in Grace. Grow in Grace has the goal of serving all 1,300+ pastors in the synod. CrossTrain is a paid service that provides peer coaching for individual pastors. This is CrossTrain's stated mission, "CrossTrain coaching helps WELS pastors develop healthy spiritual, emotional, and physical habits, along with transparent relationships, that foster resilience. These efforts all take place under the grace of God and in a network of brotherly relationships."¹³⁸

Pastor Boehm, one of the life-coaches for CrossTrain, sees CrossTrain and Grow in Grace as partners. Grow in Grace specializes in deepening growth in a pastor's spiritual life. "Then CrossTrain says, "Yep, and that is absolutely essential, but let's also realize that there are other components or elements of ministry or just being a child of God that are also important. Important to give attention to, so I don't see them at all competing but rather complementing each other."¹³⁹ Boehm goes on to say, "Another credit to our seminary is their encouragement to grow professionally and personally. So, I think CrossTrain fits in there. It's a partner and not a different philosophy. It meets a different need or realization of growing in those areas."¹⁴⁰ The "areas" that Boehm is referring to are the spiritual, emotional, and physical habits.

138. "Welcome," *CrossTrain Ministries*, 2020, <https://crosstrainministries.com/>.

139. Boehm Interview

140. Boehm Interview

How CrossTrain Helps with Personal Growth

The primary way that CrossTrain pushes growth in the pastor's vocation is through accountability. Loewen describes how CrossTrain helps with accountability,

The research shows this. If you have a great idea, like a New Year's Eve resolution, you have about a 5% chance to succeed. If you take a good idea or good intention, and you put it into an action plan that has written goals, a timeline, encouragement, accountability, it goes up to a 90-95% success rate. And that's a lot of what we do. So, we provide peer-to-peer coaching, and then we also infuse the webinars every month as an ongoing curriculum.¹⁴¹

Boehm knew he wanted accountability, but he could not find an accountability program. The accountability programs of the secular world are based on the law,

I couldn't arrive at a place where I felt good about accountability except under the law. CrossTrain has really been instrumental in it. Reinforcing accountability is actually gospel-fueled. You recognize that who we are in Christ is why I can be open and transparent with struggles and reveal where I've fallen short. I don't have to pretend because the gospel covers the shortcomings. Either I believe that or I don't, and it's because I do believe it that now I can be real with the challenges that I know that I want to work on because grace means this brother cares enough to help and support and encourage me.¹⁴²

Boehm also mentions that this is not one big fast and easy fix to make the pastor grow,

In general, it's the slow incremental changes. And sometimes that's why we struggle. It's a number of little habits to establish that you build on overtime. It's that power of compound interest, in a sense. Over time the little changes are going to have a much bigger impact than this idea that I just need to make one big change.¹⁴³

Combining CrossTrain and Grow in Grace

141. Loewen Interview

142. Boehm Interview

143. Boehm Interview

Boehm comments that there cannot be a separation of the growth that Grow in Grace and CrossTrain emphasize,

You have to guard against giving all of your time and attention to one or the other because I need to be pushing myself theologically too and digging into the meat and the stuff that makes us confessionally Lutheran. But at the same time, if that's all I do and I have never acknowledged that, maybe I'm not really great with dealing with emotions, or I've let myself go physically, and now I'm not even in good enough health to pastor people. So, it's a both-and that I think complement each other. That is something we can be grateful for in our church body.¹⁴⁴

Grow in Grace offers a mentoring program for young pastors. Loewen differentiates coaching and mentoring. He believes the mentoring program is a great transitional program for young pastors,

It (mentoring program) gets guys used to and understanding the power of talking to another godly man about what's on your heart. I would say the difference is coaching is probably more intense. Grow in Grace's base is broader. I think the mentoring has a lot to do with the pastor's job, and I know the mentors do a great job and would be good listeners, but we dig deep (into the other vocations).¹⁴⁵

As Boehm and Loewen have pointed out, a pastor can grow with both programs. God has blessed the WELS with two great organizations for the pastor's continued personal growth in his various vocations.

144. Boehm Interview

145. Loewen Interview

CONCLUSION

As the writer of Ecclesiastes said, “there is nothing new under the sun.”¹⁴⁶ The philosophy of personal growth has been around for thousands of years. The pastor recognizes the history of personal growth and gleans ideas for his own life. But the pastor has a very different definition and motivation for growth. Growth is always under the cross and in service for others because of the freeing gospel of Jesus. This growth benefits the pastor’s congregation, his family, his community, and finally him. The pastor grows out of thanksgiving and praise for the amazing God who allows His people to continue their life Growing in Grace.

146. Ecclesiastes 1:9

APPENDIX 1

SAMPLE INTERVIEW QUESTION

1. How would you define vocation in the broad sense?
2. How would you define vocation in the narrow sense?
3. What are some ways you balanced your ministry with your personal growth?
4. Is balance a good word to use with vocations, or is there a better way to describe it?
5. What other vocations did you have outside of ministry?
6. What are areas you are working on right now?
7. What is faithfulness?
8. How does personal growth in other vocations contribute to faithfulness?
9. How has your personal growth in your vocations outside of ministry influenced/enhanced your ministry?
10. What are the biggest challenges to personal growth?
11. What are three specific ways a pastor can grow?
12. Where do you see the purpose of a “self–help” book in ministry?
13. Was there a major change you made that was the greatest benefit or were there many small changes?
14. Compare and contrast Growing in Grace with Crosstrain.
15. Is this something that can easily be used with the leaders of the pastor’s church?
16. Why does a pastor need personal growth?

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