Resilient ministry: what pastors told us about surviving and thriving

Burns, B

https://myrrh.library.moore.edu.au:443/handle/10248/11038
Downloaded from Myrrh, the Moore College Institutional Repository
WARNING

This material has been provided to you pursuant to section 49 of the Copyright Act 1968 (the Act) for the purposes of research or study. The contents of the material may be subject to copyright protection under the Act.

Further dealings by you with this material may be a copyright infringement. To determine whether such a communication would be an infringement, it is necessary to have regard to the criteria set out in Part 3, Division 3 of the Act.

WARNING

This reading is NOT complete.

Copyright restrictions limit the amount included in this file.

To complete the reading the book may be accessed through the Moore Theological College Library.
RESILIENT MINISTRY

WHAT PASTORS TOLD US ABOUT SURVIVING AND THRIVING

BOB BURNS, TASHA D. CHAPMAN
AND DONALD C. GUTHRIE
WHAT DOES IT TAKE FOR PASTORS NOT ONLY to survive but to thrive in fruitful ministry over the long haul? With the alarmingly high rate of people leaving the pastorate, the church has a great stake in the answer. Unlike other vocations, ministry work has no formal arrangement for ongoing learning and development and no requirements for continuing education. So how do pastors pursue learning and growth? Where do pastoral couples receive mentoring and pastoral care? How do pastors stay current in our rapidly changing world?

This book, based on seven years of research, seeks to answer these questions. Our research focused on gathering pastors and their spouses into peer cohorts, which met repeatedly in multiday retreats called Pastors Summits where we facilitated heartfelt discussions about the challenges of vocational ministry. This book presents the summary and analysis of those discussions in light of our literature research and experiences. Although the cohort research was limited to the majority demographic in the pastorate of married male pastors and their wives, we believe the findings are relevant enough to help foster resilience for all those in vocational ministry. (See appendix A for research method details.)

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR READERS

When you read nonfiction, do you tend to skip over block quotations and illustrative stories to be efficient? We often do. With this book, however, try flipping that strategy. Instead, focus on the quotations and stories. Listen to what it sounds like when pastors unplug from the stressors of ministry in a safe place. We wrote this book to focus on the actual words of real pastors, serving in real congregations and facing real-life issues. While we don't mention the speakers by name, most direct quotations were said by male pastors during conversations in the peer cohorts. Benefits from this book begin with "hearing" the participants.
Another tip for utilizing this book: consider reading the final chapter first. There we summarize lessons learned in the summit and give helpful advice on how you might put the ideas you will find into practice. This is not material easily skimmed over, so consider some strategies for putting the book to work in your life.

An ounce of reflection can lead to a pound of learning. Therefore, throughout each chapter we include sets of questions worth pondering. These questions can be used in many ways. One idea is personal reflection. Consider writing in a personal journal to ponder these questions, as well as other thoughts and feelings that this book raises. Another strategy is to work through the book with others. The questions can serve as discussion guides. If you study this with a group, you may want to cover only half of a chapter per session. Take time to make it your own by adding stories and insights from your experience to the stories in the book. And at the end of each chapter, we suggest other books and media that will heighten your understanding of the issues. You may find it helpful to pause and utilize some of this material for further reflection or group work.

We wrote this book with five types of readers in mind. First, we hope pastors will read it and share it with their spouses. We also believe other vocational ministry staff will benefit from the book and find the issues to be relevant to their lives. Although we write about vocational ministry in the church, the material is applicable to Christian leaders in parachurch ministries and other vocational contexts. Ministry board members will find great value in it for understanding and caring for the pastors and staff who serve their churches. Finally, church members will gain an appreciation for the complexity of ministry leadership, as well as a way to evaluate their own lifestyles and vocations in God's world.

A WORD ABOUT THE AUTHORS
Bob Burns serves as senior associate pastor and head of staff at Central Presbyterian Church in St. Louis, Missouri. During the seven years of leading the Pastors Summit research, Bob was dean of lifelong learning, professor of educational ministries and director of the Center for Ministry Leadership at Covenant Theological Seminary in St. Louis. Bob has been a pastor and teacher for more than forty years, with experiences ranging from church planting to family ministry and from worship and the arts to youth and singles ministries. Bob and Janet, his wife of thirty-five years, have two married children and five grandchildren.

Tasha Chapman serves Covenant Theological Seminary as dean of academic services and adjunct professor of educational ministries. Tasha has over twenty years of experience working with diverse ministries in the United States and overseas. These include university campus ministry, church women's ministry and international women's ministry, as well as consulting for youth ministry, children's ministry, disability ministry and elementary schools. After spending the week with adult learners at the seminary, she enjoys ministering with young children and cognitively handicapped saints on Sunday mornings. She and her husband, David, have two teenaged children.

Donald Guthrie is professor of educational ministries at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School. Following twelve years of campus ministry, Donald joined the faculty of Covenant Theological Seminary, where he served for fifteen years. He directed field education, the doctor of ministry and distance learning programs, and served as vice president for academics. He has enjoyed serving as a ruling elder in several local churches over the past twenty-five years. He is a frequent teacher at conferences and retreats, often addressing cultural trends, intergenerational ministry, calling and vocation, and adult learning. He and his wife, Mary, have two young adult children.

We invite you to join us in a conversation that is stimulating, sobering and ultimately hopeful. Whether read primarily for yourself or on behalf of a loved one or colleague, we hope this book leaves you embracing the gospel of Jesus Christ more deeply, loving others more richly and serving our Lord more joyfully.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS
The Pastors Summit involved many more people than we could mention here. Besides the pastors and spouses who were involved, we would be remiss without thanking our omnicompetent administrator Denise Wichlan, research coordinators Rebecca Rine and Caroline Wilson, researcher and writer Kim Andrews, writer Kristen Sagar, and transcriber Sarah Bobell. We are also grateful for research assistants Chris and Maggie Genshear, Kelsey Reed, Michael Wichlan and John Early. Stafford Carson, Frank
James and Tim Witmer did an amazing job as coordinators for the summit in their respective seminaries.

Finally, we want to thank the Lilly Endowment, particularly Craig Dykstra and John Wimmer. With the leadership of these two men and the rest of the Lilly Endowment staff, initial research on the challenges facing pastors was completed. Then the endowment invested millions of dollars in the Sustaining Pastoral Excellence initiative. This book is one small contribution to the fruit of this investment. We trust that the church will be greatly strengthened in the coming years because of this initiative.

LIFE IN PASTORAL MINISTRY

When do pastors receive mentoring and pastoral care?
Where do pastors pursue learning and growth?
How do pastors stay current in our rapidly changing world?

A FEW YEARS AGO, BOB WAS SITTING with a small group of pastors who were meeting together for the first time. In the midst of a lively conversation about ministry life, one pastor made the following comment:

I don't have anybody that I open up to about my life, my family or my ministry. I feel like a guy who is driving over the speed limit on a narrow mountain road without barriers. It's the grace of God I haven't driven off.

People hear pastors preach on Sunday morning and assume they have their lives together. But most of us don't understand what pastors think, feel and experience week by week. Take, for example, the pastor quoted above. A few years after he said this, Bob quoted him (anonymously) at a ministry gathering in this pastor's hometown. Afterward, an elder from this pastor's church came up to Bob. With his pastor standing behind him, the elder said, "Do you know what I remember from your presentation? It was that comment made by some pastor who said he didn't have anyone to talk to. I sure am glad it isn't that way in our church. Our pastor can really share with us."

His pastor and Bob exchanged knowing glances, sharing the secret
that the words were his own. From our research, we have found those words to be true for most pastors. People in ministry rarely feel understood and seldom have anyone with whom they can openly talk about their experiences.

WHAT ENABLES PASTORAL RESILIENCE?
A denominational official recently made the following statement: “So many pastors today leave the church. Often they leave the ministry altogether. What does it take for pastors to remain fruitful in ministry for a lifetime?” This person was overwhelmed by the statistics of pastors leaving the ministry and by stories of people struggling with the idea of staying in the pastorate.

Ministry leadership is a tough but highly rewarding job. Many pastors love the challenge, but most find it much more difficult than they had anticipated. Some wonder what they have gotten themselves into. Like a recent seminary graduate who shared with dismay, “I never expected the church to be like this.” Or a pastor of eighteen years who confided, “My experience in the ministry has been good. But I question whether I can subject my wife and family to this much longer.” Statistics on the dropout rate of ministers vary. But it is clear that conditions of ministry have changed in the past few decades and that too many local church ministers leave as a result.

We probably qualify as ministry survivors. Bob has been involved in the church as a volunteer and a pastor for over forty years. Donald has served as a ruling elder in several local churches during the past twenty-five years. Tasha has been active in the church as a leader and staff member for over two decades. In addition, all of us train people for vocational ministry leadership.

Lilly Endowment, Inc., an Indiana-based foundation concerned about the health of the church, has been exploring this question of pastoral resilience for years. In one of their initiatives, called Sustaining Pastoral Excellence, the endowment invested over $84 million to support sixty-three projects that explore what it takes to thrive in ministry. The three of us have coordinated one of these grants, running research and facilitating continuing education for pastors designed to find some answers to this perplexing problem of pastoral survival.

What Is Pastoral Excellence? One of our Lilly-funded programs for researching resilience in the pastorate was called the Pastors Summit. At political summits, heads of state gather for several days to survey and collaborate on complex challenges. In a similar way, our summits were designed to be an emotionally safe place where pastors could share the difficulties of vocational ministry life. As we selected participants for the Pastors Summit research, we wanted pastors who demonstrated excellence in ministry. But how can you define ministry excellence? Our culture often identifies it by certain markers of success. These markers range from the numbers who attend worship services to the state of a church’s finances to the popular programs a church creates and sponsors. As one pastor put it, “People judge our ministries by noses, nickels and noise.”

Others, however, reject the idea of defining ministry excellence by these standards of success. They often counter by using the criteria of leadership faithfulness. Excellence is viewed as a pastor who remains committed over time. But we questioned whether the ability to “hang in there” and endure is a helpful way to judge ministry excellence.

As we worked on our selection criteria, we found some aspects of numerical success and pastoral faithfulness useful. But we felt that neither was sufficient to express the idea of excellence. After much discussion, we concluded a better measure was found in the idea of fruitfulness. We came to believe that Christian leaders are to bear fruit by sharing their faith and nurturing the fruit of God’s grace in their own lives and in the lives of others. Fruitfulness includes a measure of faithfulness and a measure of success—valuing both but preferring neither.

The Pastors Summit. To choose pastors for the summit, we asked trusted colleagues about pastors who exhibited fruitfulness in ministry. (See appendix A for the research selection criteria.) As a list emerged, we explored many questions concerning fruitfulness in their lives. We spent time talking with these pastors, their families, friends, church officers and outsiders. We knew that none of these pastors were perfect. Neither would they personally accept the term excellent to describe their ministries. But each of them was on a trajectory of fruitfulness in ministry and life.

Over a six-year period, we carefully selected and worked with seventy-three pastors in the Pastors Summit. The pastors represented twenty-six states from across the United States. Gathering in small groups, each cohort
of pastors met together three times a year, often with their spouses, during each two-year program. We talked with participants and their spouses about their joys and challenges. In the earliest meetings, our staff developed the agendas. But the longer we met, the more freedom each cohort had to define topics and activities that they needed for furthering their ministry fruitfulness and tenacity to stay in the ministry vocationally.

While the summit groups began to bond by sharing their lives, our staff was actively involved in research. Each summit meeting was audio-recorded and transcribed, eventually creating about twelve thousand pages of material. This material was analyzed by our team, which constantly asked the question, “What does it take to survive and thrive in pastoral ministry?” Over the first five years, some answers came into sharp focus.

Five subjects stood out as the foundations that enable pastors to sustain fruitful ministry with resilience. The following chapters explore these five themes. Before we look at them, however, we need to consider the uniqueness of ministry life.

SITTING ON A ONE-LEGGED STOOL

Ever heard jokes about pastoral work? We have heard them muttered by businesspeople after a worship service, by church members talking in grocery stores and even by pastors in denominational settings. These comments sound something like, “It must be nice to only work one day a week,” or, “Besides preaching on Sundays and visiting folks in the hospital, what do pastors do?”

Good question. What is involved in pastoral ministry? Jackson Carroll is a scholar who has spent a lifetime studying American clergy. In his work, he identifies four core tasks of pastors: leading worship, preaching, teaching and providing oversight. Carroll explains that pastors rarely handle these tasks as distinct activities. Rather, they blend together through much of the week. Researchers Gary Kuhne and Joe Donaldson conclude that pastoral work requires a great variety of complex skills and talents. They describe pastors’ activities as “taxing, fast-paced, and unrelenting, often characterized by doing two or more tasks at the same time.”

On average, pastors work long hours. Carroll compared statistics on the average workweek of various professions with his own research of pastors. He concluded that pastors averaged more work hours per week than other managers and professionals. He also found that the larger the congregation, the more hours the pastor works.

Peter Brain, an Anglican bishop in Australia, completed a survey exploring the amount of time congregational leaders expect their pastors to work. Then he compared these results to the actual time pastors spent in ministry. His survey showed that pastors work an average of fifteen hours per week more than their lay leaders realized.

The late Peter Drucker, one of the leading management authors and consultants of the twentieth century, once told a pastor friend that he viewed church leadership as the most difficult and taxing role of which he was aware. This perspective was confirmed by one of our Pastors Summit participants, who has a master’s degree in management and who left a successful real-estate development company to enter the ministry. He said bluntly, “The business world is much easier than the church.”

One of the unique aspects of pastoral ministry is how it affects and defines all areas of life. Work, family and personal responsibilities blur together through the week, so that pastors have difficulty distinguishing when they are on and off duty. One summit pastor put it this way:

Being a pastor is not just what I do—it is very much who I am. I live with that persona twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year.

Another explained,

I was an art major in college. I still love to work at the pottery wheel. But the people in my church have no idea about this area of my life. They only see me as a pastor, regardless of the time or place.

Still another pastor shared,

Most people in our church have a life that is like a stool with three legs. They’ve got their spiritual life, their professional life and their family life. If one of these legs wobbles, they’ve got two others they can lean on. For us, those three things can merge into one leg. You’re sitting on a one-legged stool, and it takes a lot more concentration and energy. It’s a lot more exhausting.

The work of pastoral ministry may be summed up by two other com-
ments. The first is from Jackson Carroll. After studying hundreds of pastors, he concluded, "Being a pastor is a tough, demanding job, one that is not always very well understood or appreciated. Pastoral work is more complex than that which transpires in the hour or so a week that many lay people see the pastor in action as she or he leads worship and preaches." The other remark is from a summit pastor, who explained, The relentless nature of ministry means that fatigue is a constant companion of leaders in the church. While lay people joke about ministers only working on Sundays, the truth lies on the other side of the continuum. A pastor's work is overwhelming because it wears upon the body and soul.

FIVE THEMES OF RESILIENT MINISTRY
After seven years of studying our summit participants—their personal lives, marriages, families and ministries—we learned a lot about what it takes to survive and thrive in ministry. We spent hundreds of hours working through all of the data, pondering our notes and talking about our thoughts and reflections. Eventually our discoveries focused around five primary themes for leadership resilience in fruitful ministry:

- spiritual formation
- self-care
- emotional and cultural intelligence
- marriage and family
- leadership and management

Before we explore these themes in more depth, let's step back and look at them through the lens of two "big ideas." The first we learned is that while each theme can be presented as separate and unique, the themes should really be considered as a whole. Each is dependent on the others. They are like the strands of a tapestry woven into one piece. For example, we can't really talk about self-care without taking spiritual formation into consideration. Similarly, we can't reference leadership and management without keeping marriage and family in mind. The themes only stand together.

Second, consider the apparent simplicity of the themes. At first glance they don't seem exceptional or unique to ministry. When reading them, your response might have been, "Everyone needs to work on these areas." True enough. The unique nature of the themes, however, is how they speak into the lives and priorities of pastors and their families. As we look at them more carefully, ask yourself, Why did this issue stand out as important for the strengthening of pastors? We will explore this question and its implications as we look at each topic.

With these thoughts in mind, let's look at the themes and read what the summit pastors had to say about them. The next chapter will give an overview of the themes, defining what is meant by each and suggesting why it is crucial for enabling resilience in pastoral excellence. The following chapters will go into more depth, looking at key aspects of the themes and how they significantly affect pastoral life and ministry. The final chapter will explore the implications of these findings and what could be done in response to them.

QUESTIONS TO PONDER
1. Think of the people you know who are in vocational ministry leadership. How do others talk about these ministers and their jobs? How well do you think these ministers feel understood? What actions might help them feel more understood and supported?
2. How do you judge excellence in ministry? In what ways does the discussion of fruitfulness push your thinking about ministry success and faithfulness?
3. Before reading about the five themes, list as many topics as you can that would be important for leadership resilience in fruitful ministry work for a lifetime.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER READING
Before you were called to be a shepherd, you were called to be a lamb.

Dr. Diane Langberg, psychologist, at a Pastors Summit gathering

Every year most of us go through a series of checkups. We have our annual physical checkups, during which doctors push, probe and test to evaluate the conditions of our bodies. There are our annual financial checkups (otherwise known as income tax season), during which our fiscal conditions undergo scrutiny. Then we regularly have planned (and unplanned) conversations with our spouses, reviewing the condition of our marriage and family. We also have annual reviews at work, looking at the last twelve months' accomplishments and assessing future goals.

When an annual review is done for a pastor (which, unfortunately, is rare), the topics for discussion usually focus on tangible issues that are vital in the day-to-day operation of the church: worship, sermons, outreach, education, finances, facilities, officer concerns, community issues and counseling. Sometimes the conversation dips into personal life. Questions like "How is your marriage?" "How are you doing financially?" and "How are your kids?" may be asked at the end of the conversation.

While all of these questions are pertinent, they generally deal with surface concerns that don't probe the real issues that tear down or build up pastoral resilience. As we shared in the introduction, after seven years of studying our summit participants (including their marriages, families and ministries), we learned a lot about what it takes to survive and thrive in ministry. Five themes, each with multiple factors, stood out as the keys for pastors to remain resilient in fruitful ministry for a lifetime. In this chapter we preview each theme, sharing why it is important for a lifetime of ministry.

**THEME ONE: SPIRITUAL FORMATION**

Over the years, we have had the privilege of seeing hundreds of people come to a faith commitment. In virtually all contexts where this has happened—from one-on-one meetings to large group gatherings—the new believer is instructed in the basics of spiritual growth. Spiritual formation can be compared to physical growth via nutrition and exercise. Spiritual growth is dependent on the care and feeding of the soul.

In our work with pastors, we have come to define spiritual formation as the ongoing process of maturing as a Christian, both personally and interpersonally. The key to this definition is the phrase process of maturing. It is a biblical expectation that all Christians, and especially leaders, be concerned about their own spiritual growth. This fits with the emphasis of Jesus when he said to his disciples, "If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him" (John 14:23).

With the same concern Paul encouraged Timothy to "train yourself for godliness" and to "keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching" (1 Timothy 4:7, 16). Both Jesus and Paul understood that maturity is an ongoing process. No one ever "arrives" spiritually. We are all on a journey of spiritual growth.

It is easy to assume that pastors are always on a clear and intentional spiritual growth trajectory. After all, when was the last time you heard someone ask pastors how they were doing in their walk with the Lord? You might even think it rude to bring up the issue. Isn't it self-evident that pastors are attending to their spiritual formation? Sadly, the answer to this question is no. It is not unusual—in a place of safety—for pastors to share that they are hurting in their personal walk with the Lord. One summit pastor bluntly shared,

Look, I may be a pastor, but I'm an inch deep. My life is filled with incessant activity and little prayer. "Contemplation" is foreign in my vocabulary and nonexistent in my life.
Another important aspect of our definition of spiritual formation is that spiritual maturity involves both the personal and interpersonal. Pastors, like all believers, need to be involved in personal aspects of Christian growth like worship, prayer and Bible study. As discussed above, it is just as easy for pastors to neglect personal growth in Christ as any other Christian. At the same time, all Christians need one another. Jesus and the apostles never tired of stressing this need for community.1

This can present a problem for pastors, however. As paid leaders in the congregation, they can be viewed solely in terms of their role rather than as human beings who need others. They are rarely appreciated as persons with interests and relational needs. (An example is the pastor we quoted earlier who majored in art but lamented that few knew of that interest.) They are not looked at as fellow saints in the process of sanctification. As a result, pastors tend to be slow in opening up and sharing their lives with others.

Bob struggled over self-disclosure while serving in a pastorate. One Sunday afternoon he was helping a deacon set up for an evening activity. As they put up tables and chairs, the deacon suddenly asked the simple question, “How are you doing?”

When asked this question, Bob faced an ethical dilemma. He wasn’t doing well at all. He was frustrated with the people in the church and was frustrated with his frustration. He was questioning his capacity as a leader and his own spiritual maturity. In a split second, he pondered the options: If I answer honestly, how would this man handle my response? Would he continue to follow me? Or would he throw up his hands and say, “You’re no spiritual leader! I’m out of here!” Do I tell him the truth or do I give him a superficial answer? Bob decided to go superficial and lied. He said he was fine and then diverted the conversation.

We are not saying that pastors should share their personal struggles with everyone. We are saying that it is easy for pastors, fearing what people might think, to become isolated from others. By doing so, they fail to grow spiritually. As one pastor put it, “I have a longing to be shepherded by someone else, but a fear to actually ask someone into my life.” Again, the themes all weave together: isolation is bad self-care and poor leadership as well.

Spiritual formation involves a growth in spiritual maturity that is generally reflected in lifestyle behaviors. Many biblical passages about the spiritual disciplines can be cited.2 There is no doubt that a commitment to these kinds of activities is essential for spiritual development. Pastors struggle as much as laypersons to be motivated to engage in spiritual disciplines. But if pastors are the ones monitoring and encouraging others in this effort, where do they turn when they face similar struggles?

A few years ago we invited psychologist Diane Langberg to speak to a group of summit pastors and their spouses. In her talk she made this simple yet profound statement: “Before you were called to be a shepherd, you were called to be a lamb.” When she said this, the entire room went silent. Everyone understood the tension her comment exposed. One of the pastors put it this way: “I realize that I have been forsaking my first love and making ministry an idol—that needs serious repentance.”

This is the first thing pastors need to be aware of in order to survive for the long haul. They need to attend to their own spiritual growth. As we look at the tapestry of these themes, the next one may come as a surprise. It is the need for pastors to address their own self-care.

THEME TWO: SELF-CARE

The idea of self-care involves the pursuit of physical, mental and emotional health. While just as important as spiritual formation, self-care may initially sound selfish. After all, didn’t Jesus say that those who follow him must give up all rights to themselves (Mark 8:34)? How does our Lord’s call to self-denial square with the idea of self-care?

In truth, responsible self-care is actually a way to deny oneself. John Stott explains, “Becoming and being a Christian involves a change so radical that no imagery can do it justice except death and resurrection—dying to the old life of self-centeredness and rising to a new life of holiness and love.”3 The old life may have included selfish or obsessive activities such as inconsistent sleep habits, crazy work hours, poor or neurotic exercise, and an unhealthy diet. Self-denying self-care, on the other hand, may include getting to bed on time, saying no to work by setting aside periods for sabbath and sabbatical, getting responsible exercise, and eating a balanced diet.

Peter Brain defines self-care as “the wisdom to ensure, as far as humanly possible, a wise and orderly work that conserves and lengthens a pastor’s ministry.”4 One of our summit pastors described his life in a simple but profound manner:
I feel like Frodo. In the *Fellowship of the Ring*, he’s talking to Gandalf and says, “I feel like butter spread over too much bread.” I just feel like I’m tired and running on fumes.

Having already explored the lifestyle of pastors in the introduction, this comment comes as no surprise. The idea of attending to self-care recognizes that pastors don’t think about their self-care—but need to!

For example, at one Pastors Summit, we addressed areas of interest outside of work. One person responded: “Do I have a life outside the church? No. Do I have a hobby? No.” Another put it this way:

I don’t know that there’s much I could talk about other than what I do functionally as a pastor and what’s going on in the life of the church. That’s a scary revelation to make.

We are not suggesting that all of the pastors in our study were one-dimensional workaholics. However, pastors can easily become so absorbed in their ministries that they fail to maintain a healthy equilibrium in their lives. As one of our participants said,

I am convicted that I need to be paying attention to (caring for) myself, not just for the church. I have been sacrificing myself for the work and really, this is not forming myself to Christ.

If you were surprised by this second theme of self-care, you may also be startled by the third area needed for pastors to build resilience in ministry. This theme draws together two ideas focusing on the understanding of self and others: emotional and cultural intelligence.

**THEME THREE: EMOTIONAL AND CULTURAL INTELLIGENCE**

Emotional and cultural intelligence are so closely aligned that we combined them under one heading. To understand how they influence pastoral life, however, we will look at each as a unique subset of the same theme.

*Emotional Intelligence.* Donald was sitting with a small group of pastors who had been meeting together for over a year. They were in an offsite location and had spent time getting reconnected with each other. The ensuing conversation included two comments that were telling about the role of emotions in the ministry.

Well, you learn to play a game, to put on a mask, which then becomes a way you handle a lot of issues. You’re suddenly the holy man that has to put on the holiness aura and have it all together. And that’s going to come back and wipe you out. Wiped me out.

* * *

When I was in seminary, I was taught how to preach and how to exegete the Scriptures. I wasn’t taught how to exegete people. . . . I didn’t know that pastoring is dealing with people and their messiness.

These statements illustrate common pastoral challenges in the two sides of emotional intelligence (EQ, named in like manner to IQ for intelligence quotient): EQ-self and EQ-others. EQ-self concerns the ability to proactively manage one’s own emotions. EQ-others concerns the ability to appropriately respond to the emotions of others. The first comment—about pastors putting on masks—illustrates an EQ-self problem. The second remark—on exegeting people—displays the need for high EQ-others in pastoral work.

EQ-self is not easy. It is hard for all of us (pastors included) to identify our own feelings correctly, let alone to handle them wisely. One summit pastor observed,

I’m increasingly seeing that I am not very aware of the emotional aspects of my personality. I see my weaknesses in this area reflected in the church I pastor. Our church is emotionally and relationally underdeveloped.

EQ-others is not any easier. It requires the ability to accurately discern what others are feeling and respond appropriately to them. Without this capacity, we tend to disregard others (whether we know it or not) while we push our own agendas. This is not a healthy way to lead!

As a pastor, Bob had worked for weeks to prepare a strategic plan. By the time he presented his ideas to the church elders, Bob was sold on the plan and believed it was the only way to proceed. But the elders didn’t buy it. They voted to postpone any decision. Afterward, one of them pulled Bob...
aside and said, “Your plan might be great. But you came across like a used car salesman, pushing your agenda. When we asked questions, you disregarded them as if they weren’t important.” The correction was clear: Bob needed to hear their thoughts and feelings and respond appropriately to them. His EQ-others was lacking.

Cultural Intelligence. In 2008, the U.S. Census Bureau announced that by midcentury, the United States will be much more racially and ethnically diverse. The report states: “Minorities, now roughly one-third of the U.S. population, are expected to become the majority in 2042, with the nation projected to be 54 percent minority in 2050. By 2023, minorities will comprise more than half of all children.”

The implications of this report are profound for the church. But it was not this information that signaled to us that cultural intelligence is an important factor for viable pastoral ministry. Rather, comments made by summit participants about their own experiences with cultural challenges prompted us to emphasize this topic.

What do we mean by cultural intelligence (CQ)? It is the ability to recognize and to adapt to different cultural contexts. CQ requires an understanding and appreciation of current contextual forces as well as the cultural background of one’s self and others. It involves an awareness of ethnic, geographical, socioeconomic, educational and generational differences and the implications of these differences on one’s perspective and behavior.

One of our summit pastors was born and raised in the southern United States. However, he was serving as a church planter in a western city. His church was actively reaching the unchurched in a very secular community.

Then two couples from the Deep South—my home turf—began attending our church. They griped to everyone how we weren’t doing things right because it wasn’t like “back home.” The non-Christians dropped out. Tore our church up.

As we see in this story, cultural intelligence refers to all kinds of contexts. In order to lead effectively over the coming years, pastors must develop emotional and cultural intelligence. A primary training ground to develop these intelligences is found in the next theme of our research: the importance of marriage and family.

THEME FOUR: MARRIAGE AND FAMILY

This theme recognizes that to sustain the stresses in ministry, pastors need to focus on spiritual and relational health with their spouse, children and extended family. As one pastor put it, “The most effective way to develop a healthy church is for me to be healthy and maintain the health of my marriage.” But the challenges embedded in this theme are significant. Who hasn’t heard stories of spouses who felt they were in competition with the church? Or of children who share bitterly about being a “PK” (pastor’s kid)? As one summit participant said, “I just feel that pressure sometimes to have this model home that everybody could follow and imitate. I’m not good at that.”

One of the most significant lessons we learned early in the Pastors Summit research was the strategic role the spouse plays in ministry life. By “strategic role,” we don’t mean the functions a spouse may perform in the congregation. Rather, we mean the role spouses have in sustaining their pastor-partners in the work of ministry. One male pastor put it this way:

I know now more than ever that I cannot answer this calling without my wife. She is the only person in my life who will always be there for me in ministry.

It is easy for people in the church to assume that pastors naturally focus on the needs of their loved ones. As one summit pastor’s wife shared, “People think that if you marry a pastor, you’ll get pastored all the time.” But this is far from true. Some pastors are so focused on others that they fail to be aware of how their spouses are doing. There was a general consensus among the married male pastors in our research that they needed to invest more time and energy into their marriage and family. One pastor stated simply, “My family gets the scraps.”

Since Jesus taught that the world will know we are his disciples by the love we demonstrate toward one another, then the first place this should be visible is in the home (John 13:35). This, together with spiritual formation, self-care, and emotional and cultural intelligence, form a significant portion of what we identified as necessary for resilience in fruitful ministry.

By this time you may be thinking, None of the themes you’ve mentioned thus far focus on the actual tasks of ministry. True enough. While these first
This chapter described the pastoral role as exceedingly diverse and complex. Effective pastors require a great variety of skills. When it comes to leadership and management, a massive study on the ministry categorizes the tasks: sharing congregational leadership, building congregational community, effective administration, conflict utilization and responsible self-management.8 Samuel Blizzard, one of the earliest researchers on pastoral life, reported that ministers allocate more of their energies to administering programs than would be anticipated in terms of training and their own expectations. More recently, another research project identified “a strong managerial dimension requiring significant amounts of time in the pastor’s weekly schedule.”9

The responsibilities of leadership and management are rarely discussed in theological training. Indeed, pastors are generally surprised by how much leadership and management is involved in their work. And they must learn it on the job. As one person stated, “I never thought about my calling as a leader until I was already in the pastorate.” It seems to us that these responsibilities of pastoral life are rarely discussed but continually demanded.

In order for pastors to thrive in ministry, they must accept the fact that they are leaders and managers. Business and professional literature depicts these roles as necessary but different in nature.10 In general, the literature describes leadership as seeking adaptive and constructive change, while management provides order and consistency to organizations. In this book, we describe leadership responsibilities as poetry and managerial tasks as plumbing.

Leadership and management require different skills and abilities. As businesses or churches grow, these responsibilities are often separated into distinct roles. But as leaders of smaller businesses and churches know, they will always have both leadership and management obligations, even if they don’t feel gifted for the work. An additional challenge is that most pastors dislike both leadership and management and would prefer delegating these responsibilities to someone else. As one summit pastor explained,

What’s my perfect job description? Preach, teach and spend time with my staff and elders. I’m so busy managing that I feel guilty doing relational things. I have this vision where I could maintain these close relationships and still keep the church moving forward if I had this guy—my own Ed McMahon—doing the stuff prohibiting me from doing what I want to do.

In his book Good to Great, Jim Collins says that a characteristic of great companies is an ability to confront the brutal facts.11 Similarly, thriving ministries have pastors who have embraced the difficult facts that leadership and management skills must be learned and responsibilities must be accepted. One of our summit pastors described how he came to grips with this truth.

When I got out of seminary, I didn’t know what I was doing. I was so deficient in the area of leadership. If somebody mentioned a book on leadership, I bought it. I had to self-educate, and I’m still doing that.

Once pastors come to grips with the fact that ministry requires them to lead and manage, they must learn to confront the political realities and expectations embedded in these tasks. Expectations and demands for service are at an all-time high. Resources and time constraints constantly push against congregants’ expectations. Disappointing people is a reality. Harvard professors Ronald Heifetz and Marty Linsky have summarized that “exercising leadership might be understood as disappointing people at a rate they can absorb.”12

Similarly, pastors must learn to navigate the political realities of minis-
Yes, politics is a dirty word in the church. But ministry nearly always involves working with people, and people have divergent amounts of influence and differing interests. These differences lead them to act in certain ways when confronted with tough decisions. The ministry involves negotiating with others, choosing among conflicting wants and interests, developing trust, locating support and opposition, timing actions sensitively, and knowing the informal and formal organizational sources of influence and action. In short, Jesus might well have also said, “Where two or three are gathered together, there are politics.”

**A LOOK AHEAD**

In this chapter, we have briefly introduced the themes discovered in our research with the Pastors Summit. In the following chapters, we will explore each of these themes—spiritual formation, self-care, emotional and cultural intelligence, marriage and family, and leadership and management—in more depth through the reflections and stories of the participants in the Pastors Summit.

The responsibilities of pastoral life are continual. The pace and demands of ministry can be relentless, often pushing even the most dedicated pastors to question their calls and evaluate their lives. It is time for all of us in the church to raise our understanding of ministry demands, review our expectations and make plans for building resilient pastoral excellence.

**QUESTIONS TO PONDER**

1. Do you know of a church that regularly reviewed the pastor for the sake of encouraging growth and effective work? If so, to what extent was the pastor’s personal life assessed? If not, how would you conduct such a review?

2. In what ways have you successfully pursued spiritual formation? What roles did others play in your growth toward Christian maturity?

3. What “stories” do you tell yourself about self-care—what thoughts repeat over and over? What motivates you to prioritize the work required to pursue physical and emotional health?

4. Think of someone you know who seems to have high EQ-self (the ability to manage one’s own emotions). How would you characterize them? Make a list of their characteristics. Do the same for someone you know with high EQ-others (the ability to appropriately respond to others’ emotions) and someone with high CQ (cultural intelligence). How do the three lists compare?

5. Name several concrete examples of how spouses can play an important role in helping sustain their pastor-partners in the work of ministry.

6. Think of a recent conflict in your church. How were the skills of management and leadership expressed during that time?

**RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER READING**

