

PASTORAL RESILIENCE: MAINTAINING A HEALTHY LIFE IN MINISTRY

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ABSTRACT

The public ministry presents the pastor with blessings that prove to be gracious gifts of God. However, it also manifests many temptations, trials, and tribulations. The expectations placed upon a pastor can leave him wondering if the ministry is worth all the hassle. First and foremost, the pastor must preach and proclaim the gospel to his congregation and the community around him. Proper gospel proclamation includes regular preaching, teaching Bible classes, confirmation, homebound visits, hospital calls, preserving the spiritual well-being of his family, and so much more. The ministry proves to be no small task, yet the expectation for a pastor is that he does his work with excellence. This may easily result in burnout. This thesis will ponder the reality of burnout in a pastor's ministry and the resilience a pastor practices to protect himself in three aspects of his life: physical health, mental and emotional health, and spiritual health. Being strong and pushing through difficult times does not equate to resiliency. Resiliency is about managing life's troubles and discovering ways to persevere without burning out.

INTRODUCTION

What is the first thought that comes to mind when you find out someone is a pastor? He must have a good presence in front of a crowd. He probably knows what he is talking about, and I should probably listen. There are even comments about pastors only needing to work once a week and enjoying six out of seven days doing whatever they want. However, when it comes to discussions about pastors and the lives they lead, conversations often lean toward the duties involved in their ministry. How often do they preach? How well do they preach? What kind of Bible classes are they good at teaching? Do they have an authoritative presence, or are they calmer and more collected?

Too often, a pastor is tempted to think that his abilities and successes reflect the success of his ministry, his ability to grab people's attention from the pulpit, his willingness to meet people where they are at with their problems, and his eagerness to teach his people, both young and old. These are all good qualities and talents that a pastor wants to have, but his abilities and attributes do not promise him success in his ministry. For a pastor to perform well in the pulpit, classroom, meetings, and counseling sessions, he needs to be resilient in body, mind, and soul.

Ministry requires countless hours of preparation, diligent study, readiness for the unexpected, and willingness to serve where others may not. It is suitable for a pastor to be in his office working with the original language of the text for his sermon the following weekend. It's noble that he spends extra hours preparing a Bible class geared toward a specific prospect for the sake of their understanding of what Scripture says. It is honorable that a pastor schedules time to

go out to his members who cannot bring themselves to worship on a Sunday morning and nourish them with the gospel in word and sacrament. It is wise for the pastor to attend the meetings held by his church council, elders, worship committee, etc. Plenty of tasks need to be accomplished weekly by the pastor for the spiritual well-being and growth of the sheep God has called him to serve. Therefore, it is admirable when the pastor is faithful to his calling and checks every last box on his list of “to-dos” before punching out at the end of the day.

However, the pastor needs to realize this: he may have the right attitudes and manages his life well, but the pastor’s ability to do his job well doesn’t guarantee him an easy ministry. Ministry isn’t about being the most charismatic, charming preacher the world has ever heard utter a word. Ministry isn’t about bringing in a steady flow of prospects who jump on board when they finish their first Bible information course. Ministry isn’t about doing everything that needs to be done and meeting every expectation under the sun for the pastor to prove himself as a faithful servant of Christ. “Congregations love those who just can’t say ‘no.’ Congregations applaud those who never take a day off, who ‘labor for the Lord’ endlessly. What heroes and heroines they are! How we admire their dedication! Or is it their disease?”¹ A pastor is not just a maid; he is not simply a butler who runs to the rescue whenever a member has a favor to ask or a request to make. Instead, God calls the pastor to preach and proclaim Christ-crucified to his people and the people of the community he serves. He is a servant who tends first and foremost to the spiritual care of the flock he shepherds.

There is one who does not want to see a pastor serve his primary purpose. The devil does not want the Word of God to reach the hearts of the lost. Satan has gone out of his way from the

1. John Frederick Lehr, *Clergy Burnout: Recovering from the 70-Hour Work Week...and Other Self-Defeating Practices* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2006), 3.

beginning of time, seeking the destruction of the crown of God's creation. He does not want the pastor to fulfill his call. Every Christian, every person created anew by God's grace and forgiveness, faces temptations daily. The pastor is no exception in Satan's eyes. Some people might view their pastor as immune to temptation, but they are on the devil's radar as much as every Christian who does not serve in the public ministry.

While the pastor may experience one or many ministerial difficulties, one flies under the radar: Burnout. In writing on faculty burnout, Rebecca Pop-Ruark comments, "For many faculty, work is always in the back of our minds even when we try to relax and enjoy being present."² Pastors are not immune to these thoughts and are even more prone to experiencing them than other professionals. As a result, pastors may focus on the quality or quantity of their accomplishments to determine the success of their ministry and identity as pastors. This focus is on the wrong place. The pastor quickly loses sight of why he is in the position of a called minister. His vision of the truth of Scripture is blurred, and he sees more what he does rather than who he is: a child of God.

When a pastor begins to notice or experience the effects of burnout, the initial response is to "be strong." Not only for pastors but for Christians in general, it is often said when trial and tribulation rear their ugly heads, "Be strong." However, being strong and pushing through complex challenges does not equate to resiliency. The resilient person, in this case, the pastor, knows that when trials come his way, he needs to manage four areas of his health and welfare: physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual well-being.

2. Rebecca Pope-Ruark, PhD, *Unraveling Faculty Burnout: Pathways to Reckoning and Renewal* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2022), 164.

I will explain the importance for a pastor to be resilient in his ministry, not simply to avoid burnout but to be well-equipped for the many challenges that come with the public ministry.³ This thesis will demonstrate the necessity of resilience for the pastor in the following areas: Physical Resilience, Mental and Emotional Resilience, and Spiritual Resilience.

3. While practicing resilience is important and encouraged by the author, this thesis will not give specific practices of resilience, but what practicing resilience could look like.

LITERATURE REVIEW

I will briefly discuss the main literature pieces that focus on the three areas of resilience that a pastor needs to be aware of in his ministry for his well-being. The area of Physical Resilience will be covered by three papers focusing on the importance of proper exercise and body maintenance. The primary literature driving the area of Mental Resilience will be *Winning the War in Your Mind* by Craig Groeschel and *The Freedom of Self-Forgetfulness* by Timothy Keller. Emotional resilience will be devoted to the works *Unoffendable* by Brant Hansen and *Enemies of the Heart* by Andy Stanley. And Spiritual Resilience will be influenced by an essay by Mark Paustian and *Live No Lies* by John Mark Comer.

Margin by Doctor Richard Swensen and *Clergy Burnout* by Fred Lehr were both beneficial books for researching the need for resiliency in the ministry. The average pastor's physical, mental, and emotional health is not up to par with the average person, partially because the average clergyman focuses so intently on his ministry that it becomes easy for him to neglect his well-being. These sources were crucial to the foundation and "reason" for this thesis.

Jonathan Scharf's essay "I'm Fearfully and Wonderfully Made" exhibits the biblical concern that the pastor has for the body God has given to him. The essays by Jonathan Fleischmann and Nathan Loersch speak to the effects of exercise on both the body and the mind, emphasizing the importance of exercise in relation to physical resilience. Loersch talks more heavily about the significance of regular exercise, while Fleischmann emphasizes exercise's mental and emotional ramifications.

Andy Stanley in *Enemies of the Heart* and Craig Groeschel in *Winning the War in Your Mind* both did fine work capturing how the head and the heart are affected by the sinful nature and the world at large. The world and the flesh are here to stay, which means the effects they have on the mind and emotions are here to stay, but there are ways to combat them. Timothy Keller in *The Freedom of Self-Forgetfulness* and Brant Hansen in *Unoffendable* focused more on the scriptural practice of maintaining a healthy heart and mind when dealing with other people and with oneself.

In his essay on pastoral wellness, Mark Paustian laid the foundation for the great importance of personal devotions in a pastor's life. John Comer also advocates for the devotional life of the pastor in *Live No Lies*. Pastor Comer relates the need for personal devotions to the enemies that oppose God and his people: the devil, the world, and the flesh. The need for a solid devotional life becomes apparent in exposing these enemies.

The literature used for this thesis was used for foundational, informational, and practical purposes. The research laid the foundation for a need for pastoral resilience, provided information on what that resilience looks like, and covered various practices that a pastor can use in pursuing resilience.

PHYSICAL RESILIENCE

When people, not just pastors, are faced with dilemmas, crises, shortcomings, disappointments, hardships, or anything that may prevent them from productively living, there's a typical response: be strong. Strength presents itself in many ways; it allows someone to move large objects, run far distances, and push their bodies to incredible extremes. However, physical resilience does not equal physical strength or fitness.

Resistance or weight training is the solution when a person wants to get stronger and increase muscle mass within a particular body part. Using calisthenics, resistance bands, barbells, dumbbells, or whatever exercise that incorporates the contraction and relaxations of muscles to break down muscle fibers allows them to build themselves up and grow in mass. For example, suppose a person wants to enable themselves to run more extended amounts of time for further distances. In that case, they train themselves to practice longer distanced runs in small increased increments. But there is much more to physical fitness than gaining muscle or endurance. Maintaining a healthy diet, getting a proper amount of sleep, drinking appropriate amounts of water, and being regularly active all play a role in a person's physical fitness.

Physical resilience comes into play when the pastor faces obstacles, challenges, and choices that cause him to lose interest and care in the well-being of his body.

What is Physical Resilience?

Careers are meaningful and, for many, the most critical aspect of life. Pastors are not exempt from concluding that their most important calling is their ministry. However, when the focus of a pastor is solely on his ministry, his physical health is often one area of his life that suffers. “It’s easy to neglect our physical health when faced with the demands of ministry—whether it’s our vocation or whether we’ve chosen to volunteer. Unfortunately, many of us take our health for granted.”⁴ Thus, a pastor must learn to be physically resilient in his ministry. He doesn’t need to be the most muscular man in the room. He doesn’t need to run the fastest mile or hold the long jump record in the congregation. But his physical well-being is vital to the productivity of his ministry.

Doctor Richard A. Swenson notes, “Time cannot be stretched or borrowed. It is a universal given, and it is in apportioning this time that balance and priorities become very important. Time, then, is the key. When we couple it with our goals, desires, and responsibilities, we have some priority decisions to make. It is unwise to give all our time to work and family but then none for personal health.”⁵ Time holds unrecognized power in the lives of all people, and many do not notice how quickly tasks can consume time—especially when society expects excellence. It would be foolish to embark on a mission with low standards and few expectations; it is also absurd to sacrifice the physical, personal care of one’s body for the sake of their career. Maintaining physical health takes time; it takes time out of the day and extensive practice to reap or notice the benefits it provides. For these reasons, the efforts to maintain physical health

4. Anne Jackson, *Mad Church Disease: Overcoming the Burnout Epidemic* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009), 48.

5. Dr. Richard A. Swenson, *Margin: Restoring Emotional, Physical, Financial, and Time Reserves to Overloaded Lives* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1992), 221.

become expendable or replaceable.⁶ “We are going through a difficult time for clergy. There is clear evidence that the stress and demands of ministry are having a significant adverse effect on the physical health of clergy.”⁷ The first step for a pastor to be physically resilient is understanding who he is and to whom he belongs.

Biblical Concern for the Body

The following statement is a cliché, but it is true: no person belongs to themselves. In today’s society, people believe they are entitled to treat their bodies however they want to. Scripture speaks very differently regarding the body. “Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore, honor God with your bodies.” (I Cor. 6:19–20, NIV 2011)⁸ There is no question about the reverent regard that the Son of Man had for the human body. “Christ so honored human flesh that He, infinite God, took it. Second, He demonstrated clear concern for the bodies of humans. Third, He redeemed human flesh, even raising it from the dead.”⁹ God

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6. The pastor who needs to prep for a 10 a.m. Bible class can easily convince himself that his morning would be better spent in his office rather than at the gym. That, if he were overprepared for class, he would relieve himself of the stress that the anticipation of class has caused him.
 7. Stephen McCutchan, *Clergy Physical Health: Healthy Clergy Make Healthy Congregations*, (self-pub., 2018) 17.
 8. If you are house-sitting for a friend who is out of town for the week, how are you going to treat their home? Their possessions? You are not going to throw parties all week, trashing the place as if you own it and have no need to care for that home. In the same way, your body belongs to the God who has graciously given it to you. For a pastor to neglect the obvious needs of his body for the sake of accomplishing more in the office is to say the pastor neglects the gift that God has given him for the sake of the call God has given him.
 9. Jonathan E. Scharf, “I believe that I Am Fearfully and Wonderfully Made: The Pastor Cares for His Body” (Paper Presented at WELS Symposium, 2021), 13.

took time and consideration in forming the human body out of love. (Gen. 1:26ff) For a pastor to recognize the gracious gift God has bestowed on him is to identify the incredible opportunity he has to glorify his God with that gift.

Exercise

For a pastor to be a proper steward of the gift of the body, he needs to understand what that body needs. Exercise is the most common and well-known aspect of physical health and, therefore, physical resilience. In his studies, Pastor Nathan Loersch notes a distinction made between physical *fitness* and physical *activity*:

One can be in a state of physical fitness and not be gleaning any benefits from physical activity. One can be comparatively unfit, but yet be indeed gleaning much benefit from exercise. Although physical fitness and physical activity are inextricably linked (one simply cannot become more fit without exercising), it seems that improved mental and emotional health is tied not to physical fitness, but to the physical activity itself.¹⁰

These studies show that being “fit” in the eyes of society does not equate to being beneficially active.¹¹ Just because someone is physically active every once in a while doesn’t mean they are physically resilient. Where physical activity becomes physical resilience is in routine. Exercising whenever there is time is beneficial, but more benefits are noticeable when the exercise becomes regular. “Regular” is a relative term and is unique to every individual. Exercise does not need to consume a considerable portion or portions of the day but can instead be a simple walk in the

10. Nathan F. Loersch, “The Impact of Regular Physical Exercise on the Pastor and His Ministry” (senior thesis, Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, WI, 2015), 25.

11. The author had a friend in college who was able to eat whatever he wanted, including a daily slice of chocolate cake, and yet he never lost the “fit” physique that he was gifted by God. The pastor who may not have what is perceived to be “the ideal body” will still reap physical, mental, and emotional benefits of regular activity.

morning before starting the day. Maybe it is an hour at the local gym every morning, afternoon, or evening. Exercise could also be incorporated into activities that already occur throughout the day: lawn work, walking the dog, playing with the kids, etc. Whatever the case, “Exercise strengthens bones, muscles, and the heart. Muscle movement helps clear chronic inflammation. Exercise burns organ fat, protecting the organs. And exercise improves endurance for the day.”¹²

Eating

Exercise plays a significant role in resilience, but eating is just as important to physical resilience. Eating habits have the potential to make or break the efficacy of the exercise that a pastor practices. Food is known as the body’s fuel, but if faulty fuel fills the tank, the body will struggle to function correctly.

For clergy in North Carolina, statistics showed that only 25% of clergy were a normal or healthy weight compared to the average person, leaving 75% of clergy overweight or obese.¹³ “The high rate of obesity among clergy is taking a toll on—and truly fracturing—their physical health. Obesity is a significant problem not just in and of itself. We should also note that it both causes and complicates various chronic diseases, including diabetes, arthritis, asthma, joint disease, angina (chest pain), heart disease, and hypertension.”¹⁴

12. Jonathan D. Fleischmann, “A Pastor in Motion Stays in Motion: The Relation Between Exercise and Mental and Emotional Health” (master’s thesis, Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, WI, 2022), 31.

13. Rae Jean Proeschold-Bell and Jason Byassee, *Faithful and Fractured: Responding to the Clergy Health Crisis* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2018), 84–85.

14. Proeschold-Bell, *Faithful and Fractured*, 84.

Many factors may cause a pastor to lose track of the food he is consuming. For example, church events have so many different dishes that call out to him. Desserts are usually on the table in Bible studies and classes. A busy Sunday may distract him from planning his meals for the week. An unexpected visit to the hospital may have him running to a fast-food restaurant rather than home. The list goes on. Resilient eating does not need to include fasting, intense dieting, or calorie counting, though these practices may be beneficial. Instead, resilient eating requires the pastor to be aware of the fuel he puts into his body, what he drinks throughout the day, the times he eats, and the portions he consumes.

Sleep

The third and final dynamic of physical resilience is sleep. Sleep is a necessity often neglected. Why? The list of reasons that sleep “isn’t necessary” goes on and on, but what are the reasons for sleep? In explaining the different “gears” that our bodies perform under, Swenson notes a difficulty for many: “Unfortunately, many in our society do not shift down from overdrive. Our cars are not meant to race at high speeds continuously—the engine would burn up. Neither are our bodies or spirits. Yet to slow down for some is unthinkable and for others, impossible.”¹⁵ When the body can rest, it recharges its systems to manage the many functions and actions it is expected to perform during the day. When the body does not get sufficient sleep, its performance experiences difficulties and even failure. Not only does sleep have ramifications for the body, but even more so for the driving unit of the body: the brain.

15. Swenson, *Margin*, 228.

Pastor Jonathan Fleischmann notes the impact sleep has on the brain. “Throughout the day, one person takes in tons of data. Everything that occurs throughout the day goes into the brain. The brain needs to figure out what to do with that information. One way it does this is through sleep.”¹⁶ The necessity of sleep for the brain is not limited to mental health—talked about later in this paper—but dramatically impacts the physical capabilities of the pastor’s body.¹⁷ There are days throughout ministry that require more time than a pastor has—it happens, and it is okay to have those days. However, shaving off time meant for sleep is not a beneficial way to gain more time for those things in ministry that need to get done before his head hits the pillow.

16. Fleischmann, “A Pastor in Motion,” 20.

17. A pastor is no different when it comes to the care and well-being of his body. However, the duties a pastor has to manage throughout the twenty-four-hour day often leave him trying to manage time he does not have. One area of the day that too often gets diminished is time for sleep. When a pastor does not get the proper amount of sleep he needs, it becomes difficult to stay alert when spiritual catastrophes come, when he needs to ponder and process the text for his Sunday sermon, or when he needs to plan a special service coming up.

MENTAL AND EMOTIONAL RESILIENCE

“Mind over matter” is an easy concept to let roll off the tongue, but putting it into practice is a different story. This part of the thesis will acknowledge that a significant amount of the pastor’s battle occurs in his mind. This doesn’t mean that it’s “all in his head” and “there’s nothing to worry about.” Still, the mental resilience of a pastor is an essential part of the overall resilience he needs to maintain a healthy head in the ministry. This paper does not focus on areas of mental disorder or illness; instead, the paper focuses on the need for mental stability in a world filled with frustrating mental and emotional challenges.

Mental health is a tricky concept. Society has always had its “norms,” and if one doesn’t fit all those norms, they are often left questioning themselves, their abilities, their place in the world, and their identity. People don’t want to talk about their mental health or what is happening inside their heads because there is a preconceived notion that people will be judgmental and not listen to what’s happening. Pastor and Doctor Larry Osborne had a fellow pastor “who regularly bemoans the lack of moral fiber in our political leaders, the media, and youth. He sees it as something unique to our modern era. Yet, when I read the cultural critiques of spiritual leaders long dead, I’m struck by the fact that they said much the same thing.”¹⁸ The world does not comply with the mentality that the Bible produces in the heads and hearts of God’s people. The outside world challenges the pastor when a congregation does not want to

18. Larry Osborne, *Thriving in Babylon: Why Hope, Humility, and Wisdom Matter in a Godless Culture* (Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 2015), 35–36.

reach out to his community, a community does not want to listen, or people, in general, do not care what God's Word has to say. It becomes frustrating; that is when emotional and mental resilience becomes a factor.

A pastor will experience various emotions throughout his ministry—many from ministry and some from life as a human being.¹⁹ Benjamin Kohls references three areas of emotional affect that a pastor may face: Compassion satisfaction, burnout, and secondary traumatic stress.

Compassion Satisfaction...is intuitively understood to be the positive feelings and sense of fulfillment associated with helping others. Burnout is...a state of feeling overwhelmed and experiencing inefficiency. Secondary traumatic stress occurs when a helper experiences a negative change in their emotions and behavior resulting from exposure to the trauma or suffering of a person they are trying to help.²⁰

Of course, there will be times when success is evident, and God is glorified in ministry. But, on the other hand, there will be times when the “to-dos” are overwhelming. And there will be times when the emotions that a pastor's congregation members are feeling will impact the feelings that he experiences.

What is Mental Resilience?

Success is a powerful driving force for any career-driven person. A successful ministry is desired, valued, and sought after by every pastor who takes their calling seriously as the spiritual caretaker of God's people. But the pastor is not responsible for the shortcomings of his people.

The pastor is not responsible for the attitudes with which people face their daily lives. The pastor

19. Examples for a pastor could include excitement on a successful food drive, anxiety over a tight schedule, relief from a vacation, or being overwhelmed by the situations of his members lives.

20. Dr. Benjamin S. Kohls, “Emotional Wellness: Holistic Care for God's Workmanship” (Paper Presented at WELS Symposium, 2021), 13.

is not responsible for the earthly lives of God's people. Instead, the pastor is responsible for the spiritual training of his people. His call is to preach the gospel to people who need a Savior and salvation from their sins. Mental resilience for a pastor begins by knowing what his responsibility as a pastor truly is.

The pastoral ministry belongs to God. The pastor is the tool by which God carries out that ministry. It is easy for the pastor to view the ministry as his own when the ministry is going well and during the “dog days” of ministry. Why is that? “The greatest weapon in Satan’s arsenal is the lie. Perhaps his only weapon is the lie. The first glimpse we have of the devil in the Bible is of him deceiving Adam and Eve in the garden.”²¹ “He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies.” (John 8:44b) Satan’s greatest power comes with his dangerous ability to convince the human mind of that which is not true—he lies all the time. Whether his lies come full-blown or mixed with absolute truth, his goal is to persuade every human that he is the source of truth or that the truth is within themselves.

The pastor is not safe from the lies Satan likes to tell.²² What combats the lies that Satan loves to spread? The truth is the one thing that thwarts the deception of the devil. There is only one truth, and you know where to find it. When Satan comes knocking at the door with his witty whispers Pastor Groeschel loudly proclaims, “Your declaration: ‘I do need help; I need God’s help. What I am using may numb me to my problem but does not help me. God tells me to come

21. Craig Groeschel, *Winning the War in Your Mind: Change Your Thinking, Change Your Life* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2021), 43.

22. “Your ministry depends on your ability to capture your audience on Sunday morning. It is obvious that your people don’t listen to your sermons—look at their lifestyles. Does God really want you spending your afternoon at that person’s house, you know they won’t believe what you have to say.” All lies—but they can be believable.

to him when I am weary, burdened, or overwhelmed.”²³ Like every other aspect of life, the ministry is not always sunshine and daisies. Ministry is a constant battle between the saint and sinner within the believer, and the shepherds that God has placed on the frontlines need to be mentally prepared to face the enemy head-on. It can be easy to say, “fight that good fight” when the enemy is far off, but when the enemy is close, fear and anxiety flood the thoughts of those attempting to stand firm. “What-if” thoughts are invasive and common for Christians, especially pastors. Thoughts of rejection and push-back invade the pastor’s mind with ease. Harboring these thoughts and hoping they will disappear is not beneficial for the pastor or an effective way of maintaining mental resilience. There is biblical reason for the pastor to care for his mental and emotional well-being. Mental and emotional resilience are closely tied to spiritual resilience. However, this section talks about mental and emotional well-being apart from Scripture. While Scripture provides mental and emotional strength, even the unbeliever is able to practice mental and emotional resilience.

What is Emotional Resilience?

The connection between mental and emotional resilience is tight but not absolute. The mind and the heart are affected by events that take place within the pastor’s life, in his congregation, and the world around him, but the head and the heart experience different difficulties. The mind often deals with the things that a person may be able to control but doesn’t know how to control them. The heart deals with the things that a person cannot control. Emotional exhaustion or fatigue can often result from cognitive overload and burnout. When emotions are in play in the decision-

23. Groeschel, *Winning the War in Your Mind*, 53.

making a pastor needs to perform, decisions can become more challenging to make with a clear mind. There are a few things that a pastor needs to be able to do to maintain a healthy balance of his emotions. An important step—often overlooked—is recognizing and accepting the emotions that he is feeling. Too often, a mistake is made when life becomes emotionally taxing; people bottle that emotion up inside their hearts, hoping that it will disappear or lessen the exhaustion their emotion is causing them. Many believe it is easier to ignore the emotions that cause pain than to talk about them and work through them.

Even more, emotions reveal the heart, leaving a person vulnerable. When someone is vulnerable, they tend to become uncomfortable because they do not want other people to see what is going on inside—they want their smile to cover their hurting heart. When the heart is hurting, help is needed. However, seeking help in today’s society is viewed by many as a sign of weakness—an inability to take care of or handle oneself. There is an ego problem. “The ego often hurts.... It is *always* drawing attention to itself – it does so daily. It is always making us think about how we look and how we are treated. People sometimes say their feelings are hurt. But our *feelings* can’t be hurt! It is the *ego* that hurts – my sense of self, my identity.”²⁴

Emotional resilience is not simply putting the ego to rest and ignoring the problems that cause feelings of stress, anxiety, depression, etc. It is not spending time overcoming fears and feelings of failure by working hard and being successful. Emotional resilience for the pastor comes from knowing his identity. “All of us want to have premier status, to feel like we are somebody important.... It feels great to receive kudos and be the object of everyone’s affection. But you *already are* privileged, you *already are* somebody. You are a child of God, and Christ is

24. Timothy Keller, *The Freedom of Self-Forgetfulness: The Path to True Christian Joy*, (10Publishing: 10ofthose.com, 2012), 16.

your brother. Christ grants us the ultimate status.”²⁵ Emotions quickly make their way into the heart, unannounced, undesired, and sometimes with tenacity. Pastor Andy Stanley sums this up nicely. “Life isn’t always kind. Everyone experiences a measure of hurt and rejection, some more than others. As a result of these unavoidable realities, unpleasant things become lodged in our hearts.”²⁶ Emotional resilience is combating negative feelings with positive peace through Christ’s sacrifice.

Biblical Concern for the Mind and the Heart

Why does the God of the universe make it so clear that Satan is the father of lies? Why does God address about the thoughts and emotions of his people? Because he has great concern for the minds and hearts of all people. It is not hard to persuade the human mind, especially when desired outcomes are promised with empty words. It is not difficult to convince the human heart that its emotions control its life. The depths of the devil’s promises equate to shallow waters and leave people with broken hearts and confused minds.

God cares for the body but also the mind that controls the body and the heart that harbors emotions. “Do not conform to the pattern of this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing, and perfect will.” (Romans 12:2) It is clear that God does not want a person’s mind to be driven by this world, but by the wisdom that he makes known in his word. The Apostle Paul wrote to the

25. Matthew Doeblner, *God Loves Nobodies: Good News for Somebody Like Me*, (Milwaukee: Northwestern, 2022), 47.

26. Andy Stanley, *Enemies of the Heart: Breaking Free from the Four Emotions that Control You*, (New York: Multnomah, 2020), 35.

congregation at Philippi, “Yes, and I will continue to rejoice, for I know that through your prayers and God’s provision of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, what has happened to me will turn out for my deliverance.” (Phil. 1:18b–19) When Paul wrote this letter, his emotions had every reason to rule his attitudes, words, and actions; he was in jail. Paul was in chains for sharing the gospel message of Christ crucified. But what emotion does he let take control? The joy he has in knowing his Savior. Emotions such as anger, anxiety, depression, and the like do not define a pastor but are driven by the devil’s lies and the heart’s dark desires. When a pastor’s heart and mind align with the will and mind of the Lord, and when the promises of the gospel drive his emotions, ministry becomes more manageable and less overwhelming.

Professional Care

There is a common misconception attached to *anxiety* and *depression*. A pastor does not need an anxiety disorder to be overwhelmed by anxious thoughts. A pastor does not need to have clinical depression to feel depressed. What does a pastor do when he is worried about the community event at his church in a few short days? Where does a pastor go when he is depressed about certain situations happening in the lives of his members? Indeed, the Word of God. However, God has made people to be social beings. One of God’s many blessings he gives to his people is other people. “As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another.” (Prov. 27:17) There is a lot to be said about the power of a person who knows the grace of God. When anxious and depressing thoughts cloud the mental sight of a pastor, who better to go to than another shepherd with an unclouded view of God’s providence and grace?

It's not easy for the shepherd who watches over God's flock to seek assistance with the challenges he faces. For that reason, two words need to be correctly defined: *help* and *hope*. Many people do not seek help because they perceive it as a sign of weakness. If a person is seeking help, especially with a mental issue, they may feel a cloud of judgment looming for their inability to overcome this obstacle. Seeking help means quite the opposite. A person's recognition of their need for assistance shows tremendous strength as they see their need for someone else's power to get them through their issue. Anxious and depressing thoughts often mask that need. Being resilient is being aware of the need for help and trusting God's help in his word and through other people. "*Perseverance* is trusting in God."²⁷ Notice resilience and perseverance involve trust, confidence, and hope in God's promises.

Hope is often seen as "wishful thinking." "I hope your day goes well." "I hope you get that promotion." Hope is used today as a longing for a specific outcome. That is not what hope is: "The prophet Daniel's hope had nothing to do with wishful thinking or positive visualization....He *knew* (as in knowing a mathematical fact) that everything would turn out okay. He knew that God was in ultimate control of who was in control, as well as everything that was happening to him. And if God was in control, there was no need to panic—even if he sometimes had no idea what God was up to."²⁸ Hope is not wishful thinking; Hope is confidence in the promises God makes. When help is sought, hope is a powerful reassurance of God's control over every life, situation, and outcome. "Yes, I am a pastor, and yes, I am in counseling. I believe it is biblical and wise to get help from the wise. Sometimes we need to talk through our

27. William Woodington, *Whatever Is True: A Christian View of Anxiety* (Milwaukee: Northwester, 2020), 51.

28. Osborne, *Thriving in Babylon*, 93.

stuff with someone trained in talking through stuff. Someone who has no agenda except to help us get well.”²⁹ Yes, the pastor is the spiritual head of his congregation, but even he is capable of forgetting the control God has and needs to be reminded of God’s promises.

It is permissible and even beneficial for a pastor to seek help when his mental capacity has reached its limit. Finding professional care allows the pastor to work through his mental exhaustion with someone who is an expert in mental wellness.

Restoration

Professional care benefits the pastor whose mind and heart are overwhelmed by the ministry, but it’s not always necessary. The pastor might look to a brother in the ministry when he needs help, someone who understands and experiences the same struggles and expectations. As Paul writes to Timothy, he provides a detailed list of the requirements of church leaders, pastors included. “Now the overseer is to be above reproach, faithful to his wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not given to drunkenness, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money.” (I Tim 3:2–3) It is a hefty list, and it doesn’t end there. God’s expectations for those shepherding his flock are numerous and, honestly, difficult for the pastor to meet with perfection—impossible, in fact.³⁰ Every pastor knows that he lives his life as a saint—reconciled to God through Jesus—but also a sinner who is incapable of perfectly obeying God’s law.

29. Groeschel, *Winning the War in Your Mind*, 164.

30. The pastor is not able, like every other human on earth, to obey God perfectly. He is susceptible to the same sins that everyone is. Paul is referring to the outward life the pastor lives, and the inability for the pastor to be charged for these sins. This, however, is not the focus of this paper.

When someone is burning with guilt and shame that sin is causing them, they can go to their pastor for the comfort of the gospel. But the pastor himself is not immune to the desires of his sinful nature. “If it is true that every leader is in the middle of the ongoing work of God’s sanctifying grace, then it is also true that there is still the presence of remaining sin in every leader’s heart. And if there is the presence of remaining sin in their hearts, the leaders will fail, sin, and fall.”³¹ When a pastor feels the guilt of his sin, where does he go? Where does the shepherd go when he is mentally and emotionally spiraling because of a sin he committed? He goes to his fellow shepherd. This is not a general reliance on the community of pastors, but support and encouragement between two pastors. It is challenging to own and admit sin, but it is especially difficult to do so as someone who is supposed to be an example and role model for his people. A pastor must not harbor his sins and the guilt that follows them; he needs a restoration partner. He needs someone who will listen to his faults and failures and, with confidence, give him what his guilt-laden heart needs: the gospel. “We sinners don’t just need forgiving grace; we need reconciling grace. And we don’t just need reconciling grace; we need restoring grace. And we don’t just need restoring grace; we need delivering grace.”³² A pastor can forget the grace that God has shown him as he focuses on the grace that God has revealed to the members of his congregation. A brother in the ministry will remind him of that saving grace. Does this mean that a pastor cannot confess his sins to people who aren’t pastors? Certainly not. However, there are sins, such as the list Paul gives to Timothy, that a pastor will not make known to just anybody. In addition, there will be sins that a pastor commits that need to be handled with care and delicacy.

31. Paul David Tripp, *Lead: 12 Gospel Principles for Leadership in the Church*, (Wheaton: Crossway, 2020), 180.

32. Tripp, *Lead*, 179.

For that purpose, a pastor will find much comfort in being accountable to a fellow pastor with those sins.

Taking Time Off

“It may seem odd that we need to learn how to take a break. But in our 24/7, always-on culture, some people simply don’t know how to relax. Ironically, for them, doing nothing is painfully hard.”³³ The pastor’s schedule is often perceived to be fixed to Sunday morning—leaving him with the entire week with nothing to do. That is far from the truth. Pastors are constantly "on the clock" far longer than the average forty-hour worker. There is a sermon to prepare for Sunday, members who need to be seen in their homes or the hospital, Bible studies needing to be written, and catechism classes needing to be drawn up. There is a lot piled on the pastor’s plate. Hence, it is crucially important that a pastor takes time to rest, relax, and sleep.

How does a pastor relax knowing everything that needs to get done in his ministry when those things have yet to be completed? One possible adjustment could be leaving work at work and keeping home at home. There is certainly an overlap between the pastor’s ministry and his life at home, but the two do not have to—nor should they—be the same. If the pastor spends his time at home contemplating the work that needs to be done in the office, he might as well just stay there. Take the time to enjoy the presence of family and the lack of work sitting at the table.

Relaxation is not only found in a week-long vacation or getting out of town. There are plenty of relaxation habits a pastor can adopt to lessen the mental load of ministry. “When we are

33. Greg McKeown, *Effortless: Make it Easier to Do what Matters Most* (New York: Currency, 2021), 68.

struggling, instead of doubling down on our efforts, we might consider pausing the action—even for one minute.”³⁴ McKeown notes that even the smallest of breaks from tiresome work can lead to a renewal of the mind. A mental break could be a walk around the block, walking up and down the hall a few times, eating a snack, or just staring out the window. Mental resilience is not about pushing the brain to its limits but rather making the brain efficient when faced with overwhelming tasks and situations.

Sleep was discussed as a part of physical resilience, but it also plays a role in mental and emotional resilience. Sleep is included under this section for two reasons: sleep allows the brain to process information, and sleep allows the brain to flush unnecessary clutter. It is undoubtedly possible to function while getting minimal amounts of sleep, but sleep is not the place to gain extra hours in the day. “Routine nightly sleep for fewer than six hours results in cognitive performance deficits, even if we feel we have adapted to it.”³⁵ The brain needs consistent sleep to function correctly throughout the day, each day. The brain doesn’t “get used” to getting little sleep; instead, the person just “gets used” to functioning on little sleep, but at a cost. The brain receives less time to process information, less time to declutter itself, and less time to prepare for a day of work.

One way to make sure the brain is getting enough rest is napping. Unfortunately, napping has a negative connotation in modern society because it often equates to laziness and lack of motivation. “We are conditioned to feel guilty when we nap instead of ‘getting things done.’ It’s a perfect storm of the fear of missing out, the false economy of powering through, and the stigma

34. McKeown, *Effortless*, 72.

35. McKeown, *Effortless*, 73.

of napping as something just plain lazy or even childish.”³⁶ However, being intentional and strict about napping can be highly beneficial. A nap does not have to be hours long. The afternoon does not need to be blocked off for “pastor’s daily nap.” In general, taking time—whether it be a minute or a few days—is vital for a pastor to maintain proper mental health, making him mentally and emotionally resilient.

Balance and Boundaries

While the pastor is the spiritual leader of a congregation, he often has many other vocations in which God has called him to serve. Those vocations may include, but are not limited to, being a husband, a father, a coworker, a teacher, a counselor, a neighbor, a friend, a brother, an uncle, a teammate, and the list goes on. So how does he fulfill all his vocations faithfully while keeping his mental and emotional sanity? First, he needs to establish and maintain boundaries between those vocations. Of course, there are reasons for everyone to set boundaries in their lives, but for the pastor, it becomes vital for his mental and emotional resilience.

The Homebound Pastor

“Homebound” is not a term generally associated with a pastor unless you talk about the people he visits. Homebound, here, is referring to the pastor who goes home at the end of the day. One boundary that pastors often struggle with is the boundary between their ministry and their life at

36. McKeown, *Effortless*, 76.

home. In correlation with a study done on clergy burnout, Pastor Fred Lehr said this about his ministry: “In my twenty-four years of parish ministry, I had a terrible time saying ‘no’ to my parishioners. I loved it when ‘they needed me.’ After all, I was there to do God’s work; how could I turn them down? Or so I told myself. In reality, it exhausted me, and I hated constantly being caught between my family and my congregation.”³⁷

The pastor enters the public ministry to serve God’s people in every way possible. This makes evident the “servant-heart” that God desires in the shepherds he calls, but when this servant-heart leads the pastor to neglect another part of his life, there’s a problem. Not every pastor has a family he goes home to, but for every pastor, time away from the office spent enjoying the gift of life God has given him is time well spent. Pastors who are husbands are to love their wives. (Col 3:19) To love his wife, he needs to be with her. Pastors who are fathers are to care for their children. (I Thess. 2:11–12) Likewise, to care for and raise his children, he needs to be with them. Every pastor—with or without a family—must care for his flock and himself. (Acts 20:28) The pastor needs to set boundaries between his ministry and his personal life; he does this for his good, the good of his family, and the good of the people he serves. If these boundaries are established and maintained, the pastor will be able to serve his family and his congregation without neglecting either of them.

37. Lehr, *Clergy Burnout*, 5.

Counsel With Care – Care for the Pastor and His People

A pastor cares for his people. The pastor who properly cares for his people takes time to listen to their needs. Sometimes those needs are advice, Scripture references, professional referrals, and sometimes simply a listening ear. Often, when people experience traumatic events, one of the first people they go to is their pastor. When a pastor serves many people in this capacity, there is potential for many traumatic events to cross his desk, and the stress, anxiety, and depression of those events can rub off on him. This is called “Secondary traumatic stress.” “Research indicates that the more exposure a helper has to stories of trauma and suffering, the greater the risk for secondary traumatic stress and vicarious traumatization.”³⁸

The pastor dives into the trenches of emotional warfare as he cares for those who have had these traumatic experiences. While he rightly steps on this battlefield, he needs to be aware that he is in the crosshairs of emotional fire as he tends to the emotions and care of his people. This is not a suggestion for the pastor to be emotionally distant from his members, but to understand that the emotions his members are experiencing are not his own.³⁹

Similar effects of emotion can plague the pastor when his members confess struggles or sins with which they are dealing. The pastor may wonder if he is efficient in his preaching or teaching. He may wonder if his members ever listen to anything he says. It can become frustrating for him to see people in light of the words and actions they display. But he needs to realize that the person sitting across from him is a sinner, exactly like himself. “Whatever

38. Kohls, “Emotional Wellness,” 15.

39. There are many ways a pastor may establish boundaries in consoling his members; this would be a topic for further discussion and research.

anyone's done to me, or anyone else, I stand just as guilty."⁴⁰ The words and actions of other people do not reflect the efficacy of the pastor's work. Instead, they reflect the sinful nature they inherited as sinful human beings—people who are in as much need of Jesus' salvation as the pastor is.

Balance

In many ways, balance in ministry is more demanding than it would appear. An important reason why boundaries are so important for the pastor is so that he maintains proper balance in his heart, mind, and life. Like a teeter-totter, proper balance allows some room for flexibility and movement but never a collapse on either side. If only ministry were that simple. The issue is imbalance; often, there is an imbalance in a pastor's heart when he gives attention to an area of his life that he views as most important at the time. "What is important to God isn't always important to us. What God knows is needful for us isn't always needful to us. What God says we should treasure, at street level, we don't always treasure."⁴¹ In recognizing the many vocations God has called him to, the pastor will be able to find a healthy balance between the many different areas of his life.

40. Brant Hansen, *Unoffendable: How Just One Change Can Make All of Life Better* (Nashville: W Publishing Group, 2015), 10.

41. Tripp, *Lead*, 88.

SPIRITUAL RESILIENCE

The most critical resilience a pastor needs for his ministry is spiritual. A common misconception is that pastors are in the Word of God so often that they don't need to worry about falling away from the faith. They don't need to spend extra time in their day reading more Scripture. They couldn't possibly become discouraged when they are always at church. False, false, and false.

When nations are at war, disrupting their communication is one of the most effective ways to defeat the opposing side. Indeed, Satan can entice God's people away in a direct manner. But he also knows that if he can get to the guy who communicates God's Word to those people, he could manage to uproot a larger crowd at once. A pastor is not immune to the attacks of the devil. A natural target for the devil is the pastor, who shepherds the rest of God's precious flock. The shepherd needs to be spiritually resilient for his ministry to maintain its health.

What is Spiritual Resilience?

Assumptions are easy to make—plain and simple. If a pastor is called to serve a congregation as their spiritual leader, he should have no problem staying spiritually strong throughout his ministry. While this is hopefully true, it is not that simple. There's an underlying assumption here: the pastor is not affected by the devil, the world around him, or his sinful flesh. The pastor is like every person sitting in the pew on a Sunday morning. He sleeps at night, wakes up in the morning, eats his meals, goes to work, etc. The pastor himself may also assume that because his

occupation requires him to read his Bible regularly, he is spiritually prepared for the daily battle he fights as a Christian sinner.

Like everyone who works a regular nine-to-five job, the pastor is capable of “going through the motions.” He can prepare a Bible study, have all the facts ready to go, and present the "need to know" information to his people without taking to heart what that section of Scripture has to say. He can put a smile on his face Sunday morning while feeling so beat down that it takes all his strength to hold back the tears that are ready to burst out. He can slap together a sermon on Saturday night without contemplating what the text of that sermon says and preach Sunday morning as if he were slaving away all week writing.

For a pastor to be spiritually resilient, he needs to be filled up with God’s grace, not simply by studying God’s Word for the sake of his job but by listening to what his God has to say to him. In today’s society, the world is so focused on doing “this” and getting “that” done. To be spiritually resilient, the pastor doesn’t need to “do”; he needs to “be.” The pastor is a child of God who needs to simply be a child of God before he does the things God has called him to do.

Biblical Concern for the Soul

God cares for his people—every part of every person. He cares for their body, their mind, their heart, and their soul. A person’s soul is the battlefield on which their spiritual battle takes place. For the pastor—for all Christians who believe in Christ as their Savior—the war has been won, but the battle continues to rage. “As a follower of Jesus, I see violence as incompatible with life in the kingdom, and I advocate for creative, nonviolent solutions to problems. But violence is not

the same as force. And even I have to admit, to apprentice under Jesus is to become a soldier in war. One where the long-term victory is assured, yes, but we still have many battles on the road to Berlin.”⁴² Not for a couple of weeks. Not for a couple of years. The battle rages on until the Christian is called home to heaven. “Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world, and the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.” (Eph. 6:11–12)

If God were not concerned for the souls of his people, he would not prepare them for the struggles they will face. Three enemies can harm a person’s spiritual welfare: the devil, the world, and the sinful flesh. In the context of the full armor of God, there is only one place to find all the necessary “equipment” for fighting against these enemies that seek to devour the soul: in God’s Word. And for the pastor who is confident in his faith and ability to fend off these enemies, God is clear; be careful. “So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don’t fall!” (I Cor 10:12–13) To be spiritually resilient, the pastor needs to understand that he can never be “over-prepared” for the combat he faces in the ministry. He is not a perfect pastor. There will be times where he fails and falls. The war that takes place in every Christian’s heart certainly takes place in the pastor’s heart as well. The pastor wants to be prepared.

To prepare the pastor for his ministry, God provides him with two important blessings: his word and community. A pastor, without doubt, will always find the grace of God as he sits in front of his Bible in personal devotion and when he spends time in the Christian community with which God has surrounded him.

42. John Mark Comer, *Live No Lies: Recognize and Resist the Three Enemies that Sabotage Your Peace*, (Colorado Springs: WaterBrook, 2021), 18–19.

Power of Personal Devotion

Graduating from Seminary and beginning the public ministry does not mean the educational studies of the pastor are over—the opposite is true. When a pastor is ordained and begins his ministry, his studies continue throughout that ministry.

One of the things most needed is helping all called workers see the broad vista of what they are already doing or could be doing in continuing education. It is much more than attendance at workshops or taking courses for credit (although those can be exceedingly helpful). We must help more called workers get past thinking that formal schooling is the only continuing education game in town.⁴³

Formal education is beneficial for the pastor in his ministry, but he also must grow in his knowledge of God’s Word. Considering the pastor’s work and his call to share the gospel with his congregation and community, his study of Scripture needs to continue and deepen. This is a nonnegotiable of ministry: personal devotions.

Yes, the pastor spends hours in Scripture every week preparing sermons, Bible classes, and confirmation courses. Any time spent in God’s Word is well spent; however, there is a difference between studying Scripture to prepare for teaching and studying for personal edification. While studying Scripture to “do” ministry is what a pastor is called to do, it is easy for him to lose sight of who he is and focus on what he does. A congregation will benefit from a pastor who regularly studies Scripture, but a pastor who studies the Scripture for his own benefit as well. The pastor is a baptized, forgiven, and redeemed child of God, like those he serves. “He knew and chose *me*, not just the idea of me. This you must have in your head and in your heart: he chose *you*.”⁴⁴ Professor Mark Paustian reminds the pastor who he is: a child of God. God

43. Gurgel, “Fan into Flame,” 19.

44. Mark A. Paustian, “I Am Convinced: A Devotional Appropriation of Romans 8 to the Life of the Pastor” (Paper Presented at WELS Symposium, 2021), 21.

indeed uses pastors to remind other pastors of their identity in Christ. Still, the pastor will also find great comfort in knowing his identity as he listens to God his Father speak directly to him in his word. In God's Word, the pastor sees that his heavenly Father knew him before he was even a thought to the world. (Jer. 1:5) Throughout the pages of Scripture, the pastor is reminded of his God's grace toward him. (Rom. 5:8)

Personal devotion is not meant for prepping for weekly pastoral duties; personal devotion is meant for the assurance of God's grace that a pastor needs daily. As the world's Savior fought his darkest adversary, he said, "Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God." (Matt. 4:4) As the pastor lives and breathes the Word of God, he is convinced that his God is for him. "This is the key that fits the lock to his kind of freedom: that in the light of Christ, God is so self-evidently *for* us, so all in, so committed. So, child, be still. You squirming patient, lie back. Show the world a man at peace with his Maker, with life, with himself. This is to the glory of God."⁴⁵ When the pastor is convinced that his God is for him and that he belongs to the maker of heaven and earth, he can do what God has called him to do.

Be Filled Up

Convinced that God is for him, the pastor seeks to serve his Savior and his people as a child of God and the shepherd of God's flock. One thing necessary for him to do this is to be so filled with the word of God that he can do nothing but overflow with the love and grace that God provides in his word. "We stand for the Gospel as our 'performative epistemology' – we embody how we know what we know. We pastors need worship - to regularly fall back from all pastoral

45. Paustian, "I Am Convinced," 23.

duty into *the thing itself*.⁴⁶ The thing itself? The Word. “But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us. We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body.” (I Cor. 4:7–10)

Be filled up with the Word of God. Your heavenly Father wants his word spread to all people of every nation so they may spend eternity in his glory-filled presence. (Matt. 28:19) But he also wants his pastors to be convinced of their eternal destination. If the pastor is not confident of his eternal salvation, he cannot preach that salvation to those around him. In the living and active Word of God, the pastor becomes confident of God’s promises to him, and he finds his spiritual resilience.

Christian Community

The pastoral ministry can seem like a “one-man job,” especially if the pastor wants to do ministry work but has no one backing him. The pastor is called to serve a congregation and a community. He is not the “boss” of his church or the members of his church. He doesn’t make all the decisions that need to be made by himself. If the pastor views his ministry as a “one-man task,” his ministry will quickly crumble. He needs to lean into the Christian community where God has placed him. Like many creatures on earth, humans are not meant to do life on their own.

The herd mentality is literally woven into our brains. Buffalo all walk on the same side of a field; teenagers all wear the same sneakers. People in coastal cities tend to vote Left;

46. Paustian, “I Am Convinced,” 28.

people in the heartland, Right. We're created by our relational God to live in community, but under the fall, we devolve back into pack animals. This is often how the devil's deceptive ideas keep such a strong hold on societies for so long.⁴⁷

There are pros and cons to the relational tendencies that God has given to people. Society has ordinary virtues and values, but they are skewed by the presence of sin in the world. This makes the Christian community crucial for the pastor and his people. While no community on earth is perfect, the Christian community knows something the world lacks: a Savior.

The pastor cares for the spiritual well-being of his congregation, but the congregation needs to care for the spiritual well-being of their pastor as well. "Now we ask you, brothers and sisters, to acknowledge those who work hard among you, who care for you in the Lord and who admonish you. Hold them in the highest regard in love because of their work. Live in peace with each other." (I Thess. 5:12–13) Spiritual encouragement for the pastor is not beyond the ability or responsibility of the congregation. The pastor wants to lean into and grow with the Christians he serves. Spiritual encouragement goes both ways in the ministry.

There is encouragement from the pastor to his members and from the congregation to their pastor. A church wants to see that its spiritual leader is healthy in his fight against the enemies that pursue him—for the benefit of himself and his congregation. This requires patience, trust, and transparency. "I find incredible relief in transparency. Here's how it goes: I don't mind you knowing that not everything in me or in my life is what I would ever have chosen. Such as you are, you speak to that thing I revealed to you. I receive the good thing you intended for me. I don't bat it away. And a little or a long time later, perhaps these roles may reverse. *You don't mind me knowing....*"⁴⁸ Referring back to the section on restoration, the pastor will not reveal

47. Comer, *Live No Lies*, 207.

48. Paustian, "I Am Convinced," 35.

every sin he commits to the members of his congregation. However, there is incredible freedom in knowing that the congregation knows he is neither the perfect person nor the perfect pastor.

Without the expectation of perfection upon his shoulders, the pastor is free to live as the sinner-saint he is, knowing that he is as much a recipient of God's grace as his members are. Being firmly rooted in the Word of God and tightly connected with the Christian community around him, the pastor sets himself up to be spiritually resilient by the grace of God.

CONCLUSION

The success of ministry does not rely on the pastor but on the grace of God. However, the pastor will better see the blessings of ministry if he is physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually resilient. There are no perfect plans for resilience because perfection is not possible on this side of heaven, and every pastor is different from the next. To be resilient, each pastor needs to evaluate himself and his ministry apart from others to determine how he will maintain a healthy life. This paper has described many vital things for the pastor to consider as he determines his plan for resiliency.

To be physically resilient, he must know how to best care for his body. This includes but is not exclusive to, exercising, eating well, and getting a proper amount of sleep. Not everyone has the same body; therefore, not everyone benefits from the same practices. These are the areas to focus on, but every pastor must be willing to examine his own body and decide how to best take care of it.

To be mentally and emotionally resilient, the pastor needs to understand that he is in the ministry by God's grace. The pastor is a sinner like the people he serves. His mental resilience prevents him from being overwhelmed by the events happening in his ministry, and his emotional resilience allows him to manage his feelings that result from what is happening in his ministry. Receiving help, professional care, setting boundaries between life and ministry, and taking time off are ways a pastor will find helpful in caring for his head and heart.

To be spiritually resilient—this is true for every pastor—he must spend “off-the-clock” time in Scripture. The pastor cannot serve God’s people if he is not immersed in the word regularly, apart from studying for sermons and Bible classes. It is also essential that a pastor is surrounded by the Christian community he serves. God knows where and when to place a pastor in the congregation he serves. The pastor is a blessing to God’s people, and God’s people are a blessing to their pastor.

Finally, know that the Almighty God of heaven and earth cares deeply about you. He cares about your body, mind, heart, and soul—all gifts he has given you out of love. Being resilient in ministry is not about looking good or proving yourself to others. Being resilient in public ministry is about giving glory to the God who has called you to be a shepherd of his flock.

How Has this Thesis Added to Knowledge About the Subject?

This thesis gives an umbrella view of what a pastor needs to consider in living a resilient life in the pastoral ministry. As a survey of the importance that resiliency plays in the life of a pastor, this thesis did not pursue the individual aspects of resiliency. Instead, this paper informs the pastor of the areas in which he needs to be resilient and why he needs to be resilient. There are many ways a pastor can become resilient; however, having an over-arching knowledge of how to be resilient will be a useful starting point for the pastor who has never considered or does not know where to begin with his resiliency.

Points for Further Study

Areas for further study include but are not limited to studying each area of resilience separately. There is a lot of information about the reasons for being resilient in your personal life and career. However, information about resiliency is not beneficial if you are not intentional about putting it into practice. That is the area where this thesis lacked. There are many ways to practice resiliency, especially in the ministry, and there are pre-written plans that can help the pastor get started on his journey toward pastoral resilience.

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