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# A Church Family's Path through Founding Pastor Transition

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GEORGE FOX UNIVERSITY

A CHURCH FAMILY'S PATH  
THROUGH FOUNDING PASTOR TRANSITION

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO  
THE FACULTY OF GEORGE FOX EVANGELICAL SEMINARY  
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DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

BY NICK MARTINEAU

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George Fox Evangelical Seminary  
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CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

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DMin Dissertation

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This is to certify that the DMin Dissertation of

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has been approved by  
the Dissertation Committee on February 13, 2017  
for the degree of Doctor of Ministry in Leadership and Global Perspectives.

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*“May the Lord, the God who gives breath to all living things, appoint someone over this community to go out and come in before them, one who will lead them out and bring them in, so the Lord’s people will not be like sheep without a shepherd.”*

*Numbers 27:16-17*

## ABSTRACT

Leadership transitions are inevitable within all organizations. It is not a question of if, but when. This is particularly true within churches. Pastoral succession, particularly a long-term founding pastor's transition, is difficult. There are many emotions and tensions to navigate for the church family, staff, elders, founding pastor, and incoming pastor, in the midst of the transition. A struggle for control often takes place in addition to a great sense of loss, confusion, and fear for many in the church family. Every transition has its own unique story. Some transitions go smoothly, while others result in pain and a disaster, yet in every transition you will find a mix of emotions, both high and low for leadership to navigate. Chapter 1 of this dissertation looks at the existing problems that occur in the midst of long term founding-pastor transitions. Chapter 2 examines leadership type and context within transitions, and reviews transitions seen in scripture. Chapter 3 examines the importance of establishing a theology and theory of leadership to assist a church family going through leadership transition. Chapter 4 acknowledges the different emotions that occur within leadership transitions and studies the importance of using emotional intelligence to help navigate these complex feelings. Chapter 5 reviews Family Systems Theory as it relates to the church. Acknowledging the church as a family allows us to examine how Family Systems Theory can help a church family navigate through the complex emotions of a founding pastor transition. Overall, this paper will look at church health and help leadership navigate the complex transition when a founding pastor moves on.

# **CHAPTER 1**

## **OVERVIEW OF LEADERSHIP SUCCESSION**

### **Introduction**

Every organization experiences transition and change. Change can create difficulties or reveal opportunities. Depending on the depth of change that takes place, real challenges may present themselves for leadership to navigate and resisting change can result in the death of the organization. Leadership within an organization must learn from the past, adapt to the present, and plan for the future. This is true whether it is a large or small church, whether it is a family business or a publicly traded company. Change will occur one way or another, and it impacts us all.

How an organization chooses to navigate change can have a significant impact on the organization's future well-being and health. This is particularly important when a significant change is occurring, like a founding pastor, president, or CEO transitioning into a new role, suddenly passing away, or choosing to retire.

A founding pastor has the unique position of laying the foundation for their church or organization. The church is designed by this pastor, and has taken the shape of their personality. Because of this, the founding pastor transition is an important challenge and transition for any church to navigate.

Many founding pastors have been able to lead a single organization for several years. Some may even have had the privilege of seeing the desired success achieved in their own lifetime, by careful planning, by creating a certain culture, and by

implementing a specific process. It is indeed an honor for a leader to see a vision transform into reality through years of sweat, energy, teamwork, and difficult decision-making. Many founding pastors, some who have led a church for twenty or more years, are held in very high respect.

It is one thing for an organization or a founding leader to achieve a high level of success, it is quite another thing to maintain that same level of success over an extended period of time, and through multiple leadership transitions. The passage of time makes change in pastoral leadership inevitable; the health of a church family is tested by how the founding pastor and church leadership move through the transition.

A local church may struggle to manage many different types of change, including a change in locations, ministry direction, methodologies, and even styles of worship. When a major change like changing pastors occurs, particularly a founding pastor, the boat is violently rocked, and fear can set in. Spiritual and emotional waves can quickly create an uneasiness within the church family. Both the congregation and leadership are often shaken, and it becomes very important for the founding pastor to recognize the impact that the transition will have on all church members. With good self-awareness, the founding pastor, incoming pastor, and church leadership can work together to minimize potentially debilitating outcomes, and create a healthy way forward for the church as a whole.

The study of founding pastor transitions and church health is particularly important in my current situation. Our founding pastor started the church 29 years ago, and just over 5 years ago, I came on staff to start the slow transition to replace him. This dissertation has guided much of our transition process. In the midst of this study, we have

learned some things that have worked in our situation, and some that have not. We have not done things perfectly, and this is not a how-to manual for pastoral transitions. However, the story of our experiences will hopefully provide insight to the many other pastoral transitions that occur within all churches and impact church leadership everywhere.

### **Story**

Whether it is sports, business, the family farm, or a church, there are numerous stories of the difficulties that can arise within leadership transitions. Imagine the difficulties a church family must navigate when an incoming pastor follows a long term, founding pastor who has developed a loving connection to the church family, a strong reputation, and an important legacy.

For this study, Robert,<sup>1</sup> who five years ago had been called to be the new pastor at Journey Church, was interviewed. He followed in the footsteps of Tom, the legendary founding pastor, who established the church 25 years ago. Tom poured his heart and soul into the church: he oversaw 3 building campaigns, was deeply loved by everyone, and under his leadership, the church grew to play an instrumental role in the community, all the while reflecting Tom's personality.

Unfortunately, Tom's unexpected retirement left quite a mess for Robert. The church leadership decided not to have an interim pastor, and many in the church were still

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<sup>1</sup> Interview by author, December 1, 2015. All interviews are confidential and interviewees' names have been changed. All quotes are used with permission.

grieving Tom's exit when Robert arrived. Robert would frequently hear people say, "We've never done it that way," and the team of Elders asked Robert to carry out the goals that they had set under Tom's leadership. On top of that, Tom and his family still regularly attended Journey Church.

Robert struggled to build relationships in the church. He was unable to create a shared vision, and he left Journey Church after being their Senior Pastor for only two years. When interviewing Robert he shared with me that "it was impossible to break into their close knit family."

In this description, it is easy to understand some of the problems that Robert, Tom, and the church experienced in this transition. How could it have been different? If Robert's leadership skills had been stronger, could he have overcome these difficulties? If Tom had properly planned his succession could things have gone more smoothly? If the church family had understood the dynamics involved in such a major change, would they have come together and provided the leadership necessary to see their church family flourish? These questions are not easily answered, but as we will see, healthy change requires more than just a single good leader.

When John Wooden was the men's basketball coach at the University of California at Los Angeles (UCLA), between 1948-1975, UCLA won 10 NCAA Championships in 12 years. He left a lasting legacy and is often referred to as the greatest coach of all time, as well as one of the greatest leaders ever. His teachings, quotes, and stories have been passed on in leadership circles around the globe.

While Wooden was a great coach, we rarely hear about his successor. Gene Bartow followed Wooden in 1975, immediately following Wooden's 10<sup>th</sup> NCAA

Championship. Bartow's legacy is his short term at UCLA. Because of UCLA's success under their long-time coach, Wooden, and the expectations of the school for his successor, Barton's position was "the toughest job in college basketball, an impossible situation."<sup>2</sup>

Soon after Bartow took the UCLA job, he told *Sports Illustrated*, "I figure this nostalgia for Coach Wooden will pass in about a year, as long as UCLA keeps winning."<sup>3</sup> UCLA did keep winning, and Bartow compiled an outstanding record of 52-9 but it wasn't enough. Even though Bartow was successful in the NCAA tournament, his UCLA teams didn't win the championship that the UCLA fans had come to expect. Bartow left after two seasons to become Alabama-Birmingham's basketball coach, and their first athletic director, where he had a very successful career. All the while, UCLA struggled for decades to replace their legendary coach, John Wooden. UCLA's athletic director, Dan Guerrero, stated that Gene Bartow had the unenviable task of "following the greatest coach in college basketball history, and [the leadership] had underestimated the difficulty the UCLA family would have in moving on."<sup>4</sup> Even though John Wooden is considered an amazing coach and leader, and even though Gene Bartow went on and proved to be an excellent coach and leader, the leadership transition was unsuccessful. UCLA and John Wooden had not established a healthy leadership culture beyond Wooden himself, and in

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<sup>2</sup> Frank Litsey, "Gene Bartow, Successor to John Wooden at UCLA, Dies at 81," *New York Times*, January 4, 2012, accessed June 22, 2016, [http://www.nytimes.com/2012/01/05/sports/ncaabasketball/gene-bartow-ucla-basketball-coach-after-wooden-dies-at-81.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2012/01/05/sports/ncaabasketball/gene-bartow-ucla-basketball-coach-after-wooden-dies-at-81.html?_r=0).

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

the end, the results proved that they did not adequately prepared UCLA for Wooden's retirement.

The two stories above are indicative of many organizations and churches that thrive under a sole leader, yet do not have a culture of leadership to weather the individual leader's departure. While every organization has different reasons for their need for successful succession, because of an eternal calling, the Church's planning should not allow the sole weight of the church's success or failure to fall on a single individual, or to be wrapped up in a sole individual's personality.

An example of a successful transition occurred at Southeast Christian Church, Louisville, KY in 1999, when long term Senior Pastor Bob Russell realized he would not live forever.<sup>5</sup> Bob had spent decades pastoring his church and seeing it grow to over 10,000 strong. The Southeast Christian Church was a thriving community, fully committed to Bob's leadership. In 1999, Bob was overcome with worry about what would happen to his church when he passed away or retired. Bob went to his Elders and together they created a long-term plan.

After a lengthy search process, Bob and the Elders hired Dave Stone, but Bob did not immediately retire, nor did Dave immediately step into the Senior role. Bob and Dave drew up a three-year plan, communicated the plan to the church body, then patiently executed the plan. They slowly gave Dave more leadership throughout the church and he was visibly preaching more and more. The plan was regularly discussed throughout the transition, and church members had months to express grief, concerns, and then to form a

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<sup>5</sup> Bob Russell and Bryan Bucher, *Transition Plan: 7 Secrets Every Leader Needs to Know* (Louisville, KY: Ministers Label Publishing, 2010), 2.



new relationship with Dave. After the three-year transition plan, Bob retired and Dave took over as Senior Pastor. The church threw Bob a big thank you party and the church was also ready and excited for the next season of life under Dave's leadership.

While the transition was likely still difficult for some who had grown particularly close to Bob, the gradual change, with an extended period of overlap, along with the opportunities for the church to walk through the emotional process of change, and the time to get to know Dave, helped make this change a smooth one for Southeast Christian Church. Bob, the Elders, and Dave all executed a smooth transition of leadership that is all too rare in churches that become shell shocked with change and regress when pastors move on.

### **Change Is Difficult**

A long term, founding-pastor transition marks a major change within a church. All change is difficult, particularly change that is deeply rooted. Many have studied organizational change and the results of different change processes. While this paper is not a study on change theory and processes, it is worth acknowledging two different ways that churches often experience change. The most common way is called "incremental change."<sup>6</sup> Incremental change is the result of a rationalized plan that does not disrupt existing patterns. Most importantly, during incremental change there is still a sense of control, because it is a planned, step-by-step approach. For many churches, this means a

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<sup>6</sup> Robert E. Quinn, *Deep Change: Discovering the Leader Within* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 1996), 3.

Senior pastor steps down, an interim pastor or overlap period occurs, and then slowly a new vision is set for the church.

A second type of change that churches can find themselves in is referred to as “deep change.”<sup>7</sup> Deep change usually requires a new way of thinking and behaving. It is change that is major in scope, and irreversible. Deep change requires taking risks and, most important, requires a surrender of control. Robert Quinn says, “those making a deep change are walking naked into the land of uncertainty.”<sup>8</sup> Quickly changing behavior, taking risks, and surrendering control will often cause shock to a church family, yet sometimes it is required.

There are times when deep change is necessary for the health of a church or organization. If a leader is caught in an immoral act, suddenly passes away, or another particular event shocks the culture, there might be a need to “pull the Band-Aid off quickly,” to ease the pain and start the healing process. This deep change is major in scope, knocks everyone involved off kilter, and it takes time for things to settle.

However, when a long term founding pastor is ready for retirement and ready to hand off the baton, then the church would be wise to approach this transition with incremental change in mind. While some might argue for quick, deep change,<sup>9</sup> the life of a church functions differently than a business institution and requires the emotional engagement and trust of church members.

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Dennis C. Roberts, *Deeper Learning in Leadership* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2007), 24.

Imagine if John Wooden had introduced Gene Bartow to the UCLA family a few years before his departure. Wooden might have developed his succession plan, giving the fans and alumni time to get to know the successor, so that no one would have been caught off guard. Bartow could have patiently waited his turn and the UCLA administration, alumni, and fans could have understood that their beloved leader would eventually retire, and this was a plan for the long-term health of the team. Imagine if Wooden had shared the coaching bench with Bartow and that they had together lifted up that 10<sup>th</sup> NCAA Championship trophy. Would the UCLA family have been better positioned for a healthy transition?

While quick, deep change is sometimes best, and often necessary, churches would be wise to consider strategic planning that implements incremental change. This kind of incremental change is rare and takes more than just a founding pastor's leadership. The question becomes how does a church instill a leadership culture that recognizes: the importance of every member playing their part, the life cycles of leadership, and the commitment of a community to thrive and maintain health through change. In the coming pages, this project will look at the different ways that a church family can navigate the deep change required during the transition of a founding pastor.

### **Church Family**

As a church grows, there are more and more dynamics to manage. Much has been written on the Church as an institution and the Church's need to follow popular business and leadership practices. While that can be good advice for many churches we must

never forget that the call of the church is to be committed to each other in unity, mission, and love, much like a healthy family.

A surprising statistic from Lifeway states that the average stay for a pastor in their church is 3.6 years.<sup>10</sup> Unfortunately, this shows that too many churches and pastors don't see their relationship as a family commitment. Pastors leave their church for many different reasons, including at the request of their church family. Lifeway's research shows that a long term commitment is rare between many pastors and churches.

In contrast, many founding pastors generally make a long term commitment, feel a deep connection to their church, and see the community as family. A founding pastor shapes the culture and identity of the church, and letting go or moving on from something so personal, might be very difficult.

Many church members in the church family with a founding pastor know no other spiritual leader. They look up to the founding pastor because they have been through many trials and joys together. To them as well, the founding pastor might feel more like family, than in a church whose pastor stays on average 3.6 years.

While churches can learn from the many successful business practices developed for successful transitions, much less has been written about churches embracing the family dynamics that can occur. If churches understood the deep rootedness of a founding pastor within their church family, they would be more likely to address the emotional process experienced when a beloved family member moves on. This paper encourages churches to look not only to successful secular transitions as guidance, but also to

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<sup>10</sup> Franklin Dumond, "How Long Do Pastors Stay in One Church?" *General Baptist Journal* (June 26, 2014): 1, accessed June 22, 2016, <http://www.gbjournal.org/8-82/>.

understand the emotional dynamics that take place within family transitions and the family theory practice tools that can help families remain healthy through those changes.

While many valuable, important, and helpful things have been written on pastoral transitions from an organizational and business standpoint, this paper studies founding pastor transitions from a “we are family” perspective. This paper will later take a deeper look at how Family Systems Theory can guide church families through this complex founding pastor transition.

### **Why The Church Should Care**

Churches and pastors might be tempted to neglect the need for succession planning and make “winging it” their plan A, never prioritizing the long term health of their church family. Although a leadership succession plan may be less of a problem for some denominations that regularly rotate pastor assignments, yet there are many independent churches and other denominations that such is not the case and that is why this paper is important. Even denominations that plan for pastoral succession should care about the emotional complexities that impact the entire church family. The primary reasons why transitions are important to the church is because of the need for longevity and the importance of a healthy church.

While many churches rightly wrestle with cultural and theological issues, and churches rightly plan programs and outreaches, unfortunately many churches never consider leadership succession as a vital issue for the longevity and health of the church. Marcus Bieschke considers the significance of leadership succession:

Many organizations are just one step away from extinction. Sounds harsh, but think about it. If Jesus hadn't intentionally infused His values, teachings, vision and Spirit into the lives of several high-potential followers, would the church exist today? No. But it flourishes today because Jesus recognized that there can be no success without a successor. "As the Father sent Me, so I send you," He said (John 20:21). Thus, the critical importance of leadership succession continues.<sup>11</sup>

Bieschke accentuates the necessity for churches to take a proactive approach to this subject. Jesus, in giving the Great Commission to his disciples, and us, spoke of an ongoing ministry when he said, "I am with you to the end of the age" (Matt. 28:19-20). It is important for pastors to plan for ministry continuity: a time when they are no longer involved and the church family needs to consider the long term health of their church.

In regards to leadership transition, some may hold a passive approach, yet we see that Jesus took an active approach in sending out the disciples. In following Jesus' example, the church cannot be passive about leadership succession. Reaching the next generation is necessary for survival of the church. Passing the torch to the next generation of leadership is dependent on how well the present leadership prepares itself.

Imagine the vision that it takes to plant a tree for future generations to enjoy. This kind of long-term vision requires a proactive approach to leadership succession. Many churches are good hearted, but lack true visionary leadership. In *State of the Church*, George Barna emphasizes the urgency for leadership:

Churches all over the country are crying out for strong, visionary, godly leadership. The people who filled the positions of leadership and churches today are, for the most part, teachers—good people, lovers of God, well-educated, gifted communicators—but not leaders. They do not have or understand vision. They are incapable of motivating and mobilizing people around God's vision. They fail to direct people's energies and resources effectively and efficiently. The church

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<sup>11</sup> Marcus Bieschke, "Five Succession Planning Values to Keep Your Organization Alive," *Leadership Advance Online* no. 6 (Winter 2006): 1, accessed June 22, 2016, [http://www.regent.edu/acad/global/publications/lao/issue\\_6/pdf/Bieschke\\_%20five\\_succession.pdf](http://www.regent.edu/acad/global/publications/lao/issue_6/pdf/Bieschke_%20five_succession.pdf).

suffers for this absence of genuine leadership. Pastors themselves are not to blame. They have emerged from a system that so esteems scholarly pursuits that leadership has been left by the wayside, and the church has suffered accordingly. In the future, for the church to become strong again we must heed the guidance of the leaders God has called and gifted for that purpose, while growing through the focused teaching of those who are gifted to explicate His Word and its profound implications for our lives. The failure to do so will result in greater unnecessary setbacks and suffering for the Church in this nation.<sup>12</sup>

While Barna makes the case for the lack of visionary leadership in churches, all hope is not lost. Jesus has provided the church with a vision for leadership succession (Matt 28:19-20). A primary concern of the Great Commission is how to reach the next generation. The way leaders and churches follow the call of the Great Commission will look different depending upon their unique context and gifting, yet everyone's call to proactively engage with the Great Commission is still relevant to the end of the age.

Succession planning matters, and churches must start embracing the inevitable change that comes with a transition of leadership, not just for the sake of a healthy church, but for the sake of the call of the Great Commission.

### **The Best Laid Plans**

Throughout scripture we see many references to the Body of Christ (1 Cor. 12), and many churches use family-type language when communicating, even referring to the pastor as Brother Nick or Sister Caroline. The pastoral or shepherding roles of the church treat the Church more as a family. However, the leadership roles experience a pressure to treat the Church more as an organization. Much has been written on church growth

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<sup>12</sup> George Barna, ed., *The State of the Church: 2002* (Ventura, CA: Issachar Resources, 2002), 130.

structures and many church meetings involve discussions on policies, procedures, and budgets.

Yet the church must be in tune not only with leadership organization techniques, and church family dynamics issues, but also with the workings of the Spirit throughout the church journey. There is no set of blueprints for a perfect leadership transition and we must be careful not to weigh a program, a process, or a theory more highly than what the Spirit is doing within a church family.

I recently witnessed a church division over an issue in their bylaws. This church had a successful, likeable, interim pastor who desired to transition into their senior pastor role. Many in the church supported this decision, but the chair of elders pointed out a rule written in their bylaws 10+ years earlier which stated that the church could not hire interim pastors to fill the senior pastor role. A strict adherence to the bylaws left no room for prayer and discussion and ultimately caused division in this church's body. This is a classic example where no room was left for the Spirit to work, and leadership succession failed.

*The Leadership Journal*<sup>13</sup> addressed several transitional approaches that churches may use to transition church leadership. One instance in particular highlighted the need to lay aside best laid organizational plans when the Spirit is leading.

Downtown Baptist Church in Alexandria, Virginia developed a well-thought out plan to guide their church through their senior pastor transition. Their plan was initially very similar to the plan many independent churches take when transitioning pastors. Two

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<sup>13</sup> Marcus Bieschke, 1.



representative teams were selected, whose recommendations would ultimately lead to the identification and appointment of the church's next pastor. There was a pastor search team, which was specifically created to reflect the diversity within the church congregation in order to represent the needs and desires of all members during the process of identifying their next pastor. Members within the team were selected through a church-wide nomination process, with the four individuals who received the highest votes automatically qualifying for the pastor search team. The transition team was selected in the same process, and was mandated with ensuring a smooth transition when a new pastor was identified and appointed.<sup>14</sup>

The pastor search team used a survey to collect views from the congregation regarding their expectations of the new pastor. However, the committee also conceded that the survey method should only be used as a guideline and that there must be sufficient room left to hear and follow God's leadership through his spirit regardless of the results from the survey.<sup>15</sup>

With regard to identifying candidates for the pastoral task, the church carefully looked for someone qualified within their church body, but after consideration, they contacted Baptist state conventions and seminaries for resumes of possible applicants. They also asked the congregation to recommend nominees, who were also equally considered for appointment. Within a week, the pastor search committee had received more than 135 applications with more continuing to trickle in as the committee work

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<sup>14</sup> H. Donald Bowen, *Passing the Torch: Changing Church Leadership in a Changing World* (Callao, VA: Sunrise Press, 1998), 15.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

progressed. The process of reviewing submitted resumes, along with identifying and interviewing potential candidates took many months, with little success in identifying the most suitable candidate. The church grew frustrated that their best laid plans were not bearing fruit. Downtown Baptist Church could have forged ahead with their plans but instead they stopped, acknowledged their frustrations with the process, and entered into a time of prayer. During the time of waiting, the pastor search committee received the resume of an assistant pastor in a Baptist church in Charlotte, and after viewing it, all committee members were unanimous that they had found their candidate.

In planning any succession, whether in business or in church leadership, it is of essence to come up with the right strategy of handing over the leadership mantle to the successor, ensuring a smooth transition as well as in preparing the organization for the change in leadership, yet it is also important to acknowledge that the best laid plans may not succeed. What may have worked in the past, or what may have worked for another church family, may not necessarily work for the present situation. The church needs to remain relevant in changing times, in tune with their current context, and willing to adopt transitional methods that are more effective for smooth succession.

Toward that end, the church may consider looking to the world of business to identify critical strategies that have been applied to ensure smooth transitions and successions. Some of these strategies may be appropriate to the church context while also looking towards family practices when going through change. Yet, most importantly the church must continue to listen to and rely on the Spirit through the journey knowing that their best laid plans and thinking might be thrown out the window. This paper will later

look at ways to help a church family deal with the emotions and tensions that come when one's best laid plans change.

### **The Importance Of This Project**

The long-term pastor has earned a special level of endearment due to the length of tenure. A special bond can form between the church family and the long-term, founding pastor. Church family members have often been on a long spiritual journey together and their founding pastor has been their tour guide. Together, the church family will have experienced many victories and defeats, and the pastor will have helped many Church members through persistent illnesses, terminal medical situations, and even death of family members. As a result, many long-term founding pastors have a high degree of power and prestige because of their success in leading the church and meeting the community's needs.

When a beloved founding pastor transitions on, for whatever reason, the people suffer a tremendous loss. Thomas Sweetser and Mary McKinney state,

The pastor may feel sad he (or she) is leaving but glad to be putting some of the difficult aspects of leading the parish behind him. The staff members may become disorganized in their work as they try to plan for an uncertain future. Parishioners struggle to put closure to the pastor's leadership while trying to come to grips with the fact that the pastor is indeed leaving.<sup>16</sup>

The pastor's imminent or future departure will bring about strong emotions such as abandonment, loneliness, sorrow, grief, and uncertainty.

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<sup>16</sup> Thomas P. Sweetser and Mary Benet McKinney, *Changing Pastors: A Resource for Pastoral Transitions* (Kansas City, MO: Sheed & Ward, 1998), 8.

A poorly planned pastoral transition can become an incubator for internal power struggles. The church as a whole can lose sight of its vision, mission, purpose, and calling in the midst of these struggles. Opportunistic church leaders may view the transition as their opportunity to gain the leadership advantage that they may have been unsuccessful in attaining in the past. Ralph Watkins, a researcher on pastoral transition, makes this statement,

Pastoral transitions are tough; there's no way of escaping that. They are not just tough; They are inevitable. All churches eventually go through pastoral transition... no one wins when transitions don't go well... whether by congregational election, judicatory assignment, or where complex joint processes involving the local church in a regional or denominational group... the process of establishing a pastor and a new pope, it can be a dramatic and traumatic moment in the life of a congregation.<sup>17</sup>

This is why it is so important for a pastoral staff and church leadership to recognize the complexity and difficulty of a long-term founding pastor transition and the impact that the transition will have on all parties involved.

This project is important to the reader because the church needs a strategic plan for its longevity in order to remain healthy and to reach the next generation. The lack of a transition plan and a leadership development plan may result in sterility of leadership and negatively impact on the church family.

In the remaining pages I will share some of the guiding thoughts and research that have shaped my own personal succession journey with the founding pastor of the church I serve. This project will impress upon the reader the need to understand context and leadership while looking at biblical leadership transition examples, a theological

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<sup>17</sup> Ralph C. Watkins, *Leading Your African American Church through Pastoral Transitions* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 2010), 1, 17.

framework for cultivating a leadership culture, the importance of emotional intelligence when navigating transitions, and ways to use family system theory to help a church family and its leadership navigate the emotional triangles bound to surface when a long-term founding pastor transitions.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **CONTEXT AND LEADERSHIP TYPE WITHIN SUCCESSION**

#### **Introduction**

The Bible is full of succession stories. Some might say the Bible is one big succession story that points to Jesus. In Matthew Chapter 1, we see Jesus' genealogy which is in essence a succession story connected through many generations. We then see that Jesus imparts the Holy Spirit on his believers and commissions them to continue sharing the message and love of Jesus. This succession plan has been going on ever since and is, in essence, the entire mission we see fulfilled throughout the Bible.

Unlike other religions, in Christianity there is no disagreement, or even discussion, about who succeeds Jesus. Instead, we wait until Jesus returns and we hand down from generation to generation the message of Jesus, as new leaders rise up and carry that message until Jesus will return again.

Since Jesus' ascension into Heaven, his message and love have been entrusted to his believers to share, and to work out through the church. While the message of Jesus will not be stopped by one local church closing its doors, we can see that a healthy succession of church leadership will most effectively model the succession story of King David to King Jesus and will continue to allow the church to fulfill its call to make disciples from generation to generation.

A church would be wise to be proactive in succession, but unfortunately most churches do not start considering their next pastor until after their current pastor moves

on. Typically, when a pastor leaves, an interim period ensues and a new pastor is hired, leaving little to no overlap between the two leaders. These pastoral transitions often lead to a new season in the church's history rather than the continuation of a church's vision. While it is possible for this scenario to be successful, how does it compare to biblical examples of leadership transition?

This chapter will look at some of the health and unhealthy biblical examples of leadership transition and how different leadership types and different contexts might call for different succession plans.

### **Is There a Biblical Template?**

Leadership transition comes one way or another. If churches choose to be proactive in their succession planning, the natural question is whether there is a biblical succession template in the scriptures that one could follow? Many have discussed this and come to different conclusions.

In 2006 at the Apostolic Networks Conference, a discussion on succession planning took place. Many different opinions arose from the panel, representing many diverse positions. Just in the past year, Ben Pugh wrote a review of this discussion and then did research to see what has resulted since the conference. Pugh shares that one of the panel hosts, David Matthew made it clear that, because of the relational approach between the Heavenly Father and a pastor, "There are not posts to be filled. People are

what they are by the grace of God.”<sup>1</sup> Roger Forster, another panel member agreed, “We don’t fill posts...we don’t even, in a sense, appoint people... it’s God’s prerogative to do so.”<sup>2</sup> Forster went on to cite Elijah and Elisha as examples, claiming that the Lord himself “will bring someone into a position where they could receive the mantle, but I’m not going to put it on them... I’d like the Lord to drop it on them, and everybody would see it.” In a heated discussion, host Terry Virgo disagreed and pointed to a plethora of biblical support that highlights the training of a number of younger leaders in readiness for the transition, thus affirming dispersing young leadership and multiplying the influence and work to be done.<sup>3</sup>

The Apostolic Network conference was over ten years ago, and Ben Pugh has recently reached out and tried to contact some of the panel hosts to see how their own succession process was, and is, playing out in their churches. Roger Forster, at the age of eighty-two, still leads Ichthus Church, in England. Forster stated that he had no current succession plan in place or on the horizon. It is also worth noting that his church has decreased by over 25% in the last five years. When asked again about biblical succession, Forster said that there is not any one passage that stands out to him, but what interests him about all of the biblical succession narratives is that, “In each case there is an obvious contact and flow of the Holy Spirit from one to the next.”<sup>4</sup> Forster said he was

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<sup>1</sup> Ben Pugh, “Succession Plans: Is There a Biblical Template?” *Journal of the European Pentecostal Theological Association* (June 2, 2016): 2.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 4.



still awaiting that anointing of someone within his church and if it never came then he would trust God with the future of his church.

Ben Pugh also contacted Terry Virgo. Virgo's response to the succession planning questions was that he did not adhere to any particular passage but had sought to adhere to biblical principles: "We began to see," he said, "the imagery of a family which had fathers and sons, and mothers and daughters." Virgo's insight was profound and has played out in his personal ministry throughout the past decade. In the past five to ten years, Virgo's leadership of New Frontiers International has been passed on to sixteen people scattered all over the world, all of whom are long-standing friends with each other and share an "identical vision."<sup>5</sup>

Virgo was clearly very grateful to see "a new generation finding genuine freedom to be expanded in their world, rather than looking to a figure head." An especially pithy line was: "Jesus did not call one leader but twelve. On the day of Pentecost it was Peter's moment, not Peter's movement."<sup>6</sup>

Both of these leaders point, not to a particular biblical passage for biblical succession, but to biblical principles that can guide a church through a succession process. However, if we are not careful we will look at "successful" transitions and deem them the biblical answer when in fact, sometimes worldly success does not equate to biblical success. As we will see, leadership types and context also play a role in succession planning.

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

## Leadership Types Within Biblical Succession

It is interesting to note that Forster and Virgo are both founding leaders. The churches and organizations take on the founder's personality and the organization's succession plan comes from their very own ministry DNA. German sociologist Max Weber had much to say about founding pastors and their succession saying, "In a sense, then, succession turns an organization inside out. It is in this process of succession from the founding leader, that the organization plumbs the deep well of the charisma with which it was founded. What it draws up from this process will forever define the organization going forward."<sup>7</sup>

Max Weber categorized leadership as belonging to three basic types: Traditional, Bureaucratic, and Charismatic. Each of Weber's leadership types has its own succession protocols. Traditional generally involves the privileging of family members or an aristocratic inner circle who are the decision makers within the church.<sup>8</sup> According to Weber, this type is not the ideal biblical type. "Indeed, declension to this model is equated with a fatal erosion of some of the core values that is washed away with the traditional handing off from generation to generation much like Solomon to Rehoboam."<sup>9</sup>

The Bureaucratic type is characterized by rational thinking about the mutually beneficial arrangements between management and staff, which are the means by which

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<sup>7</sup> Max Weber and A. M. Henderson, *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization* (New York, NY: Martino Fine Books, 2012), 363.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 365.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

solidarity and obedience are secured.<sup>10</sup> The Pastoral Epistles, with their relatively complex descriptions of leadership, could perhaps be taken as evidence for at least the beginnings of bureaucratization in the New Testament. Weber cites the succession of Moses to Joshua as another bureaucratic example.<sup>11</sup>

The model most closely associated with Weber is charismatic leadership. According to Ron Boehm's study using Weber's leadership types, the charismatic leader is the leadership type found in most founding leaders.<sup>12</sup> There are varying levels of ideological zeal in the founders of organizations, and the greater the zeal, the harder the transition will be,<sup>13</sup> yet all founding leaders are likely to fall within Weber's understanding of "charismatic leader." Charismatic leaders spurn traditional or bureaucratic ways of doing things and rely heavily on a divine mandate or message, a heavenly call or a special empowerment, recognized by a large number of loyal and sacrificial followers.<sup>14</sup>

My church has taken a particular interest in understanding leadership types as we move through our own leadership transition. Our founding pastor follows Weber's charismatic definition, and while time will more accurately define my leadership type, I tend to follow a more bureaucratic leadership style. As a church community we are

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Ron Boehme, *Leadership for the 21st Century: Changing Nations through the Power of Serving* (Seattle, WA: YWAM Publishing, 1989), 69.

<sup>13</sup> Heather Haveman and Mukti Khairi, "Survival Beyond Succession?: The Contingent Impact of Founder Succession On Organizational Failure," *Journal of Business Venturing* 19 (2004): 441.

<sup>14</sup> Boehme, 69.

acknowledging these differences in order to understand their implications within our community.

While we do not have a clear understanding of any of the biblical leaders' leadership types and personality, we can see that their gifting and personality played a significant role in how the community they led moved forward. Through the stories, we recognize that Moses had a different leadership type than Joshua. The same can be said for King David's passion, vision, and warrior leadership style compared to his successor Solomon, who was known as a builder, full of wisdom. We can include Jesus' transition of leadership in the conversation and see that his charisma and leadership style demonstrated his willingness to delegate to the twelve disciples, decentralizing the leadership to the community as a whole.

Along with Max Weber's breakdown of leadership types there are many other studies that seek to analyze and determine the gifting and makeup of a leader. Recognizing leadership types is important for analyzing the founding pastor and assessing the gifting of an incoming pastor.

While acknowledging leadership types is important we also understand the context in which we minister and lead plays a significant role in our future ministry and church family.

### **Context Matters**

Succession looks different in different contexts. In the political world, the United States handles presidential succession in a different way than Great Britain handles the succession of the monarch, or of the prime minister. Churches with episcopal structures

place the authority for decisions about succession in higher levels of the episcopacy. A congregational or independent church looks to local decision-making: the church membership, or perhaps the choice of the retiring minister. In between these approaches is the representative model, seen notably in Presbyterian communions, that looks to assemblies of delegates to fill vacant pulpits and thus to maintain the presence and witness of the people of God.<sup>15</sup>

In any and all of these contexts, the actual event of succession can be triumphant, or disastrous, or anything in between, and if we have spent any time at all in a church the examples come easily to mind. The question of succession itself has therefore received fresh attention in the literature of leadership. For instance, a recent collection of essays on the “leadership traditions” of various Judeo-Christian communities includes the question of how succession is handled, including recruitment, cultivation, education, and support.<sup>16</sup> These questions have led also to an engagement with relevant biblical literature to determine how context plays a role in leadership transition. Understanding the biblical contexts is important in order to apply the biblical examples to a particular church community.

While understanding biblical context is important it is also important to study your own community context. While different contexts can require different transition models, we also can see that reflecting on one’s own context, can reveal varying degrees

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<sup>15</sup> Stanley J. Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000), 542-572

<sup>16</sup> Richard J. Mouw and Eric O. Jacobsen, eds., *Traditions in Leadership: How Faith Traditions Shape the Way We Lead* (De Pree Leadership Center, CA: 2006), 58.

of health, which may impact the success of a leadership transition. In order to implement a plan that meets your church family's needs and specific context, carefully evaluate your ministry or church setting. A careful look at your church family can help gain an understanding of what to expect through transition. A few context questions could be: What are the core values that drive your sense of purpose? What is the overriding vision that connects those values? What is distinctive about your ministerial focus? How do you see God leading your institution into the future? What do you offer that is different from other, similar churches? Who is your church family serving and how does that impact your approach to ministry? What challenges are you facing? What skills do your leaders need in order to meet these challenges? What cultural issues do you see impacting your surrounding community?

Evaluating the dynamic nature and context of your organization will give you a strong sense of what values, vision, and skills you want your prospective leaders to have. The needs of a small community organization will be vastly different from a large national nonprofit or a local church. As churches or organizations gain a good understanding of their ministry context they can then set out to craft a plan that can remain fluid and responsive to shifts in their organizational model or goals.

As we will see in some biblical examples the type of leadership, along with the context the succession takes place in, will play a significant part in the overall health and success of the transition.

## Leadership Type and Context: Succession In The Old Testament

### *Solomon To Rehoboam*

In the Bible, not all leadership successions go well. We can often learn a lot by studying the mistakes of others. There are many examples of incompetence, selfishness, and foolishness during the period of the Israelite kings, and one example is often cited. The leadership transition between Solomon to Rehoboam disrupted much of the unity that Rehoboam's grandfather (David) had created. King David was a man after God's own heart, but that was not the case for Solomon, or for his son Rehoboam. In the biblical portrayals of succession, the very worst kind of failure involves a reversion to tradition, namely, Rehoboam's claim to the throne purely as a hereditary right.<sup>17</sup>

The transition of leadership from Solomon to Rehoboam is an example of Max Weber's Traditional Type, which generally involves the privileging of family members or an aristocratic inner circle who are the decision makers in the church. While we do not know the exact leadership potential of Rehoboam, we do see that he came to expect that the Kingship would be his by family lineage. There seems to be no bureaucratic system mentioned throughout the biblical story that would affirm Rehoboam as King, and we do not necessarily see charismatic qualities within Rehoboam which would gain him a large, trusted following to place him as King.

While some scholars attribute the disastrous transition to Rehoboam's leadership, we can also look at Solomon's leadership type to see that this transition failed on multiple levels. Solomon reigned for forty years and built the temple in Jerusalem. He also

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<sup>17</sup> Weber and Henderson, 368.

accomplished amazing things during his reign, but toward his later years, he started to follow other gods and disobeyed God by marrying many wives. Solomon's wives were from many different nations and their union brought the worship of many different gods (1 Kings 11:4) into his kingdom. In an effort to please his wives, Solomon allowed this idolatry to enter his nation. Frank E. Gaebelin says, "Solomon never renounced the Lord, but his heart was not entirely devoted to the Lord either."<sup>18</sup> We see in the later years of Solomon's life that he did not seek God's approval, he was disobedient, and allowed the nation of Israel to worship other gods. Garland sees this differently, instead suggesting that Solomon intentionally sought to expand Israel's influence by welcoming those of other nations into his harem.<sup>19</sup> Either way, both Gaebelin and Garland agree that Solomon's legacy was a country disobedient to God, disconnected from God, and in disarray internally. This proved to be detrimental to the transition of leadership. Solomon did not implement a bureaucratic succession plan, but instead provided poor leadership and relied on a Traditional family lineage transition that designates the oldest son as heir, regardless of the readiness of the successor and it was a plan that ultimately failed.

Looking at both the leader and the successor helps us see that this was not just a failure on Rehoboam's part, but that Solomon's attention to succession might have changed the outcome. Considering Solomon's situation, he had an opportunity to make a difference. He had great wisdom and wealth, and whether it was his harem of one thousand wives who turned his heart away from the Lord, or his own misstep of

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<sup>18</sup> Frank E. Gaebelin, ed., *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1992), 106.

<sup>19</sup> Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland, eds., *Expositor's Bible Commentary*, Revised ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), 109.



judgments, we see that Solomon's legacy impacted not only his successor, Rehoboam, but all of Israel. Dale Ralph Davis states that "Solomon's rebellion against God paved the way for Israel's split."<sup>20</sup> McGee agrees that because of Solomon's rebellion, God stirred up enemies against him, and allowed Jeroboam to rise to prominence and finally split the kingdom.<sup>21</sup>

By the time Solomon died, disorder and division were already rampant throughout the nation. Davis adds that the lack of a clear succession increased the divisions, thereby giving Jeroboam motivation to declare himself king. Jeroboam went to Shechem to position himself as leader over the ten northern tribes, and Solomon's son Rehoboam tried to assert himself as King (1 Kings 12). Although Solomon was known for his wisdom Rehoboam was viewed by many as "stupid and arrogant."<sup>22</sup> While it is true that Rehoboam made some questionable and unwise decisions, it is unfair to consider him "stupid and arrogant." When looking at the greater context of this transition we must also consider the mess that his father left for him. Rehoboam found himself in a situation that would be difficult for any leader to fix.<sup>23</sup>

Another element of this transition is that the nation of Israel was in an unhealthy place before the leadership succession took place. One reason why Rehoboam failed as a leader was because he inherited a nation that was full of disorder, division, and

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<sup>20</sup> Dale Ralph Davis, *1 Kings: The Wisdom and the Folly* (Fearn, UK: Christian Focus, 2007), 89.

<sup>21</sup> John Vernon McGee, *Thru the Bible with J. Vernon McGee*, vol. 2, (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1981), 271.

<sup>22</sup> *The Interpreter's Bible* (New York, NY: Abingdon Press, 1952), 114.

<sup>23</sup> Paul R. House, *1, 2 Kings* (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 1995), 96.

disobedience to the Lord. Before the transition took place, the nation was divided and disobedient to the Lord. By studying the context of this transition we learn how Solomon, Rehoboam, and Israel gave us a blueprint of an unhealthy community and ultimately a failed leadership transition.

### *Moses To Joshua*

The transition of leadership from Moses to Joshua is an example of a careful succession in the Bible and our current day church leaders can learn many principles from studying the leadership type of Moses and Joshua and the context of this transition.

In the inevitable transition of leadership from Moses to Joshua, God did not start a fresh search for a replacement. McGee says, “I doubt whether Moses would have chosen Joshua if the choice had been left to him. Actually, Caleb seems more impressive than Joshua, and it would seem more natural for him to be the new leader.”<sup>24</sup> While it is true that God’s choices are often different from the ones that we would make on our own, we can see that Joshua had been walking side by side with Moses for decades. Wenham disagrees with McGee, stating that Joshua’s defeat of the Amalekite army was the first sign of Joshua’s succession.<sup>25</sup>

We are told that Joshua was Moses’ aide since his youth (Numbers 28:11). Joshua grew up in the Israelite community, serving Moses. Joshua made his first appearance in Exodus 17. Moses appointed Joshua to select a few men to fight the Amalekites, while

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<sup>24</sup> McGee, 605.

<sup>25</sup> Gordon J. Wenham, *Numbers (Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries)* (Nottingham, UK: IVP Academic, 2008), 233.

Moses himself went on top of the hill to pray. As a military leader against the Amalekites, “Joshua overcame the Amalekite army with the sword” (Exodus 17:13). Later we see that Joshua joined Moses and the elders on Mt. Sinai, to meet with the Lord. Joshua stayed at a distance, but he was a witness to the “consuming fire” of God’s glory (Exodus 24). Joshua was an astute observer<sup>26</sup> when Moses and the elders descended from Mt. Sinai with the Ten Commandments, and when, with righteous anger, he scolded the Israelites for their idolatry.

As we study the context of this transition we see that it was a long time in the making. Present day churches can learn from Moses as he welcomed Joshua into these experiences and allowed the elders and entire Israelite community to see, early on, that Joshua was a part of these important events.

Moses and Joshua had the type of relationship where they could approach each other with differences, and on at least one occasion Moses even rebuked Joshua (Numbers 11:28-30). We see that Joshua strongly encouraged Moses to stop two men from prophesying and Moses responded by admonished Joshua, expressing his desire that all of the Lord’s people would receive the Spirit and be a prophet.

In Joshua’s younger years, he was chosen to be among the twelve men to explore Canaan. The twelve men witnessed powerful people and large developed cities, and ten of the twelve men said it would be impossible to take the land. It was Joshua and Caleb who believed God would protect them and lead them into the Promised Land. The

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 277.

Israelites did not listen to Joshua and Caleb, and instead wandered the desert for 40 more years (Numbers 14).

There are parallel stories explaining the transition of leadership from Moses to Joshua (Numbers 27; Deuteronomy 31). In Numbers 27, Moses went up the mountain to be with the Lord, and after praying, the Lord told him to make Joshua his successor. Moses then gathered the Israelites, and in front of them, blessed Joshua, assuring him that the Lord himself would go before him to give protection. Following the death of Moses, the Israelites did what they had been commanded to do and looked to Joshua as their leader.

In Joshua 1:2, following the announcement, “Moses my servant is dead,” there is no interim period in leadership. The transition of leadership had started years before, as God prepared Moses and the Israelites. In fact, Moses had a direct hand in the preparations. It was Moses who cried out to God in prayer and said, “May the Lord, the God who gives birth to all living things, appoint someone over this community to go out and come in before them, one who will lead them out and bring them in, so the Lord’s people will not be like sheep without a shepherd (Number 27:16-17).”

God knows how to make leadership transitions go well. Moses sought God’s counsel, and Joshua humbly observed Moses’ leadership, and served Moses the best way he could. The Israelites had years to witness this transition and welcome Joshua as their new leader. John Sailhamer points out that, “All the glory of Moses had come upon Joshua, a man in whom dwelt the Spirit.”<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> John H. Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative: A Biblical-Theological Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1995), 412.

Moses and Joshua, and their unique leadership types, provide an example of leadership transition. While Moses and Joshua, according to Weber, followed a Bureaucratic Type of transition, it is also clear that they both had charisma and they modeled a type of leadership that is guided by the Spirit of God. Moses and Joshua walked together for years and sought God's direction through prayer and humility. God was very active in preparing Joshua: even before Moses' death, Joshua, and the Israelites, realized that they were being prepared for this transition.

The Moses to Joshua succession is a combination of Weber's charismatic leadership being handed off in a bureaucratic fashion. During this transition, Joshua was able to develop his own charismatic leadership. The transfer of the charisma from Moses to Joshua is done in a methodical fashion over a long, visible period of time. This succession is accompanied by unambiguous public recognition. Fortunately, Joshua had already experienced battlefield success as well. Fountain believes that this shows Joshua's charismatic leadership and was the crucial factor in securing his credibility in the eyes of the people. This success was as, if not more, important than the fact that God, through Moses, had publically affirmed him.<sup>28</sup>

Interestingly, even when Joshua suffers the setback of the defeat at Ai (Joshua 7), quite early in his leadership, there was no rebellion. None of the dysfunctional raging of the people that was common under Moses, appears. In fact, not even once is there any hint of disloyalty or revolt against Joshua while he has the reins of leadership.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Kay Fountain, "An Investigation into Successful Leadership Transitions in the Old Testament," *Asia Journal of Pentecostal Studies* 7, no. 2 (2004): 191.

<sup>29</sup> Angel Hyyim, "Moonlit Leadership: A Midrashic Reading of Joshua's Success," *Jewish Bible Quarterly* 37, no. 3 (2009): 145.

In the context of this transition, Joshua develops his own charismatic leadership, the nation of Israel is healthy and has realistic expectations of their new leader. The people of Israel see him as a strong leader yet God continually reminds Joshua to be strong and courageous (Joshua 1:7). Even in the episode of the twelve spies, while it was clear that both he and Caleb were “men of a different spirit” compared to the fearful and discouraged remainder, Joshua is clearly more hesitant than Caleb (it is Caleb who speaks out first, Num. 13:30; 14:6–10). Joshua straddles the two worlds of Moses and the people.<sup>30</sup>

Moses’ unparalleled awe of God was so great that he simply could not fathom why his people did not trust God also. Ironically then, Moses’ incomparable faith may have been precisely at the root of his struggles in leading the Israelites. In contrast, the people never rebelled against Joshua, because they detected his fears and therefore view him as one of them.<sup>31</sup>

The Israelite community, possibly because of the long nature of the transition, seemed to understand the different leadership types of Moses and Joshua. They also seem to understand the different context and need for a different type of leader, as they moved forward into a new season within their community. The context of Moses, Joshua, and Israel show us a biblical example of a leadership transition that was healthy, patient, and trusting.

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 151.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

## Leadership Type and Context: Succession In The New Testament

### *John the Baptist To Jesus*

Four hundred years passed between the prophetic words that close the Old Testament in Malachi, and John the Baptist's appearance and fulfillment of prophecy as the harbinger to the Messiah (Malachi 3:1). John the Baptist did not follow any tradition, and he had no adherence to a bureaucratic infrastructure. John the Baptist was a charismatic leader who preached about baptism and repentance and drew crowds from both far and near, thereby gaining the attention of the entire Israelite community. The Israelites noticed John the Baptist and were stirred by his message, but John the Baptist remained obedient to his calling. John the Baptist fits into the Charismatic leadership type and represents the charisma that many founding leaders represent.

Robert Strong points out the great degree of acclaim and notoriety that John the Baptist achieved, and how it feeds the innate desire of man.<sup>32</sup> When a person receives that kind of recognition, attention, and power, it can be hard for that person to let go and it can be hard for a community to look towards someone else. Yet, John the Baptist teaches us an important lesson regarding leadership transitions. John the Baptist did not follow a certain set of leadership rules; he chose to step out of the spotlight and never pointed people to himself but towards something greater. To do this takes a great amount of humility and focus, and can be a difficult step during leadership transitions, particularly for a charismatic leader, or a highly invested, long-term, founding leader.

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<sup>32</sup> Robert Strong, "A Pastoral Succession Plan to Help Long-Term Pastors Prepare for Inevitable Ministry Transition" (DMin diss., Biola University, 2013), 57.

John the Baptist maintained a servant's attitude, always pointing others to the one greater that would follow. He clearly knew his role. As a forerunner, John the Baptist's mission was to prepare the way for the one who would come after him (Matt. 3:11). When the Pharisees and religious leaders considered John the Baptist to be the Messiah, he refused and replied, "I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way of the Lord,' as the prophet Isaiah said" (John 1:23).

Jesus entered his time of public ministry and came to John the Baptist to be baptized (Matt. 3:13). John the Baptist humbly responded by saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and you come to me?" (Matt. 3:14). John reluctantly agreed, and one could say that John the Baptist's baptism of Jesus was when the transition of leadership actually took place.

There is so much that leaders can learn from John the Baptist and how he continually pointed people to something greater than himself. In the gospel of John, we see another event when John the Baptist spoke to a crowd and said, "This was he of whom I said, 'He who comes after me ranks before me, because he was before me'" (John 1:15). Wilkinson and Libby say, "Everything John said seemed to draw attention away from himself. True, he baptized many and people thronged to the Jordan to hear him preach. But John constantly sought to downplay his popularity."<sup>33</sup> John the Baptist clearly fulfilled his calling to prepare the way for Jesus. John the Baptist displays an incredible amount of character, which is so important to any leadership transition.

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<sup>33</sup> Bruce Wilkinson and Larry Libby, *Talk Thru Bible Personalities* (Atlanta, GA: Walk Thru the Bible Ministries, 1983), 165.



John the Baptist knew that the people were comparing him to Jesus, and he also knew what he was called to do. John the Baptist knew that his position of leadership would be temporary. He was able to stay focused on his mission of preparing the way for Jesus. When some of John the Baptist's disciples noticed others following Jesus instead of John the Baptist, they were upset. When they brought it to John the Baptist's attention, he said, "He must increase, but I must decrease" (John 3:29-30).

John the Baptist consistently downplayed his own role and pointed to something greater, but Jesus, also gave great honor to John the Baptist. Jesus, when referring to John the Baptist said, "Truly I tell you, among those born of women there has not risen anyone greater than John the Baptist; yet whoever is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he" (Matt. 11:11).

Leaders can learn a lot by studying the leadership type and context from the leadership transition between John the Baptist and Jesus. John the Baptist's example shows that by recognizing that leadership is temporary, one can take great joy in watching those who once followed them, assume the mantle of leadership. We can also learn from Jesus as he shows great honor and respect to the one who led before him. Robert Strong reminds us that, "The clash between humility and ego will determine the extent to which a pastor will experience joy or internal turmoil when faced with the end of the tenure as pastor."<sup>34</sup> Humility is a crucial character quality in leadership and particularly, leadership transition.

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<sup>34</sup> Strong, 59.

The process between John the Baptist and Jesus does not fit the Traditional model or the Bureaucratic model. It follows the Duplication method, where succession follows from one charismatic leader to an even better charismatic leader. We cannot look at this succession and draw up a clean template for succession, but by studying the context we can identify the biblical principles that made this a healthy transition, and attempt to emulate them. John the Baptist was not sending out many people to complete his mission; with humility and faithfulness he was waiting for someone better to appear, to take up his mantle, and finish the work. Because of his ministry, the people of Israel were prepared and anxiously waiting for their new leader.

### *Jesus To His Disciples*

It should be no surprise that Jesus orchestrated an excellent leadership transition to his disciples. Through humility, prayer, and clear direction, Jesus prepared his disciples for success after his departure. By studying context and leadership type we see that this leadership transition is the best example of a charismatic founding leader dispersing leadership to others.

Unlike a founding pastor that hands off authority, Jesus never transitions his authority to the disciples, but he does ask them to continue with his mission. While Jesus' leadership transition to his disciples can never be fully emulated there is much we can learn by studying how he prepared and empowered the disciples to carry out his mission.

Jesus knew the mission of the church would continue without his earthly leadership. The night before Jesus called twelve apostles from among his many disciples, he spent the night in prayer (Luke 6:12-13). Warren Wiersbe expounds: "Why did he pray all night? For one thing, he knew that opposition against him was growing and

would finally result in his crucifixion; so he prayed for strength as he faced the path ahead. Also, he wanted the Father's guidance as he selected his 12 Apostles, for the future of the church rested with them."<sup>35</sup> The selection of the apostles was the start of a leadership transition, and Jesus modeled the importance of prayerful selection during the transition process.

Not only did Jesus pray for those who would follow his leadership, but he modeled humility for them. One time of real significance was when he washed the feet of his disciples. During the Last Supper, Jesus took the role of a servant and cleaned the dry and dusty feet of his disciples (John 13:1-20). When Peter questioned Jesus about washing their feet, Jesus responded, "What I am doing you do not understand now, but afterward you will" (John 13:7): by very nature this implied that Jesus was preparing Peter for something that he would understand at a later time. Jesus taught that the teacher was never too high to serve, and the humility he showed was something he expected future leaders to imitate (John 13:15). A willingness to serve reveals the true heart of a servant and is an important quality for both the leader and successor (Mark 10:45).

Like John the Baptist, Jesus knew his earthly presence was limited and others would join in his mission, so he prepared the twelve apostles for his inevitable departure. Jesus had already outlined his expectations for their personal and professional behavior in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5:1-7:29). He had modeled how to live, particularly the importance of prayer and humility. Jesus knew that teaching and mentoring were not sufficient so he tested their abilities and their faith.

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<sup>35</sup> Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary* (Wheaton, IL: Chariot Victor Publishing, 1992), 191.

Jesus also knew his mission would be carried out through the disciples. Jesus laid a clear path of transition for the disciples by sending them out to proclaim the message of repentance, giving them the authority to cast out demons, and perform miracles. Jesus also taught them how to expand their ministry through others when he prepared another seventy disciples and sent them out in pairs with specific instructions on how to continue his mission (Luke 10:1-23).

Toward the end of Jesus' public ministry, he made time, on multiple occasions, to be alone with his disciples. John Walvoord and Roy Zuck expound on Mark 9:30-31, "Jesus wanted to keep their presence from becoming known because his public ministry in Galilee had ended and now he wished to prepare his disciples for the future. His coming death was a constant theme of his teaching on this journey."<sup>36</sup>

We see that Jesus clearly informed the disciples about the coming leadership transition and what he expected from them (Mark 8:31; 9:31; 10:33). Jesus knew his time on earth was short, so as any wise leader should, he clearly laid out his expectations so those who followed him would continue to follow his ways.

After Jesus' death and resurrection, but before Jesus' final ascension, we see Jesus continuing to prepare his disciples for this transition. Despite Jesus' preparations, the disciples were overwhelmed by his death and stunned by his appearance three days later. Jesus continued to prepare them for forty days, during which time—in the same way that Moses did with Joshua—Jesus commissioned his disciples for their work. The transition occurred when he said to them, "All authority in heaven and earth has been given to me.

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<sup>36</sup> John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck, eds., *The Life of Christ Commentary* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1989), 145.

Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age (Matt. 28:19-20). With humility and a clear plan Jesus transferred his mission to his disciples so that people would clearly recognize the presence of Christ in them, as they spread the gospel. The disciples took this commissioning seriously, but it is striking that they made no move to appoint one to take Jesus' place. While not their earthly leader, the disciples took to heart when Jesus said, "I am with you always, to the end of the age."

Jesus truly models for us how a founding charismatic leader cannot be replaced, but instead their vision and charismatic leadership is dispersed, in effect, multiplying the influence and effectiveness of sharing the message. While Jesus' power and authority have never left him, a founding charismatic leader will one day find themselves replaced and their authority passed on to someone else. A church would be wise to learn from the context, leadership type, and the example of Jesus as they seek to make their own leadership transition within their church family.

### **Summary**

I recently witnessed a church where a successful founding pastor handed off the senior pastor position to his son. The father was the founding pastor and a charismatic leader with gifted speaking skills. Many in the church, including his son, assumed that the senior pastor position would remain in the family. The son unfortunately lacked the work ethic of his father and didn't have the visionary skills, nor speaking gift of his father. The church lost its vision and purpose in our community and is in the process of

dividing. This is a classic example of a traditional leadership succession failed because they were unable to look past the inner circle for leadership, didn't understand their church context or recognize the importance of leadership style within succession.

Max Weber loved the discomfort organizations are left with when a founding charismatic leader transitions on. In regards to the charismatic leader succession Weber states,

There is no such thing as appointment or dismissal, no career, no promotion. There is only a 'call.' ...Both rational and traditional authority are specifically forms of everyday routine control of action; while the charismatic type is the direct antithesis of this ... [it is] foreign to all rules ... charismatic authority repudiates the past, and it's in this sense a specifically revolutionary force.<sup>37</sup>

What we end up with in Weber, is a caricature of the crazed prophetic founder, and Weber revels in the problems which the founder's ideological zeal creates when the time comes for him or her to pass on the baton. He cheerily creates his pages-long litany of the sad but inevitable results of the founder's passing and the subsequent routinization of the organization into either the traditional or the bureaucratic models.<sup>38</sup> The once revolutionary movement melts away into economic practicality, and merges with dull but safe societal norms. Weber leaves very little hope for a church in my personal situation where a charismatic founding pastor hands off to a more bureaucratic incoming leader.

Thankfully, though, Weber's three methods of leadership transition provided a useful framework for conceptualizing some of the issues within these kinds of processes. In addition, the Bible itself holds clues about both successful and unsuccessful leadership

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<sup>37</sup> Weber and Henderson, 361.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 368-73.

transition. In successful succession stories, we see biblical principles that lead to a duplication of charismatic leadership (Moses to Joshua, John the Baptist to Jesus) or a dispersing of charisma (Jesus to his disciples).

These examples demonstrated the need for awareness, prayer, and planning, when a church is in the process of determining how to proceed. Sometimes there will be a duplicate charismatic leader ready to continue the mission of the church, other times, the founding charismatic leader might disperse their leadership, in effect multiplying their influence and ministry. Either way, we see that a church family can help the leadership transition process by understanding the leadership gifting/type and the context in which the transition is taking place.

Succession is inevitable. All churches and leaders must deal with this looming reality. While there is no one set way to make this all-important transition, churches would be wise to understand their founding leader's gifting along with the current context of their church. By studying biblical examples and principles, they can strive to follow the principles of these models, to pray for wisdom as to whether they are in a position to duplicate their founder or disperse his/her leadership giftings to many.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **LEADERSHIP AND SUCCESSION**

#### **Introduction**

The study of leadership theory and a convergence of theory and leadership theology is important for any church undergoing a succession. An understanding of why you are doing what you are doing, along with a vision of how to do it should be of great importance.

As we saw in the previous chapter, the type of leader (Traditional, Bureaucratic, Charismatic) impacts the protocol for leadership succession planning. In particular, long-term, founding leaders are generally described as charismatic leaders. As well as the learning from biblical examples of charismatic succession, chapter 2 argued that duplicating or dispersing leadership is of great importance for a healthy founding leader succession. For the founding church undergoing succession planning, this highlights the need for not just a good leader, but for good leadership within a community that can maintain vision, mission, and purpose when the outgoing leader steps down. Succession planning is not just the work of a leader, but it is the work of leadership within a community. As stated by Giambatista, “Implicit in this progression is the idea that



understanding and studying succession effectively is very close to understanding leadership, which may explain succession's broad appeal to scholars."<sup>1</sup>

In this chapter, we will look at the necessity for churches to understand proper leadership theory, the importance of theology in succession planning, and how a proper converging of leadership theory and leadership theology can guide a founding church through the succession of their charismatic leader.

### **Leadership Theory**

Who would write a leadership book, let alone read a book, about a stable, small company providing useful services through the hard work of lifetime employees? I highly doubt this book would become a *New York Times* Bestseller. Yet, thousands of small churches have successfully influenced, in meaningful and noteworthy ways, the families and communities where they are planted.<sup>2</sup> Unfortunately, the popular Christian leadership press likes the highly "successful" pastor who started with a home group and within a few years cultivated a church of thousands.<sup>3</sup> Christian culture in general, and church leadership in particular, is strongly influenced by the world's measurements of leadership.

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Giambatista, Glenn Rowe, and Suhaib Riaz, "Nothing Succeeds Like Succession: A Critical Review of Leader Succession Literature Since 1994," *The Leadership Quarterly* 16, no. 6 (December 2005): 966.

<sup>2</sup> *The Center for Healthy Churches*, accessed April 22, 2015, <http://chchurches.org/>.

<sup>3</sup> Paul Ford, *Knocking Over the Leadership Ladder* (St. Charles, IL: Churchsmart Resources, 2006), 12.

What is leadership? How a church defines leadership will inevitably have a significant impact on their process of leadership transition. Numeric and economic growth are not bad things, yet they shouldn't be the focus of church leadership theory. The next section will review a number of leadership theories that have been popular during the last 50 years.

### *Questioning Leadership Theories*

The 20<sup>th</sup> century saw a lot of attention given to the characteristics and development of leaders. The developments of trait, behavioral, transactional, and transformational leadership theories provided resources which Christians modified and adapted to their churches.<sup>4</sup> However, given core differences in the approach to leadership in these theories, and in the Scriptures, it too often appeared that errors were made in order to find these theories within Scriptures. As an example, during the hiring process you see some churches implementing the Trait Leadership Theory by requiring personality testing and comparing certain personalities compared to successful corporate leaders. Assessing traits during the church hiring process is not wrong, but asserting that God only uses specific traits in leaders does not align with scripture.

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<sup>4</sup> Bernard M. Bass, *Leadership and Performance Beyond Expectations* (New York, NY: Free Press, 1985), 1.

Other theories have greater similarities to Christian thought, including servant leadership<sup>5</sup> and spiritual leadership<sup>6</sup> theories. Clark, however warns of the danger of simply incorporating these theories into a theology of leadership. The following of celebrity leaders and ideologies minimizes the unique exegesis of the truth contained in scripture. Rather, Clark maintains that it is wise to pursue an exegesis from scripture of a theology of leadership in order to assess popular leadership theories, and their suitability for the local church.<sup>7</sup>

### *Lack of Leadership Training*

During my three years of seminary, I never took a class on leadership. One possible reason is that it is difficult to connect leadership theory with theology. Barna reports that the declining effectiveness of church leaders demonstrates that theological education alone is not adequate to train people for this leadership role. In an era where church leaders receive more theological training than ever, Barna asserts that leadership is the primary problem facing the future of evangelical churches, and that graduates of seminaries, now facing the realities of ministry, regret that they did not receive more leadership training.<sup>8</sup> This lack of training impacts not just our pastors and leaders, but

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<sup>5</sup> Robert K. Greenleaf, *Servant Leadership: A Journey into the Nature of Legitimate Power and Greatness*, 25th ed. (New York: Paulist Press, 2002).

<sup>6</sup> J. Oswald Sanders, *Spiritual Leadership: Principles of Excellence for Every Believer* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2007).

<sup>7</sup> Chap Clark, "Ministry as Practical Theology," *Journal of Ministry* 7, no. 1 (2008): 9.

<sup>8</sup> George Barna, *Leaders on Leadership: Wisdom, Advice and Encouragement on the Art of Leading God's People* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1998), 28.

how our churches learn leadership. Many churches fill the gap by incorporating popular leadership theories, instead of a theological understanding of leadership.

Schwartz studied over 1000 churches across the globe and found that formal theological training of church leaders had little to no impact on church growth and overall quality of churches. Schwartz believes this is due, in part, to a pastor's excessive reliance on teaching and doctrine (at the expense of exercising leadership) to grow the church and impact people. We can conclude from Schwartz, along with Barna's research, that many people extensively trained in Bible and theology lack the ability to lead and understand leadership characteristics that influence the Church for the Kingdom of God. It should not surprise us that this lack of leadership theory converging with theology is a concern in our church leaders and it is leaving church leaders without clear direction and skills.

Churches in the midst of a founding pastor succession that have solely relied on the founding pastor to lead, may lack the leadership understanding and training to withstand a healthy transition. A healthy church will have a vision for leadership throughout the entire organization, not just relying on the senior pastor.

### **Why Theology's Role in Leadership Matters**

Before diving into a theology of leadership one must understand the need for theology and the diverse ways theology is expressed. Garrett states that theology is "the ordered consideration or study of God."<sup>9</sup> As with all topics, there is a diverse perspective

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<sup>9</sup> James L. Garrett, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995), 2.

within theological studies. For instance, some theologians approach theology from a purely historical perspective, by examining diverse lines of thought throughout history.<sup>10</sup> Others understand theology in a philosophical way, dealing almost entirely with philosophical, linguistic, or sociological matters as a way of explaining God.<sup>11</sup> Paul Karleen asserts that this view of theology sometimes attempts to organize data from all the sources concerning God and his activities (i.e., history, philosophy, logic, law, and other fields), yet seeks to explain God without significant reference to the Bible.<sup>12</sup> Charles Hodge's *Systematic Theology* discusses the different methods. He claims that a scientific approach in any field of study should move beyond the concrete recording of data to the systematic organization of that data, so that meaning may be assigned.<sup>13</sup> The study of theology, according to Hodge, must include something more than just mere knowledge of facts. It must embrace a demonstration of the internal relation of those facts, one to another, and each to God.

Hodge is one of a number of theologians who have developed a common approach to biblical theology that pursues the systemization of biblical research into an articulate concluding outline. This approach has become known as "systematic theology." While discussing the nature of theology, Hodge states that the Bible is no more a system

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<sup>10</sup> Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1 (1872; repr. OalHabor, WA: Logos Research Systems Inc., 1997), 1-2.

<sup>11</sup> Paul S. Karleen, *The Handbook to Bible Study: With Guide to the Scofield Study System* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1987), 4-5.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>13</sup> Hodge, 3-4.

of theology than nature is a system of chemistry or mechanics.<sup>14</sup> We find in nature the facts that the chemist or philosopher has to examine, and from them establish the laws by which they are determined. Likewise, the Bible contains the truths that the theologian has to collect, authenticate, arrange, and exhibit in their internal relations to each other.

Hodge states, “This (process) constitutes the difference between biblical and systematic theology. The onus of the former is to ascertain and state the facts of scripture. The office of the latter is to take those facts, determine their relation to each other and to other cognate truths, vindicate them, and show their harmony and consistency.”<sup>15</sup>

Systematic approaches to biblical theology have been written to reflect the unique perspectives within theology: Calvinistic theology, Reformed theology, Armenian theology, Covenant theology, Dispensational theology, and others. All reflect assumptions and paradigms that drive the discussion and practice of systematic theology, as well as nuances of differentiation within each paradigm.

As mentioned earlier, the vastness and diversity of our God requires vast and diverse approaches to knowing him. If theology is, as Stone and Duke suggested, “faith seeking understanding,”<sup>16</sup> then the application of revealed truth to every aspect of the human experience is necessary. Since it is clear from scripture that to be primarily followers of Jesus does not exclude the practice of leading others (Acts 1:20; Romans 12:8; Hebrews 13:17), seeking understanding of faith’s application to the practice of

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Howard W. Stone and James O. Duke, *How to Think Theologically* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2013), 7.

leadership is simply another way of bringing an additional part of humanity under the submission of Jesus as King. We now see that our theology, and therefore theology of leadership, while it can take many forms of study, is an important topic to study. As churches walk through succession planning a theological understanding should not be overlooked.

### **A Theology of Leadership**

Christianity, at its deepest level, is a practice of followership. The final command of Jesus before ascending into heaven was to go and make disciples. Christian leaders should therefore be working to align their lives to become followers of Jesus and his message. This view is a natural outworking of the follower taking on the role of servant to Jesus the King (Mark 9:35). The follower's relationship to Jesus requires a position of servanthood. However, the requirement of a Christ-centric, God-governed leadership returns to the final command of Jesus – make followers of Jesus who are taught and live as he lived. Since Jesus himself came, not to be served, but to serve (Mark 10:45), it is the same for his followers. This is where we clearly see the distinction between general leadership theories and a theological leadership. Greenleaf's book on servant leadership, defines its intended outcome – a discussion of legitimate power and greatness.<sup>17</sup> Though Jesus is certainly filled with both power and greatness – as are also, by extension, all those who are in Jesus – it is not for the purpose of power and greatness that he came. Thus, any leadership theory that has, as its outcome, power and greatness as the world

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<sup>17</sup> Greenleaf, 1.

knows it, is necessarily going to be at odds with the purposes of Jesus.<sup>18</sup> Koenig asserts that a Christological, God-governing element, is foundational to all other elements that are identified in scripture. The Christian leader should foremost align his/her life to being a follower of Jesus the King.

Identifying other characteristics for a theology of leadership seems important and helpful but it is not as easy as expected. Naturally, we could start with listing the characteristics of biblical leaders, but Bartz makes the insightful point that at face value, the only characteristic that clearly links all of the biblical leaders to one another, is that they are included in scripture.<sup>19</sup> As we read scripture we see that there is a great variety of biblical leadership. However, Bartz goes on to note that a deeper study of the lives of biblical leaders reveals an important element to biblical leadership: all of the biblical leaders engaged their particular context according to the gifting that God had provided to them, and in partnership with God's active involvement.<sup>20</sup> In other words, although some traits may have assisted certain leaders in particular contexts, the leaders of scripture seem rather content to be "themselves" and make themselves available for God to work through them to accomplish his will.

A theological approach to leadership that seeks to identify, or build upon, a specific list of traits will probably fall short, not because of a wrong combination of traits, but because of an insufficient listing of traits. Any such listing of traits would combine

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<sup>18</sup> John Koenig, "Hierarchy Transfigured: Perspectives on Leadership in the New Testament," *Leadership in the Church* 13, no. 1 (Winter 1993): 11.

<sup>19</sup> James Bartz, "Leadership from the Inside Out," *The Anglican Theological Review* 91, no. 1 (Winter 2009): 3.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*



traits from different leaders in various situations and such a combined list would simply be impossible for any one person to obtain.<sup>21</sup> What is often fascinating and encouraging, is that God is quite willing to work with character traits demonstrated by imperfect individuals. This should be encouraging to any church looking to replace a charismatic founding leader.

Foundational to this work of God, and an essential aspect to any theology of leadership, is a fulfillment of his mission and the “power” in which the work is done. Mission is the purpose of God and his mission is the salvation of his people. Salvation is planned by God, secured by Christ, and mediated through the Holy Spirit. It is communicated through revelation, obtained through faith in Jesus, and presented to the world by the church.<sup>22</sup> Thus, the church’s central role and driving force is the completion of the Great Commission. However, a “driving force” suggests power, and some might rightly question what power will drive this force.

Strawbridge does an insightful job of connecting a biblical idea of power to a theology of leadership. She demonstrates how general leadership theories are primarily for the presumption of personal glory, goals and outcomes, instead of for God’s glory. Such is not the power that the follower of Jesus pursues. Instead, the power of God is available to anyone who is fulfilling the mission of God. This is a necessary foundational element of the theology of leadership because it refocuses the point of power from the

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Jennifer Strawbridge, “The Word of the Cross: Mission, Power, and the Theology of Leadership,” *The Anglican Theological Review* 91, no. 1 (Winter 2009): 58.

individual leader to God.<sup>23</sup> A leader should come to acknowledge that they, along with all Jesus followers, have become a jar of clay (2 Cor. 4:7). This refocus avoids the pursuit of self-importance since the purpose of God's power is to bring salvation through his Son, not the Christian leader saving people through his or her own power. Thus, a theology of leadership must have a strong understanding of the mission and the power in which the mission becomes accomplished. Strawbridge states it like this:

Mission does not happen until the leader knows what it means to embody Christ and is already on the path of faith to which others are invited and are empowered to join. This leadership is grounded in the life, death, and resurrection of Christ to such a depth that others are moved to embrace and embody the gospel in their own lives. A theology of leadership is not complex. It is comprehensive, but in the end, based upon the mission of the gospel and the power of God, leadership is rather simple.<sup>24</sup>

Any theology of leadership must include the role of a community rather than focus solely on the characteristics and drive of the individual. This understanding is especially important as a church plans the succession of their charismatic founder. Jones points out, in reality the church is not headed up by a local leader or even an oligarchy of leaders but a community of leaders who are followers of the head of the church, Jesus.<sup>25</sup> The phrase "priesthood of all believers" (1 Pet. 2:9) clearly communicates that there is a sense in which all believers share leadership within the spiritual church. The leadership within a Christian context is one defined by the church's mission and thus extends a participatory role to all within the church family, including the contexts in which followers find themselves outside the church. An element of Christian leadership must

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 74.

<sup>25</sup> Greg Jones, "On the Priesthood," *The Anglican Theological Review* 91, no. 1 (Winter 2009): 55.

include the opportunity for anyone within its community to lead in proclaiming the Gospel through their individual gifting. This practice of leadership by all within a community will greatly contribute to the health of a church, particularly when a founding leader transitions.

The obvious contradiction of this approach is that, if everyone is a leader, then no one is the leader. However, this contradiction does not take into consideration the unique structure of the church. The pastor may hold a unique public ministry of leadership, and church members may even look to the pastor for vision and wise direction. However, in like manner, the pastor must look to those within the church family to lead in ways that God has uniquely created them to accomplish the mission of the church.<sup>26</sup> This necessarily redirects this leadership to contexts and influences outside the church. While the institutional church spends a significant amount of energy trying to get the world inside the church one day a week, it must remember that the church is in the world for the other six days of the week.<sup>27</sup> Leadership occurs in both contexts, although by different people and in different ways. Thus, the local church in a fully revealed state is one in which all of its members are pursuing the advancement of the Kingdom of God and are taking unique leadership roles in doing so. This mindset makes it much easier to transition a founding leader, because the rest of the community is equipped and practicing leadership in their own areas of giftedness. This also means a move away from institutionalism, toward a deeper partnership between servant leaders and laypeople, in

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 58.

<sup>27</sup> William H. Willimon, *Pastor: The Theology and Practice of Ordained Ministry* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2002), 275.

which they work together to accomplish the mission of God within the sphere of influence God has placed them.<sup>28</sup>

These are the primary elements of a theology of leadership: a God-governed Christ-centric view, leaders being “themselves” and making themselves available to God, a strong understanding of the mission, along with the participatory role of the congregation. A church family and leadership would be wise to instill these elements in their church’s understanding of a theology of leadership.

### **Leadership Theory and Theology Converging**

Much of current leadership theory focuses on the question of “what do we do to accomplish the outcome we desire?” On the other hand, one of the primary questions that Beely and Britton suggested must drive a theology of leadership is “why do we do what we do to conform to Jesus?”<sup>29</sup> This shift in the question of leadership development is necessary in a Christian context because of the relationship we seek to have with God. Succession planning should be developed by why, and not what. Christianity seeks to embrace all things within the context of the Kingdom of Jesus. This requires a transformation of the heart and attitudes of followers at both the individual and community levels. Thus, the “why” of leadership becomes a more fundamental question than the “what.”<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Christopher A. Beeley and Joseph H. Britton, “Introduction: Toward a Theology of Leadership,” *The Anglican Theological Review* 91, no. 1 (Winter 2009): 3.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 4.

Churches often enter into succession planning too late, and as a result start focusing on the “what” that needs to be done. Frank explores the danger of starting with the wrong fundamental question. General leadership theory first establishes a determination of desired outcomes. For the most part, in the American context, this results in measuring sales, acquisition, and stock prices. Thus, the definition of leadership has often become linked to measurable growth. When researchers integrate such definitions into a Christian theology of leadership, it is quite possible that financial growth, numeric growth, or a combination of both become indicators of success.<sup>31</sup> This definition of leadership might never ask whether spiritual growth or growing closer to Jesus has been accomplished. However, the focus on asking “why” in the development of Christian leadership leaves the researcher seeking a difficult answer to quantify or articulate. Churches with large measurable growth are not misled, but measurable growth does not answer the more important “why” questions. This focus could result in a church board dealing with the loss of a charismatic founding pastor, starting with the question, “Which leader will best help us maintain our current budget?” or “Which leader will help us prevent the loss of church members?”

Beeley maintains that the starting point of this research must be a theology that defines leadership rather than a leadership that defines theology. We could practically see this play out in our churches when budget issues are in some way “practical” matters, while characteristics of God as Provider is a theological matter. By developing a leadership theory that grows out of theology, the so-called “practical” will not be seen as

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<sup>31</sup> Thomas Edward Frank, “Leadership and Administration: An Emerging Field in Practical Theology,” *International Journal of Practical Theology* 10, no. 1 (July 2006): 118.

somehow contrary to theology. Instead, Beeley argues that all practical issues will be incorporated under theology.<sup>32</sup>

The Christian leader developing a theology of leadership does well to be deeply informed by general leadership research. Frank notes that today's pastor often thinks of leadership in terms of preaching, teaching, and pastoral care. "Meanwhile, the work of managing churches and church institutions races on, expanding into areas as diverse as procedures for legal incorporation of church-sponsored activities, prevention of sexual harassment and abuse, public relations, and legal liabilities in leasing church facilities to community organizations."<sup>33</sup>

Frank goes on to provide five helpful points drawn from leadership research to assist in incorporating general leadership theory into a theology of leadership:<sup>34</sup>

- First, the Christian leader must identify the contemporary critical issues of leadership.
- Second, the Christian leader seeks to integrate those issues into an established framework of biblical perspective that is informed by general leadership theory.
- Third, given the church's long history of leadership, the Christian leader should seek to understand how the current issues fit within the larger framework of the church's history and how past leaders have dealt with similar issues.

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<sup>32</sup> Beeley and Britton, 27.

<sup>33</sup> Frank, 115.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

- Fourth, building on the previous point, there is great wisdom in attempting to understand how other perspectives within contemporary Christian church are dealing with similar issues.
- Finally, the Christian leader ought to understand the impact of leadership development not only on the local individual church and its parishioners, but also its impact on the universal church and the unbelieving world.

*Founding Leaders: Putting A Theology Of Leadership into Practice*

In essence, a founding leader must build a foundation of leadership within their community. A founding leader has the unique role of shaping a church or organization from the very beginning, often setting its vision, practices, and measurements of success.<sup>35</sup> This is what makes a founding leader's transition so difficult, and what makes a theology of leadership so crucial for the church or organization to remain healthy for generations after the founder has transitioned on.

In the business world, transitions from founding leaders to successors almost always involve a change of style from "entrepreneurial" to "professional,"<sup>36</sup> the issue being one of power. Only the professional style is capable of empowering and delegating. Founder leaders often try to retain control, a situation described in non-profit organizations as "Founder's Syndrome."<sup>37</sup> Commentators also highlight the fact that in non-profit organizations and churches, very large proportions of founding leaders, as well

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<sup>35</sup> Haveman and Khaire, 441.

<sup>36</sup> Stephen Block and Steven Rosenberg, "Toward an Understanding of Founder's Syndrome: An Assessment of Power and Privilege Among Founders of Nonprofit Organizations," *Nonprofit Management and Leadership* (Summer 2002): 353.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

as their board members, are Baby Boomers.<sup>38</sup> In America in particular, where generational stratification is pronounced, succession means a marked shift of culture to a Gen X or Millennial leader that might lack the Boomer work ethic and challenging the command-and-control approach to leadership.<sup>39</sup> It is also pointed out, though not surprisingly, that a founder's identity is much more bound up with the organization than are the identities of subsequent successors.<sup>40</sup>

With these problems in view, the best practice is a succession plan that is centered around the community of the church, and does not simply plug in a new leader, but instead has a theology of leadership for the whole community within its DNA.<sup>41</sup> The work of the community that has gathered around the founder has to adapt to a new scenario with different leadership. The founder succession plan thus has, at its heart, the transmission of charisma from the founder to the leadership team and the church community. With this in mind the church leadership is then ready to select a successor. Understanding that they are not handing charisma over to a new leader but instead acknowledging that a founding leader is never truly replaced. Thus, a theology of leadership will be embraced by the entire community instead of just a sole leader.<sup>42</sup>

The vision-keeping needs to become the responsibility of a designated group within the community whose job it is to see that the new leader remains faithful to

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<sup>38</sup> Donna Schaper, "Leadership Transitions: What the Nonprofit World Can Teach Us," *Congregations* (Winter 2009): 34.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Ben Pugh, "Subverted Hierarchies: Towards a Biblical Theology of Leadership," *Journal of the European Pentecostal Theological Association* 33, no. 2 (2013): 125.

<sup>42</sup> William Kondrath, "Transitioning from Charismatic Founder to the Next Generation," *Journal of Religious Leadership* 9, no. 2 (Fall 2010): 83.



the vision that created the community. . . . What needs to take place is a shift from trust in the leader to confidence in the leadership of the community, its goals, and its structure.<sup>43</sup>

When this happens, the new leader who is chosen will represent the corporate charisma of the selection team. This is a fundamental organizational shift, one that positively embraces transition as an opportunity for renewal and growth.<sup>44</sup> This shift is essential as a church community takes its focus off of the sole founding leader, and embraces the responsibility of leadership within themselves. This shift of leadership happens because of a shift in the theology of leadership and the role that the community plays in the process.

#### *The Church Community: Putting a Theology of Leadership into Practice*

Many people believe that the local church is simply an organization like any other association or group of people. If the church was merely another human enterprise, it would be reasonable to assume that we could freely adapt and apply secular leadership and management principles in the church. However, the church does not exist for itself, nor base its success on economic or numeric measurements, and should not function with a CEO giving orders from the top down.

This difference in leadership between the church and business models can create confusion for those not rooted in a true theology of leadership. For example, imagine the situation that my friend Paul found himself in. In Paul's early years as a pastor he sought

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 95.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 92.

to emulate his pastor friend, and mentor, Tim. Tim was a charismatic leader. People loved Tim. He could always say the right thing, and inspire people with a clear vision, both at the same time. It seemed that people would follow Tim anywhere, like a piper who can play the tune in such a way that people would step out and come along for the journey. Paul wanted to lead just like Tim. The charismatic, inspirational leader was the model Paul wanted to follow. But Paul soon discovered that he was a poor copy of Tim. He did not have Tim's charismatic gifting and he could not pull it off. Does the example of Paul sound familiar? The ethos of a visionary leader has grown over the past 25 years,<sup>45</sup> and now everyone wants to be a leader like Tim. Everyone wants to be a visionary leader, a leader who has influence over others in some tangible way. The message has become about climbing the leadership ladder, where everyone can move from good to great. Robert Webber said this:

...the pragmatic view of the church, the church as the body of Christ has been replaced by an efficient corporation. The pastor is CEO and everyone else functions under the pastor's strong leadership. A meaningful and effective ministry is developed using marketing techniques and corporate organizational structures instead of attempting to recover the theological reality of the church.<sup>46</sup>

More and more evangelical leaders spend their energy promoting leadership, or a vision-driven organization, rather than focusing on healthy, multiplying relationships.

In our desire to help God enlarge his church, we have focused on the tasks of ministry, then tied this to the cultural metaphor of ladder-climbing, and lost sight of the

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<sup>45</sup> Paul Ford, *Moving from I to We: Recovering the Biblical Vision for Stewarding the Church* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2012), 269.

<sup>46</sup> Robert Webber, *Ancient-Future Faith: Rethinking Evangelicalism for a Postmodern World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1999), 12.

*who* in the body of Christ, while we chase down the how and the where. The organization has overtaken the organism, and consequently, the living body of Christ has become constrained.<sup>47</sup>

In an effort for the church to properly practice a theology of leadership the community must help the founding leader create an environment where leadership can flourish throughout the entire community, not just an inner circle at the top. This can be intrinsically difficult for founding leaders, knowing that no one has spent more time, energy, and sweat than them.

Much has been written on moving an organization from I to We or from Me to We. This move from the sole focus of a leader to a community of leadership is crucial for the next season of a church: the ability to practice a theology of leadership as a community.<sup>48</sup>

### *Mentorship*

When a church family struggles to engage new leaders, they usually keep their eyes focused on themselves. When a church family is not able to look beyond itself, it has difficulty recruiting new people to step up into leadership roles. Over time, a cyclical effect will develop. Current leaders cannot see any new prospective leaders to develop because they keep looking at each other to lead.

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<sup>47</sup> David L. McKenna, *The Leader's Legacy* (New York, NY: Barclay Press, 2006), 19.

<sup>48</sup> Kondrath, 83.

Within a church context, a mentor relationship is the best relationship that can break this cycle because it guides a person to the task of nurturing someone else to lead instead of the person always putting him or herself in the leadership role again. Through mentoring relationships, the church will develop new leaders and see leadership potential within everyone involved in the church family. Practicing a theology of leadership means that everyone commits to intentional relationships that lead to a healthy process of Christian discipleship.

When a church family intentionally engages in mentorship then leadership development will naturally occur. Vice versa is also true, when a church family is having difficulty developing new leadership, an intentional focus of mentorship can help a church's leaders to empower others to step into leadership roles.

The mentor relationship is one type of relationship that can be discovered in a church setting. Within a church context, there can be relationships of discipleship, mentorship, and coaching. In "Multiplying Jesus Mentors," D.M. Crow compares the tasks of discipling, mentoring, and coaching. Crow describes discipling as "a more mature believer [helping] a new believer grow in following Jesus," mentoring as "a mature leader [helping] develop leadership by both clarifying and implementing God's call," and coaching as "a coach [helping] a coachee discover his or her own solutions and strategies."<sup>49</sup> The difference between the relationships is revealed in the desired result of the relationship. Discipling is the broadest relationship, with an emphasis on helping someone else follow Jesus. Coaching is a focused relationship around a particular

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<sup>49</sup> D.M. Crow, "Multiplying Jesus Mentors: Designing A Reproducible Mentoring System, A Case Study," *Missiology* 36, no. 1 (January 2008): 90.

problem to be solved by asking questions. Mentoring becomes a focused relationship around sharing life together through one person helping another person discover and live into their unique leadership calling of guiding people in God's kingdom work.

Mentoring in the church is a form of leadership development and is a broad relationship where one person nurtures another person in discovering their role in a church family context. The mentor relationship is not a short-term relationship, but is one established to address anything that might come up, over time, in a person's role within a community. The interactions between a mentor and those being mentored are focused on the relationship itself instead of a particular task or issue. In "Spoken, But Perhaps Not Heard: Youth Perceptions on the Relationship with their Mentors," Nikki Bellamy, et al., state, "Mentoring programs are relationship based. There is a growing consensus that the core component of mentoring interventions is the relationship itself which turns to leadership development."<sup>50</sup>

When churches ask how they are going to transition leadership successfully within the younger generation, they are asking a question about the church family's spiritual health. If teenagers are not comfortable with answering questions about their personal faith, then they will also have difficulty asking questions about personal faith into adulthood. When churches ask questions about transition leadership, these young adults will not be equipped to join their church family in these questions. The intentional mentoring relationships within the church family must explore youth culture to

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<sup>50</sup> Nikki D. Bellamy, Elizabeth Sale, Mini Q. Wang, J. Fred Springer, and Susie Rath, "Spoken, But Perhaps Not Heard: Youth Perceptions on the Relationships with their Mentors," *Journal of Youth Ministry* 5, no. 1 (Fall 2006): 58, 62.

understand how the church can understand the questions of leadership development for the younger generation.

In her book, *Almost Christian: What the Faith of Our Teenagers is Telling the American Church*, Kendra Creasy Dean states, “Teenagers tend to approach religious participation, like music and sports, as an extracurricular activity: a good, well-rounded thing to do, but unnecessary for an integrated life.”<sup>51</sup> Recognizing there are church families challenging the observation, Dean also states, “Caring congregations help teenagers develop what social scientists call ‘connectedness,’ a developmental asset accrued from participating in the relational matrix of authoritative communities - communities that provide young people with available adults, mutual regard, boundaries, and shared long term objectives.”<sup>52</sup> The picture Dean paints is one of mentorship. When churches do not develop multigenerational authentic relationships with people throughout the entire church family, their teenagers consider the work of the church to be about helping people become a nice person. However, when church families understand the work of the church to be about developing relationships with each other through their relationship with Jesus, the teenagers discover a connected community that intentionally nurtures young people to a life of following Jesus in the years to come and they in turn, as a result of their mentoring relationship, sense the important leadership role they can play within their church family.

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<sup>51</sup> Kendra Creasy Dean, *Almost Christian: What the Faith of Our Teenagers is Telling the American Church* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2010), 6.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 72.

### *Followership*

Leading a church family through a pastor transition is different from leading in general. Leading in general happens after the pastor and the members of the church family have formed a relationship. When a new pastor arrives at a church, unless there has been a significant overlap period, then no such trust relationship exists. The pastor must learn to lead and follow the church family, and the church family must learn to lead and follow their new pastor. They must begin working together right away, even though trust has not had time to develop. Both parties have to assume characteristics in the other such as integrity, sincerity, and honesty. This assumption does not always happen, particularly when the transition was not a welcomed one. This makes being a good follower an important part of leadership.

Followership is a concept many authors do not address directly. Leadership has been the focus of many studies and books while the responsibility followers have to support good leaders often goes without mention.<sup>53</sup> Everett Rogers speaks about followership indirectly as he distinguishes innovators and early adapters from slackers, recognizing the power of each group upon the final acceptance of a change.<sup>54</sup> Rogers continues to explain that resistance and sabotage are to be expected and chronic criticism is a sign the leader is functioning well with an unspoken understanding those behaviors are not representative of good followers.<sup>55</sup> However, too often, the incoming pastor has

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<sup>53</sup> Leonard Sweet, *I Am a Follower: The Way, Truth, and Life of Following Jesus* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2012), 25.

<sup>54</sup> Everett M. Rogers, *Diffusion of Innovations*, 5th ed. (New York, NY: Free Press, 2003), 280.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*

full responsibility for a good transition when it really is about the ability of the pastor and church to mutually follow and lead each other.

The church family role in leading and following is rarely written about. William Bridges understands the importance of followership as he encourages transition leaders to respect the needs of those going through a transition in order to allow time for grieving losses and embracing new opportunities, but he does not refer to the responsibility the followers also have in this process.<sup>56</sup>

Leonard Sweet addresses the importance of followership when he says, "Our leader-centric culture esteems and emphasizes leadership over followership."<sup>57</sup> He shares the importance of a "first follower" as the one who begins the process of joining with a leader.<sup>58</sup> Sweet illustrates with an example from the 2009 Sasquatch Festival in eastern Washington where a man stood up in a crowd and began dancing to the music. After a few moments of dancing alone, another person joined in. Soon others joined the dance as well.<sup>59</sup> Sweet says, "The first follower breaks some kind of social membrane and gives others the courage to follow their hearts".<sup>60</sup>

Barbara Kellerman addresses the need for followers to accept responsibility for supporting good leaders and removing bad leaders. She suggests, "Those who obey

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<sup>56</sup> William Bridges, *Managing Transitions: Making the Most of Change*, 3rd ed. (Philadelphia, PA: Da Capo Lifelong Books, 2009), 32.

<sup>57</sup> Sweet, 22.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 9.



orders play as important a role in human affairs as those who issue them".<sup>61</sup> Kellerman labels groups of followers as bystanders, participants, activists, and diehards based on their degree of willingness to challenge the status quo.<sup>62</sup> Rogers uses a similar system with labels of slackers, late/early majority, early adopters, and innovators.<sup>63</sup> Appropriate attention given to each of these categories of people can help the pastor transition process go well.

Kellerman highlights the power followers have to influence situations and warns leaders not to ignore or dismiss their followers: "But by and large we scarcely notice that, for example, followers who mindlessly tag along are altogether different from followers who are deeply devoted; and we scarcely notice that the distinctions among followers are every bit as consequential as those among leaders."<sup>64</sup>

The members of a church family can negatively affect a pastoral transition if they are not good followers. If they do not become devoted to the new pastor, whether he or she is a good leader or not, the likelihood of a successful pastor transition is slim. A church family with a good theology of leadership will understand the important role followership plays in any pastor transition.

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<sup>61</sup> Barbara Kellerman, *Followership: How Followers Are Creating Change and Changing Leaders* (Boston, MA: Harvard Business Review Press, 2008), 15.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 92.

<sup>63</sup> Rogers, 283.

<sup>64</sup> Kellerman, 75.

## Summary

Popular Christian leadership likes to promote the highly “successful” pastor who started with a home group and within a few short years cultivated a church of thousands, but this emphasis has muddled and confused a theology of leadership for most Christian leaders. When church leaders look to the popular Christian leadership press they are encouraged to think that leadership starts with the “what” questions, and they may develop strategies to try to establish influence and gain more followers. This sets the senior leader’s direction down the wrong path and makes it very difficult when succession inevitably happens. This also ignores the “why” questions and ends up hindering most conversation on leadership theology.

Our theological seminaries and leaders could do more to take the vast knowledge that general leadership theory has surmised and converge those learnings with a theology of leadership that is God-Governed and Christ-Centered. Our churches would also be wise to not think of leadership as only a numerical and financial growth objective but instead to develop a theology of leadership that differs from the worldly measurements of leadership and instead guides and directs the true followers of Jesus as King.

A proper theology of leadership greatly impacts succession. It is necessary for founding leaders to embrace their unique charismatic gifting and, through that awareness, build a theology of leadership within their community for the sake of the long-term health of their church.

A theology of leadership embraces the unknown and understands the need for good questions and conversations within a community. This is important throughout succession planning so that a sole leader does not assume that he/she knows everything

and prioritizes the need for everyone within the community to play their part. Leadership and Management scholar Caroline Ramsey has stated, “Claiming access to a universal story of objective reality is deeply problematic.”<sup>65</sup> The idea that we are leaders because we know everything is deeply problematic. As Ramsey points out, “Do you know everything? Do you know what you don’t know?”<sup>66</sup> As succession planning and leadership transition progress, the leadership within a community is wise to develop a scholarship of practice, encouraging everyone to embrace their own unique leadership gifting, thus taking the focus off one sole leader. A correct theology of leadership can greatly help the leadership transition process for a church family.

While nothing short of the Spirit can ensure a smooth founding pastor transition, yet a proper theology of leadership practiced within the body of Christ is the best practice for church health.

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<sup>65</sup> Caroline Ramsey, *Discipleship as a Practice Centered Inquiry* (Personal Communication, 2016).

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

## CHAPTER 4

### EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE WITHIN SUCCESSION

#### Introduction

At the *Next: Succession conference*,<sup>1</sup> the joke was told that there were two circumstances which can best help an incoming pastor hoping to replace a founding pastor: either the founding pastor suddenly dies, or he/she has a major moral failing. In Manfred Kets de Vries, *The Leadership Mystique*, equally encouraging advice about succession is given; “the major task a CEO faces is finding his likely successor and then killing the bastard.”<sup>2</sup> Both the Vanderblomen conference, and Kets de Vries comments are a reminder that there is truth in every joke.

Pastoral succession, particularly a long-term founding pastor transition, is difficult. There are many different emotions and tensions to navigate as the church family, staff, elders, founding pastor, and incoming pastor find their new norm amidst the transition. Struggles for control often take place and a great sense of loss, confusion, and fear can come over many in the church family.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> William Vanderblomen, “Next: Succession” (lecture, Calvary Chapel Church, Dallas, TX, October 13, 2014).

<sup>2</sup> Manfred F. R. Kets de Vries, *The Leadership Mystique: Leading Behavior in the Human Enterprise* (Harlow, UK: FT Press, 2009), 225.

<sup>3</sup> Roberta M. Gilbert, *Extraordinary Leadership: Thinking Systems, Making a Difference* (Lake Frederick, VA: Leading Systems Press, 2011), 12.

Every transition has its own unique story. Some transitions go smoothly, while some result in pain and a disaster, yet in every transition you will find a mix of emotions, both high and low. This chapter examines the role that emotional intelligence plays, by reviewing transition stories.

Emotional intelligence has convincingly been linked to leadership.<sup>4</sup> The ability to be perceptively in tune with yourself and the emotions of others, as well as having sound situational awareness are powerful tools in leadership. The act of knowing, understanding, and responding to emotions, overcoming stress in the moment, and being aware of how your words and actions affect others, is described as emotional intelligence.<sup>5</sup> In this chapter we will look of the significant role emotional intelligence can play as leaders navigate founding leader succession. In particular, this chapter explores the emotional dynamics that can take place at all levels of a church while a transition is taking place. The stories of different pastoral transitions as well as personal research narrative interviews,<sup>6</sup> will provide examples of some successful and unsuccessful transitions. The influence of emotional health and intelligence on individuals and communities will be discussed, but first we will take a general survey of emotional intelligence theory.

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<sup>4</sup> Brent Gleeson, "5 Types of Emotional Intelligence All Great Leaders Have Mastered," *Business Insider*, February 28, 2016, accessed August 3, 2016, <http://www.businessinsider.com/types-of-emotional-intelligence-leaders-master-2016>.

<sup>5</sup> Gilbert, 12.

<sup>6</sup> Elliot George Mishler, *Research Interviewing: Context and Narrative* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986), 2.

## Emotional Intelligence

In recent years we have witnessed an “unparalleled burst of scientific studies of emotion.”<sup>7</sup> Psychologist Daniel Goleman believes this is a course correction away from an unhealthy path toward cognitive analysis alone. He argues, “We have gone too far in emphasizing the value and import of the purely rational . . . in human life.”<sup>8</sup> Goleman, a prominent psychotherapist, has partnered with others in the social and neurological sciences to redirect “intelligence” theory toward emotion. He refers to the current interest in emotional studies as “an emerging science.”<sup>9</sup>

Even though emotional intelligence has been gaining more interest, it is not a new field of study. The publication of Charles Darwin's *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals* (1872) was a precursor to scholarship and clinical exercise of emotional intelligence in the twentieth century. E. L. Thorndike, in the 1920s, gave definition to the concept, claiming “the ability to understand and manage men and women, boys and girls-to act wisely in human relations” is a kind of social intelligence worth consideration.<sup>10</sup> David Wechsler wrote of “non-intellective aspects of general intelligence” in the 1940s,<sup>11</sup> as did his contemporary, R. W. Leeper, who connected

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<sup>7</sup> Daniel Goleman, *Emotional Intelligence* (New York, NY: Bantam Books, 1995), xi.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>9</sup> Daniel Goleman, *Social Intelligence: The New Science of Human Relationships* (New York, NY: Bantam Books, 2006), 4.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

<sup>11</sup> Henry L. Thompson, *High Performing Systems, Inc.: Eq-I Certification Workshop* (Watkinsville, GA: High Performing Systems, Inc., 2005), 2-1.

“emotional thought with logical thought” in 1948.<sup>12</sup> B. Luener, a German, first used the term “emotion intelligence” in a 1966 article.<sup>13</sup>

In the 1980s, Howard Gardner wrote of “multiple intelligences,” and Reuven Bar-On, a clinical psychologist, revolutionized emotional intelligence exploration with his development of “emotional quotient.”<sup>14</sup> Bar-On's clinical research showed both the validity and practical applicability of emotional intelligence.<sup>15</sup> His early research led to the development of the Bar-On EQ-I, a project including more than 10,000 people. Bar-On's highly-regarded assessment tools now serve emotional intelligence clinicians around the world.<sup>16</sup>

The 1990s popularized emotional intelligence through the work of Jack Mayer, Peter Salovey, and David Caruso, but especially through the writings of Daniel Goleman. His 1995 bestseller, *Emotional Intelligence: Why It Can Matter More Than IQ*, generated enormous awareness and popular interest in emotional intelligence. Today, there are more than 60 emotional intelligence inventories,<sup>17</sup> dozens of books, and thousands of published scholarly articles.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Stephen J. Stein and Howard E. Book, *The Eq Edge: Emotional Intelligence and Your Success* (Mississauga, ON: John Wiley & Sons Canada, 2006), 15 .

<sup>13</sup> Tim Sparrow and Amanda Knight, *Applied Ei: The Importance of Attitudes in Developing Emotional Intelligence* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2006), 5.

<sup>14</sup> Stein and Book, 16.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Thompson, 4-1.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 2-1.

<sup>18</sup> An important online resource for emotional intelligence publications is <http://eiconsortium.org>, accessed November 4, 2016.

Clinical psychologist Reuven Bar-On defines emotional and social intelligence as “an array of emotional, personal, and social abilities and skills that influence one's overall ability to succeed in coping with environmental demands and pressures.”<sup>19</sup> His primary evaluation tool, BarOn EQ-i, diagnoses “Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats” in 15 components of emotional health, or “well-being.”<sup>20</sup> These components include Self-Regard, Emotional Self-Awareness, Assertiveness, Independence, Self-Actualization, Empathy, Social Responsibility, Interpersonal Relationship, Stress Tolerance, Impulse Control, Reality Testing, Flexibility, Problem Solving, Optimism, and Happiness.<sup>21</sup> Bar-On's evaluative term is “emotional quotient” (EQ), which measures a person's relative health in each area. Steven Stein and Howard Book, co-authors of *The EQ Edge*, skillfully explain how to use EQ-i in each of its various components.

Daniel Goleman has written extensively on emotional intelligence. In addition to his bestselling, *Emotional Intelligence*, some of his other works (some co-authored) include: *Primal Leadership: Realizing The Power of Emotional Intelligence*, *Working With Emotional Intelligence*, *The Emotionally Intelligent Workplace*, and *Social Intelligence: The New Science of Human Relationships*. Goleman uses the term “emotional competence,” which means emotions can be “learned” like any other “skill.”<sup>22</sup> He explains how discoveries in neuroscience show us that the actual physiology of the

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<sup>19</sup> Reuven Bar-On and Rich Handley, *The Last Corporate Secret* (New Braunfels, TX: Pro Philes Press, 1999), 2.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>22</sup> Goleman, *Social Intelligence*, 27.



brain can be altered through training. He writes, “The human brain is designed to change itself in response to accumulated experience.”<sup>23</sup> Therefore, when Goleman speaks of emotional intelligence as “being able ... to rein in emotional impulse; to read another's innermost feelings; [or] to handle relationships smoothly,”<sup>24</sup> these are all skills that can be developed. Just as we can increase the stamina of the heart, or strength in the quadriceps, we can develop our brains, the seat of cognitive and emotional life.

Goleman insists that we must develop “forgiveness, compassion, and empathy”<sup>25</sup> if we are to combat our social ills and encourage social strength. And, because these are competencies to be learned and developed, we should be “building a society's capacity” in these areas.<sup>26</sup>

Alex Bryan has compiled quotes from a number of writers on organizational dynamics, and emotional and social intelligence. Here is just a small sampling:<sup>27</sup>

- Patrick Lencioni claims “absence of trust” and “unwillingness to be vulnerable” are the foundational reasons for “team dysfunction.” This leads to “fear of conflict” and “lack of commitment” and “avoidance of accountability” and

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 152.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., xiii.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 317.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Alex Bryan, “The Role of Human Emotion in Christian Discipleship” (DMin paper, George Fox Seminary, 2009), 86 #, April 1, 2016, <http://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/dmin/154>

“inattention to results.”<sup>28</sup> Interpersonal intelligence (emotional acumen) determines the health and success of group life.

- Max De Pree says we must provide an atmosphere of “hospitality” in our organizations. We must help one another “feel authentic and needed and worthwhile.”<sup>29</sup> “Being cared about as an individual” is an essential desire of people in our organizations.
- In *Mavericks at Work*, the authors write of the importance of “not just encouraging people to learn new skills but encouraging a diverse group of people to sit in a room, try new things, mess up, get embarrassed, and learn how to bounce back-together.”<sup>30</sup>
- Margaret Wheatley says, “Although we live in a world completely revolutionized by information, it is important to remember that it is knowledge we are seeking, not information. Unlike information, knowledge involves us and our deeper motivations and dynamics as human beings.”<sup>31</sup>
- In the church world, Bonem and Patterson say we must be “pulse takers.” We must “know what others are thinking and feeling...”<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Patrick Lencioni, *The Five Dysfunctions of a Team: A Leadership Fable* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2002), 188.

<sup>29</sup> Max De Pree, *Leadership Is an Art* (New York, NY: Double Day, 1 989), 67.

<sup>30</sup> William C. Taylor and Polly LaBarre, *Mavericks at Work: Why the Most Original Minds in Business Win* (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 2006), 233.

<sup>31</sup> Margaret Wheatley, *Finding Our Way: Leadership for an Uncertain Time* (San Francisco, CA: Berrett Koehler Publishers, Inc., 2005), 154.

<sup>32</sup> Mike Bonem and Roger Patterson, *Leading from the Second Chair: Serving Your Church, Fulfilling Your Role, and Realizing Your Dreams* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2005), 100.

- Leonard Sweet writes, “A mature soul has learned to read the energy fields of others. Some people give off low vibrations; others are high-wattage. Some people suck energy out of you; others plug you into the energies of the universe.”<sup>33</sup>
- Andy Stanley, pastor of North Point Community Church, challenges his staff and pastors everywhere to “cheat the church” in order to spend generous amounts of time with family. For Stanley, being faithful as a disciple of Jesus means relational health at home more than organizational progress at work. Stanley has crafted a vision for his local church that puts family health (interpersonal intelligence) above productivity.<sup>34</sup>
- Wayne Cordeiro, pastor of New Hope Christian Fellowship, encourages us to be responsive to heaviness in our relational world—and to act promptly in healing those endangered relationships. He believes the Holy Spirit uses our emotions to redirect our energies toward people, especially family.<sup>35</sup>

These examples—from the business and the church world—show a collective awareness of the need for emotional intelligence. There is a recognition that the health of our relationships largely determines the quality of our lives and organizations. Hence, Jim Collins’ claim that “getting the right people on the bus” by including that, “Whether someone is the ‘right person’ has more to do with character traits and innate capabilities

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<sup>33</sup> Leonard I. Sweet, *Summoned to Lead* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2004), 106.

<sup>34</sup> Andy Stanley, “Focused Leadership,” in *Leadership Summit* (South Barrington, IL: 2006).

<sup>35</sup> Wayne Cordeiro, “Dead Leader Walking,” in *Leadership Summit* (South Barrington, IL: 2006).

than with specific knowledge, background, or skills.”<sup>36</sup> Largely, this understanding and discernment is a kind of emotional and social intelligence.

### **Healthy Families Deal With Emotions**

The need for emotional intelligence in leadership is even greater in the church than secular organizations due to the commitment the church has to one another.<sup>37</sup> Throughout scripture we see many references to the Body of Christ<sup>38</sup> and many churches use family type language when communicating, even referring to the pastor as Brother Nick or Sister Caroline. In reference to the pastoral or shepherding roles of the church, there is pressure is to treat the Church more as a family. However, in reference to leadership there is a pressure to treat the Church more as an organization. Much has been written on church growth structures and many church meetings involve discussions on policies, procedures, and budgets.

In regards to church leadership transitions, a majority of the available resources reflect on this process from the vantage point of the church as an institution, disregarding the role of the church as a family. Even the recent denominational policy of the Evangelical Free Church, *Covenant for Alignment & Staff Unity*,<sup>39</sup> recently laid out the

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<sup>36</sup> James C. Collins, *Good to Great: Why Some Companies Make the Leap...And Others Don't* (New York, NY: Harper Collins, 2001), 63-64.

<sup>37</sup> William M. Kondrath, *God's Tapestry: Understanding and Celebrating Differences* (Herndon, VA: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2008), 8.

<sup>38</sup> 1 Cor. 12 NRSV.

<sup>39</sup> John Herman, “Evangelical Free Church Covenant for Alignment and Staff Unity,” *The Ministerial Forum* (Winter 2012): 1, accessed April 21, 2016, [https://go.efca.org/sites/default/files/resources/docs/2013/03/ministerial\\_forum\\_winter\\_2012.pdf](https://go.efca.org/sites/default/files/resources/docs/2013/03/ministerial_forum_winter_2012.pdf).

policy for outgoing pastors and how they are to interact with their former congregation and successor. In it, there are step-by-step procedures, policies, and “How To Guides,” that guarantee a successful transition. Unfortunately, life in a family rarely works step-by-step.

### *Neglecting Emotions*

It was soon after reading the Evangelical Free Church transition policy that I sat down and interviewed<sup>40</sup> an Evangelical Free Church founding pastor of 24 years, who was a few years removed from retirement and the process of passing the baton of church leadership to a new senior pastor. While sitting with Pastor Mark I asked him to tell me his story. Pastor Mark shared of his successful transition including details about he and the Elders had mapping out a detailed timeline, including: preaching sermons about succession, empowering the new senior pastor, and a nice compensation package as a parting gift. Pastor Mark also shared the Elders’ desire to create a tension-free transition, and their recommendation that Mark and his wife find a new church home and not return to the church unless invited by the new Senior Pastor.

As I listened to Pastor Mark, his story only focused on the institutional/corporate approach to their transition. It was not until I asked questions, that Mark shared any of the emotions of this major life change. The first question I asked Mark was, “How has your wife dealt with finding a new church family?” Mark’s response was pure emotion. As tears welled up in his eyes he mentioned things like, “you can’t replace family,” “we are

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<sup>40</sup> Interview by author, February 1, 2016. All interviews are confidential and interviewees’ names have been changed. All quotes are used with permission.

a few years removed and my wife still hasn't formed the type of relationships she had back at our other church," and "in many ways it has felt like a death." Unfortunately, Pastor Mark's situation is all too familiar in the Church. While Mark's church might be doing well, Mark and his wife are not, and the church he founded has left him to deal with the emotions, the pain and the loss on his own.

### *Nurturing Emotions*

Not all church transitions play out the way Pastor Mark's transition has. Some churches have acknowledged the complex nature of the biblical call to share life together, be a family, and function at a greater depth than just a long-term institutional vision. Many churches have embraced Edwin Friedman's<sup>41</sup> works, and see the church as a living breathing family organism, one created to survive from generation to generation. These churches incorporate Family Systems Theory within the framework of a healthy church.

Edwin Friedman conducted research among churches who had experienced the departure of a founding pastor. Church families who had been shepherded, often for decades, by their founding pastor, most often compared their founding pastor's departure to a death. This natural grieving and mourning occurred within many founding families, years later, still not healed from the change. Friedman concludes his research with direct emotional comparisons to those experiencing death in a family unit of a significant

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<sup>41</sup> Edwin H. Friedman, *Generation to Generation: Family Process in Church and Synagogue* (Colorado Springs, CO: The Guilford Press, 2011), 1.

matriarch or patriarch in a family.<sup>42</sup> Friedman also points the Church towards another option. Friedman encourages the church to embrace the emotional journey of a family during a major transition but instead of thinking about it as a death and funeral to think about it as a Father/Mother giving their daughter away in marriage.<sup>43</sup> This line of thinking requires emotional intelligence by church leadership and embraces the emotions of loss and letting go, while also embracing a new season of life and the excitement that comes with a new generation of family taking shape.

I recently interviewed a church that embraced this family centered approach. I had a conversation<sup>44</sup> with Pastor Jack, the 31-year pastor who was 5 years removed from his Senior Pastor role, and Pastor Travis, Jack's successor. I began by asking them to tell me the story of their transition. They both effortlessly and joyfully shared about the love they have for each other, the jealousy/comparison games they played, the tensions they walked through together, and the period of grieving and then growing that the church has experienced through the transition. It was Pastor Travis who said that he looks at Jack as a father figure in his life, and Jack responded by saying he would happily claim Travis as his son.

While talking with Pastors Jack and Travis it is clear that they experienced this transition with more of a family view in mind. Pastor Jack and his wife still regularly attend the church and Pastor Jack still serves on staff, having assumed a part-time,

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<sup>42</sup> Edwin H. Friedman, "Empathy Defeats Therapy: Interview with Helen Gill," *Family Therapy News*, September/October (1988): 9.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Interview by author, January 28, 2016. All interviews are confidential and interviewees' names have been changed. All quotes are used with permission.

pastoral care role. They did communicate with me some policies they have in place to help them walk through any disagreements or tensions, but also said that they have hardly ever had to lean on those policies, instead trying to give each other lots of grace and continuing to meet regularly face to face.

Pastor Jack and Pastor Travis said they both knew pastors who were either uncomfortable with, or had no relationship with, their predecessor or successor, some of whom had never even met each other. Pastors Jack and Travis said they have tried to take the approach that their relationship with one another could be a huge asset to the church they both love and care about and how their personal relationship with each other will impact the church's ability to process their own range of emotions from grief to later excitement regarding the change.

While the church has a great leadership responsibility if it wants to thrive, it is still a family unit, a living-breathing organism, and must be aware of the emotional responses of people within the church. Whenever there is a pastoral change, particularly a senior or lead pastor, there is a time of adjustment and grieving for the family. This grieving process can be similar to a death, or the emotions a parent might feel while watching their child get married. The successor and leadership team play the dominant role<sup>45</sup> in making the predecessor feel valued and affirmed, and this process greatly impacts the health and healing of the rest of the church family. This is not a step-by-step

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<sup>45</sup> Mike Andrus, "Pastoral Succession: Handling It Well," *The Ministerial Forum* 20, no. 1 (Winter 2012): 1, accessed April 21, 2016, [https://go.efca.org/sites/default/files/resources/docs/2013/03/ministerial\\_forum\\_winter\\_2012.pdf](https://go.efca.org/sites/default/files/resources/docs/2013/03/ministerial_forum_winter_2012.pdf).



process, but requires emotional intelligence to be aware of others, so that leadership can make sound decisions when emotions might be conflicting.

### **The Importance of Emotional Intelligence During Succession**

Whether you are considering a business, a church, or a family, you are never just talking about one individual. It takes many people, varied gifts, and diverse personalities in order for organizational structures to thrive. Navigating these entities takes more than just rule-following and the status quo. The best leaders understand that there is an emotional heartbeat to be acknowledged. That is certainly the case when dealing with church leadership transitions and succession. In his book *Social Animal*, David Brooks states, “effective business leadership is never limited to the acts of one “heroic” individual; rather, it operates in a context of employees and of the business, industry, and larger social environment. Leaders who recognize the emotional nuances of that context and guide their followers accordingly provide their organization with an extra stimulus.”<sup>46</sup>

This is one reason why it is so important to acknowledge the church as more than an institution, instead, it is a living and breathing family unit with emotional ups and downs. The church should not function as a business institution hiring and firing at a whim, promoting and making change without thinking about the impact and emotions of the long term committed community who are affected by these decisions. Any

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<sup>46</sup> David Brooks, *The Social Animal: The Hidden Sources of Love, Character, and Achievement*, Reprint ed. (New York, NY: Random House, 2012).

predecessor or successor at a church would be wise to use their emotional intelligence when navigating this complex process.

Ignoring the emotions of a community can be dangerous to the overall health of the church.<sup>47</sup> Understanding the emotional heartbeat of the church family might take extra time, but this helps ensure that everyone within the family can play their part.

### *Fruit Bowl Analogy*

Many churches that struggle with a change of leadership see this change mostly as the exchange of one top administrator with another, i.e., a technical fix. This viewpoint neglects the emotions involved throughout the community and is particularly problematic when an outgoing senior pastor is a founder or has been in place for an extended period of time. The successor inevitably becomes the target of all the negative emotions about the change.<sup>48</sup>

In searching for an analogy that communicates this difficult emotional transition I discovered William Kondrath's illustration of a fruit bowl.<sup>49</sup> Imagine a very large fruit bowl, maybe thirty inches in diameter and eighteen inches deep. It is filled with all sorts of fresh fruit: oranges, apples, grapes, kiwis, mangoes, lemons (there are always lemons), peaches, a pineapple, perhaps a couple of delicately placed strawberries, and, of course, a banana. Now let's suppose the banana is the "top banana," the senior pastor, in our case

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<sup>47</sup> Friedman, "Empathy Defeats Therapy," 9.

<sup>48</sup> Kondrath, "Transitioning," 83.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 104.

the charismatic founder who is leaving. Because this banana has been so central in the church, he or she is in the center of the bowl of fruit.

Now, imagine taking the banana out. What happens? The individual pieces of fruit nearest to the banana shift places. Some of the fruit farthest away doesn't move at all and doesn't even realize the banana is gone.

Now suppose you want to place a new leader in the midst of this church. This leader may not be a charismatic banana. He or she may be an avocado (which only ripens when it is off the tree) or a pear. Obviously, it will not fit in the same space as the previous banana and even if the new leader were a banana, it would be difficult for it to fit in the same space as the original founder banana because all the nearby fruit shifted when the founder banana left.

Notice also that each of the pieces of the fruit closest to the center, closest to the founder banana, now shifts in relationship to one another, and even extending to the marginal members of the fruit community. The system is no longer the same.

In churches and communities where the founder was in place for a long time it often happens that people become accustomed not only to their relationship to the leader, but also to their place in the system relative to all the other members. They may also become used to certain patterns of worship, education, social interactions, and community outreach. The patterns and expectations have a way of becoming set and when change occurs all sorts of emotions are sure to be exposed.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 98.

The greater the number of people who are unaware of their feelings or who are substituting feelings, the longer it will take to move through the transition, because people are not getting what they need at a time of disruption and disequilibrium.<sup>51</sup>

The fruit bowl analogy illustrates for us the need for leadership throughout the community to have an emotional intelligence and awareness to help lead the community to an emotional healthy place as they process this major change.

### *Emotional Intelligence in Practice*

Emotional Intelligence was coined in a 1990 study<sup>52</sup> and then popularized by Daniel Goleman's book<sup>53</sup> in 1995. Since then, scores of researchers have shown how being in touch with feelings, both your own and other people's, gives you an edge, compared to people without this awareness. Many research studies have concluded that those with high emotional intelligence are more successful at work, are more enjoyable to work with,<sup>54</sup> have a greater influence over the health of their organization and family, have fewer health problems,<sup>55</sup> and report a greater life satisfaction.<sup>56</sup> It would be wise for

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<sup>51</sup> Friedman, *Generation to Generation*, 204.

<sup>52</sup> Peter Salovey and John Mayer, "Emotional Intelligence," *Imagination, Cognition and Personality* 9, no. 3 (March 1990): 185-211.

<sup>53</sup> Goleman, *Emotional Intelligence*, 1.

<sup>54</sup> Chi-Sum Wong and Kenneth Law, "The Effects of Leader and Follower Emotional Intelligence On Performance and Attitude: An Exploratory Study," *The Leadership Quarterly* 13, no. 3 (June 2002): 243-274.

<sup>55</sup> Moira Mikolajczak, "Explaining the Protective Effect of Trait Emotional Intelligence Regarding Occupational Stress: Exploration of Emotional Labour Processes," *Journal of Research in Personality* 41, no. 5 (October 2007): 1107.

<sup>56</sup> Donald H. Saklofske, "Factor Structure and Validity of a Trait Emotional Intelligence Measure," *Personality and Individual Differences* 34, no. 4 (March 2003): 707.

church leaders to gain an understanding and pay close attention to their emotional intelligence.

One of the church transition case studies reviewed for this paper paid special attention to emotional intelligence.<sup>57</sup> The leadership transition occurred at a church in Louisville, Kentucky where the long time founding pastor of 25+ years went to his elder board and asked for help in the complex transition process. The church made intentional reference to the emotional process for those involved, understanding that different people will have different emotional responses along the way. As the elder team, founding pastor, and successor crafted their detailed timeline, they created plenty of space for different emotions they anticipated might occur. Special events were created for founding families to grieve and ask questions, and again for staff/leadership in the church to grieve and have conversations about how they expected this transition to impact the church family. The church leadership, following the pattern of Moses and Joshua,<sup>58</sup> also walked the church through a 30-day grieving time. Once the grieving time was over the leadership understood that a new season would be occurring for the church, and they led in dreaming/vision casting sessions. This time created emotional excitement about the future of the church that allowed the successor to start from day one with an emotionally healthy church family.

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<sup>57</sup> Russell and Bucher, 48.

<sup>58</sup> Deut. 34:8 RSV.

### *Caution Regarding Emotional Intelligence*

Not everyone sees emotional intelligence as a positive element. Just last year a group of Austrian psychologists reported a correlation between emotional intelligence and narcissism, raising the possibility that narcissists with high EI might use their “charming, interesting, and even seductive” qualities for “malicious purposes,” such as deceiving others.<sup>59</sup> Similarly, a 2014 study linked “narcissistic exploitativeness” with “emotion recognition,” concluding that those who were prone to manipulating others were better at reading others emotions.<sup>60</sup> While these studies highlight extreme possibilities of emotional intelligence, they can help us properly weigh the value that EI plays in the outcome of a leadership transition, instead of overestimating its importance.

We also see that some emotional intelligence organizations have produced an array of tools designed to measure an individual's emotional and social health. Sparrow and Knight aptly point out that “it is misleading nonsense to reduce somebody's emotional intelligence to a single figure.”<sup>61</sup> Choosing the best tools is critical. And after selecting a tool for yourself or your organization, respecting the limitations of the assessment is important. Just as IQ tests or spiritual gifts inventories can inappropriately, and less-than-perfectly, “define” a person, equating a person's relational and personal

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<sup>59</sup> Ursa K. J. Nagler, “Is There a ‘Dark Intelligence?’ Emotional Intelligence Is Used by Dark Personalities to Emotionally Manipulate Others,” *Personality and Individual Differences* 65 (July 2014): 47.

<sup>60</sup> Sara Konrath, “The Relationship between Narcissistic Exploitativeness, Dispositional Empathy, and Emotion Recognition Abilities,” *Journal of Nonverbal Behavior* 38, no. 1 (March 2014): 129.

<sup>61</sup> Sparrow and Knight, 33.

success with a score on a brief exam is problematic. These tools should be used to assist the process of growth more than grading the emotional effectiveness or value of people.

Peter Drucker offers stern words for consideration: “Don't start with personality. Don't start with the usual silly questions such as does he get along with people, or does she have initiative? These characteristics may be meaningful in describing a personality, but they don't tell you how people perform.”<sup>62</sup> The danger of “touchy-feely” decision-making is real. A person's emotional quotient may not tell the whole story of well-being, emotional health, or job performance. Just being a good guy does not mean a person is qualified to effectively serve in a particular area of the church. Spiritual gifts (calling) and talents still matter.

Some emotional intelligence theorists have closely associated their work with business and management literature. If this human science is corrupted by business leaders to control people and expand financial profits, danger lurks. If this human science is corrupted by church leaders to control people and expand pastoral power, danger lurks. Is our use of these psychological discoveries helpful or hurtful? We must use this emerging science with wisdom and humility. A greater awareness of people must be used to help them fulfill God's purposes for their life.

Even with these caveats, emotional intelligence does play a significant role in a healthy church family leadership transition. A great resource to support this thought is Peter Scazzero's book, *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality*. The premise of Scazzero's book is that “It's impossible to be spiritually mature, while remaining emotionally

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<sup>62</sup> Peter F. Drucker, *Managing the Nonprofit Organization* (New York, NY: HarperBusiness, 2006), 146.

immature.”<sup>63</sup> Many individuals try to shut off their feelings, but as much as we distort, deny, and bury our emotions and memories, we cannot ever eliminate them. This is not just for individuals, but the same can be said of the body of Christ, and the need for the community as a whole to express emotions during a major succession. We must deal with our emotions and understand that our Heavenly Father is able to communicate to us through our feelings and provide healing and comfort along the way. An emotionally intelligent leader will not only live this way themselves, but will help others walk through this process understanding that the greater health of the organization, church, or family, will benefit everyone involved.

### **Common Emotions Seen in Founding Transitions**

One of the great difficulties in any transition is the transfer of control and authority. This tension occurs whether a CEO is being replaced or a Matriarch/Patriarch passes away and a new family member assumes the role. Every leader has their own way of doing things and their own network of people who partner with them to make it happen. When a senior leader steps aside it affects the entire leadership structure of the church/family/organization, particularly if the leader moving on is a long-term, founding leader. When the new leader transitions, a struggle to maintain or obtain control can take place, and often some predictable emotions surface within a community.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Peter Scazzero, *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality: It's Impossible to Be Spiritually Mature, While Remaining Emotionally Immature* (Nashville, TN: Zondervan, 2014), 1.

<sup>64</sup> Kets de Vries, 224.



### *Emotional Fears*

The ability to lead with control and authority is not based on one's ability to follow a set of policies and procedures, but instead is complex, and relies heavily on emotional intelligence.<sup>65</sup> Manfred Kets de Vries' book, *Leadership Mystique*,<sup>66</sup> assesses the fear that comes with a transfer of power and the need for emotional intelligence to help guide the process. Kets de Vries does not just lay out plans and strategies for succession, but he examines the emotions an incoming or outgoing leader might be feeling. Fear is a key emotion Kets de Vries identifies in all participants during succession. Regarding the outgoing leader, Kets de Vries says, "succession arouses basic fears of death...CEO's tend to be fairly close-lipped about their fears and feelings, making succession shrouded in mystery."<sup>67</sup> For the incoming leader Kets de Vries identifies another reason for fear, "once a person becomes head honcho, there are no obvious new positions to strive for. It's success or failure; there are no other options."<sup>68</sup> These fears mostly revolve around control: the fear of letting go of control and the fear of obtaining control.

In one interview,<sup>69</sup> I conversed with a woman named Elizabeth who has attended the same church for over 35 years and had the same pastor during the entire time, except

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<sup>65</sup> Gleeson, "5 Types of Emotional Intelligence."

<sup>66</sup> Kets de Vries, 224.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 219.

<sup>69</sup> Interview by author, January 19, 2016. All interviews are confidential and interviewees' names have been changed. All quotes are used with permission.

for the past 5 years when a new senior pastor transitioned in. When I asked Elizabeth to share the story of her church's transition she immediately got tense and appeared to be nervous. Elizabeth told me that she served as staff secretary for over 15 years. She loved her job and said that those were some of the most satisfying years of her life. She loved serving the church and the senior pastor. When the senior pastor retired, she remained on staff and fully hoped to remain in her job for another 10+ years. Elizabeth told me when the new pastor was hired there was a steep learning curve for her and she feared change. The new pastor desired to use new computer software programs and everything he did revolved around technology that she was not familiar with. Elizabeth communicated to me that as the months went on she started to sense a great fear of failure whelming up in her new Senior Pastor. The Pastor isolated himself, while also isolating Elizabeth. She said she found herself on the outside of things and no longer felt like she was contributing to the team. After 6 months Elizabeth decided to quit and she was quickly replaced with someone younger and more technologically savvy. Elizabeth said that neither the new pastor nor elders ever addressed the emotions the staff might be feeling through the succession and that no one ever asked her about how the senior pastor transition impacted her. Elizabeth said she believes the new pastor's fear of failure created a performance culture and that many of the long-term staff had left the church.

Elizabeth was caught in a transition of control. While her being kept on the outside appears to have had nothing to do with her personality, it did have to do with the way in which the new senior pastor worked. Elizabeth assessed the situation, understood her limits, and graciously stepped down from her position without creating any

unnecessary conflict and tension. Unfortunately, not all transitions of control occur that gracefully.

### *Emotional Dependency*

While emotional fears revolving around control also exist in the church, Kets de Vries also points toward another key emotion found in transitions, that of dependency. One of the most common difficulties Kets de Vries identifies is that, “CEO’s are highly sensitive to shifts in power and some simply can’t face the reality of losing power.”<sup>70</sup> Just like CEO’s, many pastors attach their identity to their work and have a hard time letting go of control. Pastors are just as likely to become workaholics and tend to build their church around their own personality, making it even more difficult to one-day walk away. This can impact everyone involved in the church family and create an unhealthy dependency.

I also interviewed<sup>71</sup> a president/CEO of a family business. Ben had taken over the family business 5 years ago from his dad. He had worked with the company for 10+ years before the transition occurred, and now 5 years later, he was able to share his story with a unique perspective. When I interviewed Ben he was quick to point out that his dad still occupied the office next to his. While sharing the story of succession, it was clear that 5 years into the CEO role, that the transition still was not fully completed. Ben said that there are a few aspects of the company that his Dad has not yet let go of, and they still

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<sup>70</sup> Kets de Vries, 225.

<sup>71</sup> Interview by author, January 21, 2016. All interviews are confidential and interviewees’ names have been changed. All quotes are used with permission.

have not worked out the complete details of the financial ownership transfer. I expected Ben to be upset about this slow process, but he shared that he enjoys having his dad around and even sees him as somewhat of a “crutch” to help him along. Ben seemed relieved that all the pressure doesn’t fall on him and that his dad is still there to “save” him if something bad were to happen. I asked Ben when he thinks the complete transfer will take place and he laughed saying, “I’m not sure, maybe when my dad passes away.” This does not seem to be an ideal way to transfer control, as there is an emotional dependency that is unhealthy for the long-term leadership Ben is required to provide to the company.

Transitions are not easy, they all look different, and there are many ways to be successful. Yet, it appears that Ben is a reluctant leader who fears obtaining control while his Dad also is hesitant to let go of power. Their transition might work well in the end but it is clear that they have yet to fully navigate the complex transition of control.

### *Emotional Security*

Kets de Vries points to a trait that is often present in successful successions and transfers of control: the ability to accept that everyone is dispensable. The ability to recognize oneself as dispensable comes from being emotionally secure. Charles de Gaulle is famously quoted as saying, “the graveyards of the world are full of indispensable men.”<sup>72</sup> Church leaders should humbly lead knowing that one day only our legacy will remain. The alternative requires never addressing the elephant in the room, which leaves

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<sup>72</sup> Kets de Vries, 226.

a mess for others to navigate. While everyone desires to depart when they are at the top, the truth is that most people have to humbly learn to relinquish control at some point in their lives, facing fear and letting go. This is why succession planning is such an important task. Succession planning allows a predecessor, successor, and leadership to plan ahead for the inevitable event to come and also allows time to process emotions and find emotional security in the future plans. As Kets de Vries concludes regarding a healthy transition of power and succession, “the acid test of excellent leadership is what happens when the leader is no longer there.”<sup>73</sup> Planning ahead gives a sense of security for everyone involved.

### **Summary**

A family in my church recently lost the patriarch of their family, and on the same day, a new baby was born into their family. How are people able to mourn and celebrate at the same time? We often do not acknowledge that we are complex emotional beings. We are capable of feeling more than one emotion at a time. I can be excited and scared, I can be weary and expectant, and like the family in my church, I can be sad and joyful at the same time.

Church leadership should do more than make sure the logistics of a pastor transition are handled but should also assess the emotional well-being of the church family and address the different emotions being experienced during a transition.

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<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

A founding pastor transition is a complex process. It is important for church leadership to understand their context, leadership style, and to develop a proper leadership theology to work through the complicated process. There are also many logistical pieces that need to be worked through and too often church families work hard making sure their church moves through a transition but never take time to address how they are feeling. A church family and leadership must not neglect all the different emotions a church family is experiencing through this major transition. Leadership and a church family that navigates the complex emotional process involved in a founding pastor transition will be more likely to have a healthy transition outcome.

A family system is often navigating different emotions at the same time and it is clear that a church family will be navigating all of this during a founding pastor transition. There are many ways to navigate a healthy transition but in this chapter we have shown that an emotionally healthy leader with a high level of emotional intelligence is best suited to help a church family navigate the difficult tensions that arise with a transition of power. In the next chapter we will look at ways a church family can be more aware of the emotional complexities within a transition and how they can walk through those emotions together.

## CHAPTER 5

### FAMILY SYSTEMS THEORY

#### Introduction

The transition of a founding pastor is an anxious time for any church. Churches that lifted their leader up on a pedestal can have an extremely difficult time navigating the transition, but so can churches that have a strong theology of leadership, have functioned in community, and have never made the founding pastor the focal point of the church. This is an anxious transition for all churches because churches, like families, are complex emotional systems.<sup>1</sup>

In the same way that a family grieves and mourns the loss of a loved one, a church family also grieves the departure of a founding pastor. How does the church leadership and succeeding pastor address all the emotions that come with a transition this deeply rooted?

One metaphor for the departure of a founding pastor and hiring of a succeeding pastor is that of a divorce and remarriage.<sup>2</sup> Yet, a healthy emotional process can also feel more like a father giving his daughter away in marriage: a time of letting go, celebration, and excitement for a new journey ahead.

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<sup>1</sup> Israel Galindo, "Bowen Family Systems Theory in the Congregational Context," *Review and Expositor* 102 (Summer, 2005): 365.

<sup>2</sup> Scazzero, 88.

This chapter lays the foundation for a theory that can help churches traverse the emotional process of a founding pastor transition. Chapter three's study on a theology of leadership identified the church as the body of Christ, each person playing their part. Family Systems Theory is a theory that supports the emotional system of that body.

Very few books reflect on the reality that the church is an emotional system. We like to call the church a "family," but too often the church, like a business corporation, deals with its staff like hired help and ignores, or poorly equips, the church body's need to deal with emotionally difficult issues.

In this chapter we will be looking at Family Systems Theory as a way for church leadership to enhance their emotional intelligence and better equip their church for a founding transition.

### **Family Systems Theory**

Peter Steinke explores Family Systems Theory in *How Your Church Family Works: Understanding Congregations as Emotional Systems*. Steinke states, "System Theory is a way of conceptualizing reality. It organizes our thinking from a specific vantage point. Systems thinking considers the interrelatedness of the parts."<sup>3</sup> Steinke continues, "When we think systemically, we cannot understand one thing without the other."<sup>4</sup> Through compartmentalization, people try to understand one thing without the

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<sup>3</sup> Peter L. Steinke, *How Your Church Family Works: Understanding Congregations as Emotional Systems* (Herndon, VA: The Alban Institute, 2006), 3.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.



other. Applying system theory to the church recognizes that what happens in one aspect of the church influences the other aspects of the church; nothing is done in a vacuum.

Without realizing it, people use Family Systems Theory in a variety of ways. One example is when a person becomes frustrated with one person, and yet takes out their frustration on someone else. A husband and wife have an argument before work, so he pulls out in the road in front of someone and then yells at another driver. His anger has nothing to do with the other driver, but that driver is the one who receives the tension that developed between the married couple. Many of the tensions that play out in organizations are the result of displaced anxiety and tension. Family Systems Theory seeks to apply displaced anxiety back onto the correct relationship and situation. By keeping the anxiety in the place where it started, the tension and emotion can be addressed instead of allowing it to grow and disrupt the health of the organization. This kind of emotion and tension also take place within the church family.

Before describing how a specific family system theory (i.e. Bowen) can help a church family walking through succession, we must begin with an understanding of family systems. In his essay, “Surviving Congregational Leadership: A Theology of Family Systems,” Craig Nesson introduces an understanding of family systems. He states, “Rather than focusing on the psyche of a troubled individual, the point of orientation becomes the entire family as a system of relationships out of which the person functions.”<sup>5</sup> When seeking to address a problem, one is thinking from an individual

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<sup>5</sup> Craig L. Nesson, “Surviving Congregational Leadership: A Theology of Family Systems,” *Word & Word* 20, no. 4 (Fall 2000): 390.

perspective. When seeking to address the relationships within the expression of the problem, one is thinking from a family systems perspective.

When a problem or situation arises, people naturally address the problem from an individual perspective. Someone will see a problem and make an assumption of who is causing the problem. To fix the problem means to fix the person, which means seeing the problem solely through an individual perspective. The individual perspective denies how the problem may actually be a symptom of a deeper issue at hand, especially an issue within the system.

An example would be low attendance from young families during the welcome weekend of a succeeding pastor. If there are no young parents in attendance, the church leadership might come to the conclusion that the new pastor is not an exciting prospect for young families. Limiting the problem to the new incoming pastor is looking at the situation from an individual perspective. A better approach would be to look at the attendance problem as a whole. Continuing this example, young parents may not be attending the welcome weekend because there is not adequate care for their children. The church's leadership may assign the problem to the personality of the incoming pastor and overlook the need to provide adequate childcare and programming, in order for young families to participate.

Ronald Richardson also develops the distinction between an individual perspective and a systems perspective. In *Creating a Healthier Church: Family Systems Theory, Leadership and Congregational Life*, Richardson states, "In the individual model, there is little sense of people's interconnectedness or of how one's own behavior can affect that of others. In the systems model, there is recognition of the connection

between people. It says people can only be understood fully within the context of their relationships.”<sup>6</sup> While the individual model and the systems model are not mutually exclusive, people tend to gravitate to the individual model when addressing issues at hand. Because people typically use the individual model, people must intentionally create steps to use the systems model.

Family can be an example of how people typically approach life through an individual model. A teenager may be causing trouble at school because of the dysfunction of his parents’ marriage. A toddler may be jumping on the couch after being told not to, because her parents are not paying attention to her. In these situations, it is tempting to address the teenager’s behavior or the toddler’s unruly actions in isolation, without realizing how the parents’ behavior influences their children’s behavior. The family model does not excuse the teenager’s or toddler’s behavior. They each are still accountable for their improper actions, but addressing the situation for a lasting effect means that the parents in both situations must acknowledge their issues and their influence on the family system as a whole.

Family Systems Theory approaches problems by focusing on how people function in the different relationships of their lives. It is within the interconnectedness of these relationships that change can happen. James Lamkin describes Family Systems Theory as a way of seeing that our relationships influence how we relate to each other. Lamkin states, “Each piece of a system is a part of the whole. The particular affects the whole,

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<sup>6</sup> Ronald W. Richardson, *Creating a Healthier Church: Family Systems Theory, Leadership and Congregational Life* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1996), 25.

and vice versa. All life is connected in this way.”<sup>7</sup> The relationship between the particular and the whole is significant for understanding systems theory.

Richardson also affirms how the context and the individual affect each other. He states, “The larger context helps to define the individual. The individual is often a particular expression of the larger corporate group.”<sup>8</sup> Some may choose to focus on a particular and try to fix it, while others may try to focus on the whole and change it. Systems theory argues the only way to enact lasting change is to see the interaction between the particular and the whole by seeing how they influence each other. Family Systems Theory empowers people to uncover the heart of the issues by getting beyond the symptoms that reveal the problem. One of the more commonly used family system theories is Bowen Theory.

### **Bowen Family Systems Theory In The Church**

Murray Bowen was a Professor of Psychiatry at Georgetown University in Washington, D.C. He began developing Bowen Family Systems Theory in the 1950s and he died in 1990. Dr. Bowen mentored the late Rabbi Edwin Friedman, whose work developing Bowen theory helped it develop into one of the leading Family System Theories currently used in America.<sup>9</sup> It was Rabbi Friedman who first made the

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<sup>7</sup> James E. Lamkin, “Systems Theory and Congregational Leadership: Leaves from an Alchemist’s Journal,” *Review & Expositor* 102, no. 3 (Summer 2005): 467.

<sup>8</sup> Ronald W. Richardson, “Bowen Family Systems Theory and Congregational Life,” *Review & Expositor* 102, no. 3 (Summer 2005): 381.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 379.

application of Bowen Theory to pastoral and congregation life in his book *Generation to Generation*.<sup>10</sup> Friedman introduced into the fields of pastoral counseling and congregational studies the application of Bowen Family Systems theory as a way to understand churches as emotional systems. Friedman's work has become a pastoral development textbook in many seminaries and now many authors are adding to the growing body of literature on Family Systems Theory's connection to the church.

Bowen Family Systems Theory has many similarities to biblical anthropology.<sup>11</sup> In both cases, the individual self is always a part of several larger wholes. The self does not exist alone. In the biblical world, individual identity is nearly always derived in part from what he or she belongs to, whether it is occupations, places, families, or tribes. The larger context helps define the individual. The individual is often a particular expression of the larger corporate group. Paul's first Corinthian letter evokes the same idea when he describes how we are a part of the body of Christ. Each part is interconnected and depends on the other. This idea is pervasive in both Old and New Testaments.

Sigmund Freud broke reality down into discreet, constituent parts,<sup>12</sup> losing the connection that things have with each other, studying them separately, as if they existed on their own. While there can be much to learn and gain from Freud's approach, Murray Bowen has shifted the focus back to a more biblical view of the individual as a part of one or more larger wholes. For Bowen, as well as the ancient Hebrew authors, the family

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<sup>10</sup> Friedman, *Generation to Generation*, 88.

<sup>11</sup> Richardson, *Creating a Healthier Church*, 27.

<sup>12</sup> Stephen Thornton, "Sigmund Freud," accessed December 7, 2015, <http://www.iep.utm.edu/freud/>.

is the primary interest. Bowen's view connects with a theology of leadership that focuses on leadership within a community instead of just the study of an individual leader.

### **Understanding Bowen Family Systems Theory**

While Edwin Friedman is heavily applauded for being the first to apply Bowen Theory to congregational life, many still have difficulty reconciling the minimal role he says empathy should play in our relationships. Friedman is often accused of not being sufficiently empathetic.<sup>13</sup> Friedman believed that empathy is one of the major factors preventing change, asserting that it is impossible to make others be more mature by just feeling for them. He preferred to emphasize responsibility and compassion, insisting that the recently evolved concept of empathy encourages loss of emotional boundaries between people and leads to problems in self-regulation.<sup>14</sup> Those who are relying on empathy from others and those who are the least willing to take responsibility for their own well-being are paralyzing the helping professionals. Friedman famously said, "Leaders cannot change others simply by talking and the colossal error in modern psychotherapy, and perhaps education and religion, is the failure to accept the fact that reason and insight only work with people who are motivated to change."<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Edward Beal, "A Retrospective: Edwin Friedman, His Life and Work," *Review and Expositor* 102 (Summer, 2005): 411.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> Friedman, "Empathy Defeats Therapy," 9.

Freidman was often criticized for not being truly scientific in his findings.<sup>16</sup> After he passed away, Mike Kerr, Director of The Bowen Center for the Study of the Family, said, “Freidman was more philosopher than scientist ... [which was] an important part of his effectiveness as a teacher. He had a grasp of the human spirit that resonated with people.”<sup>17</sup> Kerr’s words rang true, because twenty years after Friedman’s death his work with Bowen has become the cornerstone work regarding Family Systems Theory and congregational life.

Bowen Family Systems Theory can be a source of hope for pastors and church leaders. It not only describes how we normally operate in relationships; it also offers direction for how growth can happen. The systemic approach includes the belief that, when we change our part in a relationship process, others will then have to change their part.<sup>18</sup> This approach is not about doing “manipulating” things to other people to get them to change. It is about a caring way to be closely connected with others that allows us, at the same time, to be true to our own beliefs and values.

Bowen Family Systems Theory consists of eight concepts and it was Freidman who first applied these eight concepts to the church. The eight concepts are: Triangles, Differentiation of Self, Nuclear Family Emotional Scale, Emotional Cutoff, Family Protection Process, Multigenerational Transmission Process, Sibling Position, and Emotional Process in Society. Applying these eight concepts to church life will create

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<sup>16</sup> Beal, 412.

<sup>17</sup> Michael Kerr, “MAD Matters,” obituary for Edwin Friedman delivered at the Middle Atlantic Division American Association of Marriage and Family Therapy, Winter 1997.

<sup>18</sup> Roberta M. Gilbert, *The Eight Concepts of Bowen Theory* (Lake Frederick, VA: Leading Systems Press, 2006), 2.

greater emotional intelligence for all involved. They can also help an individual to understand the church family's emotional health and what role the individual plays in that emotional health. Bowen Family Systems Theory can be a great resource for church families walking through change, such as a deeply rooted founding leader transition.

Many pastors may think a good sermon, or series of sermons, can heal the emotional health of their churches, while in fact it is rarely ever enough. Just like our families, churches are emotional systems and Bowen Family Systems Theory helps leadership, and all individuals, better understand what role they play in the emotional health of the family.

Many have applied all eight of Bowen's concepts to the church, but Triangles and Differentiation of Self are the two concepts that are most commonly connected to church families.<sup>19</sup> It will be these two concepts that we look at in depth for this study.

### **Triangles Within Succession**

The theory states that the triangle, a three-person emotional configuration, is the molecule or the basic building block of any emotional system, whether it is in the family or any other group. The triangle is the smallest stable relationship system. A two-person system may be stable as long as it is calm, but when anxiety increases, it immediately involves the most vulnerable other person to become a triangle. When tension in the triangle is too great for the threesome, it involves others to become a series of interlocking triangles.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Friedman, *Generation to Generation*, 204.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 47.



As we study the impact Triangles have on the emotional health of a church we will be using the case study of Nate, Tom, and Grace Church<sup>21</sup> to highlight the difficulties that can arise with unhealthy emotional triangles. I interviewed Nate just a few years after walking through a difficult succession plan. Nate had been called to be the new pastor at Grace Church. He was following in the footsteps of Tom, the founding pastor of 25 years. Tom poured his heart and soul into this church, was deeply loved by everyone, and under Tom's leadership the church had grown to play an instrumental role in the community, all the while reflecting Tom's personality. Yet, Tom's quick exit left quite a mess for Nate. Many in the church were grieving Tom's exit. Tom and his family still regularly attended Grace Church, and Tom had continued talking with elders, hoping that Nate would carry out the projects that he had started. Every Elder meeting Nate attended he felt the tension of the "triangles."

Nate, Tom, and the Grace Church leadership find themselves in what systems theory calls a "triangle." Triangles are just one of the eight concepts that are a part of Bowen Family Systems Theory. Triangles are the basic molecules of emotional systems. They are the primary way we manage the inevitable anxiety that eventually will occur in two-person relationships when they are stressed. When one member of a dyad begins to feel anxious, often around feeling "too close" or "too distant," a third person (or group) will be brought in.<sup>22</sup> When speaking with Nate it was easy to see how he began to

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<sup>21</sup> Interview by author, February 8, 2016. All interviews are confidential and interviewees' names have been changed. All quotes are used with permission.

<sup>22</sup> Roberta M. Gilbert, *Extraordinary Relationships: A New Way of Thinking About Human Interactions* (New York, NY: Wiley, 1992), 75.

develop some anxiety early in his relationship to Grace Church about being controlled by their wishes and Tom's vision/goals.

Nate said that he knew that as soon as he shared his differing vision for the future of Grace Church, Tom and some elders would feel hurt and possibly threatened. This was Nate's first pastorate and he feared their anger. In particular, he knew that he did not want to have a confrontation, nor did he want to lose their otherwise valuable input to the life of the church.

Triangles are a central feature of church life, and every pastor is a part of numerous significant triangles every day. Once we learn to see them we realize they are everywhere and there is no escaping them. Generally, two of the corners in a triangle represent the "close insider" position and the third corner is the "outsider" position. Who is "in" or "out" is fluid, and can shift. Understanding how triangles function and how we manage ourselves within them can help us in most of our pastoral relationships. Conflicts between two people will often resolve themselves if a third person, who is important to the others emotionally, can maintain contact with them both and remain neutral about their conflict. The principle involves learning how to manage our own anxiety and be a calmer presence with the conflicted parties.<sup>23</sup> This is what family and couples therapy is based on, and it is a useful principle for most pastoral functioning.

Triangles can be a place where we play a game of "letting you and them fight it out." Nate could have told Tom that the Elders do not want him moving forward with his projects and if he has concerns he can take it up with the Elders. Therefore, Nate could

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 76.

have transferred his tension and anxiety to the other two parties, in order to feel calmer himself. However, if Tom confronted Nate he might say that he was sure the elders wanted his projects seen through to completion thus shifting the anxiety back to the other two corners. This process could continue with anxiety being passed around the church, through interlocking triangles, building as it goes while other parties add in their unresolved concerns, until it becomes a huge concern within the church. If there were enough anxiety about other unresolved issues, a major church fight could develop.

Rabbi Freidman employed Bowen Family Systems Theory in the church he oversaw. Friedman found that the makeup of a church community changes over the years but the emotional system of a church, like that of a family, tends to remain constant.<sup>24</sup> In his book, *Generation to Generation* he recommends a three-fold strategy for entering an established relationship system, such as the triangles that exist in a church:

1. Avoid interfering with, or rearranging, the triangles in the established relationship system.
2. Be wary of efforts by members of the congregation to triangle you with the “departed” or with other members of the system.
3. Work at creating as many direct one-to-one relationships as possible with key members of the family.<sup>25</sup>

As the succeeding pastor, Nate found himself in a difficult situation. However, he had enough emotional intelligence to understanding that he needed help navigating this

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<sup>24</sup> Friedman, *Generation to Generation*, 268.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 269.

triangle. Nate shared his concerns with the elders and they brought a Bowen Family Systems consultant in from the Lombard Mennonite Peace Center.<sup>26</sup> Nate explained to me that, over the course of a few weeks, the consultant gently and with detailed questions, helped everyone within the triangle become aware of the emotional tensions that were occurring. Nate became a quick study of Bowen's theory on triangles and he said it gave him hope and helped him understand his role in the transition process. The consultant encouraged Nate to stay emotionally neutral in triangles, while finding a way to communicate, based on his own principles, and what he thought was best.

According to Bowen, when the calm third (pastor, parent or consultant) can remain in contact with the other two, they gradually begin to de-escalate. At this point, there is more time to think. According to Bowen, logical thinking is how they will solve their problems with each other and in the system generally.<sup>27</sup> With time, Tom saw his unhealthy role within the church triangle. He started to let go of leadership and encourage Nate. Now a few years removed from the succession, Nate tells me that Tom has become his biggest support and advocate.

The picture of Nate remaining calm and in good contact with both parties is a great way for anyone to think about managing oneself in intense triangles. Triangles are everywhere so we will have plenty of opportunities to practice. As we manage our selves toward becoming and being a calming, thinking, self-defining presence, connected with others, we not only find ourselves in a healthier place, we find that others are more likely

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<sup>26</sup> "Lombard Mennonite Peace," accessed August 4, 2016, <http://www.lmpeacecenter.org>.

<sup>27</sup> Gilbert, *Extraordinary Relationships*, 13.

to join us over time. Certainly, if Nate is a calm, thinking, principled leader, he can have a positive effect upon intense triangles. It would be hard work, but extremely rewarding. This awareness and intelligence among church leadership can have a significant impact on the health of a church family as they walk through a major transition.

### **Differentiation of Self Within Succession**

Differentiation is the primary focus for growth within an emotional system. Differentiation is the ability to be in significant emotional contact with others and still be able to function as a more autonomous self, without the automatic emotional system processes determining our thinking and behavior. This is a mark of emotional maturity.<sup>28</sup> Friedman describes it as,

... the capacity of a family member to define his or her own life's goals and values apart from surrounding togetherness pressures, to say "I" when others are demanding "you" and "we." It includes the capacity to maintain a relatively non-anxious presence in the midst of anxious systems, to take maximum responsibility for one's own destiny and emotional being. Differentiation is the capacity to be an "I" while remaining connected to others.<sup>29</sup>

Anxiety and differentiation are two key variables in family systems thinking. Generally, the more imagined threats we experience in life, primarily in relation to others, the less differentiation we will have. The two are inversely related. As anxiety grows during stressful times, we are less able to think with a broader perspective. We narrow in on the perceived threat, often represented by a particular person, and the larger systemic

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<sup>28</sup> Richardson, "Bowen Family Systems Theory," 388.

<sup>29</sup> Friedman, *Generation to Generation*, 27.

issues get lost.<sup>30</sup> During times of anxiety and tension, if just one key leader can be less anxious, relate well to others in the group, simply define self, it will have a beneficial impact on the life of the group as a whole.<sup>31</sup> The more important this person is to the life of the group, the greater the impact. If this key person is more solid and less anxious, he or she can be an anchor for the whole system.<sup>32</sup>

A self-differentiated person can have a significant impact on the health of a church or organization when walking through succession. That is exactly what I witnessed when interviewing Al.<sup>33</sup> Al served as chairman of the board for a national not-for-profit, when a long time founding president retired. I asked Al what he saw as his role during this transition. He responded by saying that he saw his role as a calming presence to the organization during what is normally a rocky time. He said the most impactful moments he had as chairman were when he created a nonthreatening environment for the successor to come in, while also facilitating a time for the outgoing predecessor to speak his voice and share his emotions. Al said their transition had a few bumps along the way but creating a space for people to freely talk through their emotions and tensions paved the way for a healthy transition. Al might not have realized it, but his self-differentiating leadership was a healthy point within the triangle that, in turn, created health within the entire organization.

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 389.

<sup>33</sup> Interview by author, February 28, 2016. All interviews are confidential and interviewees' names have been changed. All quotes are used with permission.

Differentiation is what allows us, individually, to fulfill our Christian mission more closely, to choose our principled ethical and moral stances with clarity, and to act with courage in fulfilling them. It allows us to relate to others in the loving way we would like, without participating in the “group think” that can destroy church life and ministry. Differentiation allows us the emotional flexibility to stay in contact with all the important constituencies in the church, hear all points of view, and understand them without being aggressive or defensive. It allows us to engage without retaliating when hurt, or accommodating in response to emotional pressure from key others in the system. In addition, it allows us to know which battles to fight, when, how, and what the potential outcomes and costs may be.

Self-Differentiation is always a work in progress and no one ever fully gets there. Yet, as we saw with Al, emotional maturity and self-differentiated leadership better prepared him to deal with the powerful triangles of the emotional system in his organization, and function as a better leader within it. A self-differentiated person within the triangle of a church succession can have significant impact on the emotional health of the entire church.

### **Critique of Bowen’s Theory and Alternatives**

No theory or model is perfect and that is the case with Bowen’s Family Systems Theory. A number of Bowen therapists acknowledge that the wide focus of Bowen’s model can be a drawback, in that many clients want only to address symptom relief in

their family situation.<sup>34</sup> For Bowen therapists, symptom reduction is seen only as groundwork from which families can then proceed less anxiously toward working on detriangling and improved levels of differentiation.<sup>35</sup> Because of this, it is important to clarify client/therapist goals when a pastor implements this theory within his or her church.

While many leading feminist therapists such as Betty Carter and Harriet Lerner have embraced Bowen Theory, it has also received its share of criticism from a feminist perspective. Deborah Leupnitz points out that Bowen has paid too much attention to the mother's contribution to symptom development of the child, because Bowen labels perceived over-investment by a mother in her child as a sign of undifferentiation, yet ignores over-investment by a father.<sup>36</sup> While Bowen therapists should be aware of this while in family sessions, a pastor in his or her church should think through triangles within a masculine and feminine perspective and not ignore the feminine emotions taking place within their church or vice versa the masculine emotions.

Another criticism that relates to the "male defined" biases of Bowen, is that his is a therapy lacking in attention to feelings. Luepnitz would state that Bowen's therapy focuses on being rational and objective in emotional processes, which minimizes the

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<sup>34</sup> Fredda Herz Brown, *Reweaving the Family Tapestry: A Multigenerational Approach to Families* (New York, NY: BookSurge Publishing, 2006), 38.

<sup>35</sup> Jenny Brown, "Bowen Family Systems Theory and Practice: Illustration and Critique," *Family Systems Institute* (1999): 1, accessed December 10, 2015, [http://www.thefsi.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/Bowen-Family-Systems-Theory-and-Practice\\_Illustration-and-Critique.pdf](http://www.thefsi.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/Bowen-Family-Systems-Theory-and-Practice_Illustration-and-Critique.pdf).

<sup>36</sup> Deborah Anna Luepnitz and Paki Wieland, *The Family Interpreted: Psychoanalysis, Feminism, and Family Therapy* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 1992), 89.



expression of emotions in therapy.<sup>37</sup> Betty Carter would counter saying Bowen's invitation to explore the "tapestry" of one's family across the generations is, in itself, an emotionally intense therapy. Betty Carter recalls asking a man about his relationship with his own father, tapping deeply into emotions that motivated him to make a change in ways of relating.<sup>38</sup>

### *Attachment Theory*

Bowen Theory is not the only way that churches can navigate the emotional system in their community. Attachment Theory is another model of Family Systems Theory that is currently being applied to church life with good results. Dr. Glenn Empey states that "by examining the type of attachment that a person exercises, clergy and pastoral care workers may gain insight into a person's spiritual health. Attachment behavior towards humans is likely congruent with the kind of attachment a person extends to a relationship with the deity."<sup>39</sup>

According to this theory some attachments have positive effects on health while other attachments have negative effects on health. Further study in Attachment Theory could be valuable considering the attachment one feels to their pastor, particularly founding families with the founding pastor. Pastors encounter numerous examples of how

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Brown, "Bowen Family Systems Theory and Practice."

<sup>39</sup> W. Glenn Empey, "Attachment Theory, Pastoral Ministry and Health: A Teaching Case Application," *Consensus* 28, no. 2 (2002): 26.

the quality of relationships affects people's health and Attachment Theory and therapy would be valuable in addressing those relationships.

Unlike other therapy professionals, pastors do not have a code of ethics prohibiting friendships with those in their church family. Professional therapists don't allow these kind of relationships and refer to them as "dual relationships."<sup>40</sup> Dual relationships refer to any situation where multiple roles exist between a helping professional and a client.<sup>41</sup> In pastoral work, dual relationships and friendship are routinely acceptable. In fact, church's may actively encourage such relationships. For example, aside from celibate clergy, a church family might welcome the idea of a single pastor dating and marrying another church member. Alternatively, among psychotherapists, a code of ethics prohibits clinicians from dating someone they also serve, precisely because under such circumstances it is difficult to clarify whose needs are primary in the relationship.<sup>42</sup> This lack of clarity presents pastors with an ongoing attachment predicament.

This matter is illustrated by the following anecdote collected by the author and therapist Robert Llewellyn from a Reform Rabbi.<sup>43</sup> Rabbi R. and his wife enjoyed getting to know Joanne and Tom as congregants. Especially since their children seemed to get along well, Rabbi R. and his wife imagined that they would like their families to become

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<sup>40</sup> Richard S. Epstein, *Keeping Boundaries: Maintaining Safety and Integrity in the Psychotherapeutic Process* (Washington, DC: American Psychiatric Publishing, 1994), 98.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> R. Llewellyn, "Sanity and Sanctity: The Counselor and Multiple Relationships in the Church," *Psychotherapy* 26 (2002): 87.

friendlier and spend time together. Then Joanne invited Rabbi R. and family to dinner and a movie on a Friday night. When the Rabbi tried to tactfully remind Joanne that he led Sabbath services on Friday nights, she remarked that everybody needs a break and he could take the evening as a vacation day. Feeling torn and confused, Rabbi R. sorted through the competing needs presented by this situation attempting to decide if any took precedence: Joanne's pastoral needs, Rabbi R's need for friendship, his children's needs since they liked playing with Joanne's children, or his wife's needs since she wanted to cultivate Joanne as a friend.

When multiple sets of boundaries exist alongside each other, one set generally wins out over the others. A healthy understanding of attachment is necessary, or one party can be unduly hurt when boundaries are crossed. Under these circumstances, the boundaries of pastor, their family members, and church friends are vulnerable to be crossed. On the other hand, Llewellyn argues that church based dual relationships can be beneficial.<sup>44</sup> They reduce alienation as individuals get to know each other in different roles and from different perspectives. They foster trust and a sense of community. Such interactions among church friends may be helpful. With a healthy attachment to their pastor these relationships may only constitute boundary crossings, which are non-abusive as opposed to boundary violations, which are injurious.<sup>45</sup>

Nevertheless, a pastor's dual relationships with church friends can remain problematic. Although pastors often feel vulnerable or even powerless, those within a

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> T. G. Gutheil, "The Concept of Boundaries in Clinical Practice: Theoretical and Risk-management Dimensions." *American Journal of Psychiatry* 150, no. 2, 188.

church often bestow them with an idealized power.<sup>46</sup> This idealization leads to an imbalance of power regarding the negotiation of boundaries. Boundaries are always mutually regulated, but in the case of pastor and church members that power is typically uneven with greater power invested in the pastor.<sup>47</sup> Boundary violations are more probable under these circumstances.

This becomes complex when a long term, founding pastor transitions. Church friends with an unhealthy attachment to the founding pastor might not understand the decision and feel like they deserved to be a part of the decision making process. Or church friends might unreasonably believe that the pastor's departure also means an end to their friendship.

While this study has only briefly looked at the impact Attachment Theory might have on a founding pastor transition and church, it is not difficult to conclude that a church family could benefit deeply with a greater understanding of a healthy attachment between the founding pastor and church family.

### **Family Systems & Leadership**

This review of the importance of understanding family systems for church health, leads to a recognition that the health of a church family is very much dependent on the health of its leadership. Richardson discusses the healthiness of a church through its

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<sup>46</sup> Jack H Bloom, *The Rabbi as Symbolic Exemplar: By the Power Vested in Me* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 1.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

leadership. He returns to Bowen and Friedman's emphasis on the church as a family system rather than a group of isolated people, and the importance of leadership recognizing that every church is more than a collection of individual members. People in the church, as in any group, are intricately interconnected. They exist in a system that is much bigger and more powerful than the individual members. Each person both influences, and is influenced by, everyone else.<sup>48</sup> Richardson believes imperatively that the family system of the church family must be understood in order to obtain a healthy church family.

In *Healthy Congregations: A Systems Approach*, Steinke reflects on the importance of healthy leaders being responsible for the care and stewardship of a system. The function of the organization is dependent upon the health of the leadership,

Like healthy people, systems promote their health through "responsible and enlightened behavior." The people who are most in position to enhance the health of a system are precisely those who have been empowered to be responsible, namely the leaders. They are chief stewards; they are the people who are willing to be accountable for the welfare of the system.<sup>49</sup>

Steinke affirms the importance of leadership being good stewards of the health and welfare of the church's family system. Leaders have the power to improve the family systems' health.

Steinke further addresses interaction within church family leadership in his book *Congregational Leadership in Anxious Times*. Continuing to draw upon Bowen and Friedman, Steinke shares his knowledge and experience of family systems within church

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<sup>48</sup> Richardson, *Creating a Healthier Church*, 26.

<sup>49</sup> Steinke, iv.

families during anxious times. He states the following as a foundation: “Influencing my thinking significantly is Bowen Theory, an understanding of what happens when people come together and interact, how they mutually influence each other’s behaviors, how change in one person affects another, and how they create something larger than themselves.”<sup>50</sup> Steinke uses reflections on Bowen Theory and acknowledges the ongoing work of Friedman’s presentation of family systems toward understanding of church families.

Steinke shares the importance of leadership understanding their presence, and how their functioning affects the activity of their church family:

People vary considerably in how they address emotionally challenging events. On the lower (immature) side, people are *reactive*. They blame more often; they criticize harshly; they take offense easily; they focus on others; they want instant solutions; they cannot see the part they play in problems. On the higher (mature) side, people are more thoughtful and reflective; they act on principle, not instinct; they can stand back and observe. They are *responsive*. Intent and choice characterize their behavior. The leader’s capacity to be in conscious control over (to respond to) automatic functioning (reaction) affects the well-being of the whole community. The leader’s “presence” can have a calming influence on reactive behavior. Rather than acting to the reactivity of others, leaders with self-composure and self-awareness both exhibit and elicit a more thoughtful response.<sup>51</sup>

Thus, the leader’s ability to be a non-anxious presence within the church family allows the leader to respond thoughtfully to a situation in a clear, reasonable manner rather than from an emotional perspective.

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<sup>50</sup> Peter L. Steinke, *Congregational Leadership in Anxious Times: Being Calm and Courageous No Matter What* (Herndon, VA: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2006), xiii.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

Richardson picks up the thought of health and action of the leadership and their effect on the emotional system within church families. He shares the analogy of a balanced mobile: Emotional systems are like delicately balanced mobiles. Any movement by any one part of the mobile, toward or away from the center of gravity, affects the balance of the whole mobile. This is most true of the parts closest to the top of the mobile (the leadership).<sup>52</sup>

The reactivity of the leadership closest to the top of the organization has the most effect of the life of the emotional system. Thus, leadership has the responsibility to understand family systems and work toward reducing reactivity in a situation in order to maintain stability in the system.

James T. Gottwald further delineates this approach. Gottwald tests the need for self-care by the pastor and leadership in order to be a healthy leader in a church family. He claims that pastors who work through the lens of family systems improve their leadership and place constraints on over-functioning, and thus reclaim their Sabbath and soul.<sup>53</sup> Gottwald's exploration results in eight guidelines for the emotional work of the pastor and those in church leadership:

- Nurture self-awareness
- Acknowledge feelings for what they are
- Discern how to utilize emotional energy
- Stay connected in appropriate ways

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<sup>52</sup> Richardson, *Creating a Healthier Church*, 29-30.

<sup>53</sup> James T. Gottwald, "Embodying Bowen's Family System Theory and Claiming My Soul," (PhD diss. Western Theological Seminary, 2004), 78-80.

- Sabbath is necessary
- Seek out counseling when needed
- Some emotional issues will never be resolved.
- The need for salvation.<sup>54</sup>

Gottwald declares that the pastor's self-care affects the ability of the pastor to deal with reactivity, thereby maintaining the balance of the organization. A pastor's reactivity is in direct relationship with the pastor's self-care; as the pastor's self-care improves, so does the function of the family system.

Family systems requires leaders to become observers of the emotional system of the church family. "As we learn to become good observers of the emotional system at work in our congregation and of who does what, when, where, and how, then we can even learn to predict what might come next."<sup>55</sup> As a result, when leadership understands family systems and observes the church through a systems perspective, this improves the function of the entire church family.

### Summary

Good pastoral care and leadership means that pastors must function, at times, as process observers and systems consultants around the anxiety in the church. Of course, the pastor has the pulpit and in this context, he or she can lay out a vision for what the gospel requires for a specific church at a specific time. Yet, a sermon or sermon series is

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Richardson, *Creating a Healthier Church*, 38.



not enough to address the complex emotional system. A pastor and leadership within a church must observe the emotional system, differentiate himself or herself, and have a positive impact on the triangles.

This kind of observing position of neutrality with regard to church life does not mean having no position or stance of one's own. It is not simple passivity and going along with whatever way the wind blows. There will be times when the leadership will have to clearly define themselves with both words and actions. Each pastor must define his or her own goals and direction in ministry. But that does not mean that he or she must define the church family or set its goals.

Rather than asking the question, "How can I change the church?" Bowen Family Systems Theory suggests that the church leadership should ask, "What do I need to work on to improve my functioning within the emotional system of the church, so that I can better represent the gospel?" If pastors successfully begin to address this question, the theory suggests that this will bring positive change within the church family context.<sup>56</sup> A focus on the church as an emotional system and on self-differentiation as a form of pastoral care, will help pastors be better, wiser, and healthier leaders.

Navigating the complex emotions involved in a long term founding pastor transition can be difficult. Family Systems Theory is a process that church leadership can use to better understand the emotional process of a founding succession and to traverse that change.

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 184.

## CHAPTER 6

### CONCLUSION

#### Introduction

Leadership, and the smooth transition of leadership, are topics that impact every organization. Many books, articles, and research projects have been made available to help guide organizations through a transition. Yet it is one thing to study and research leadership transitions, it is another thing to put these findings and theories into practice.

In general, the Church has not been great at pastoral transitions. Thom Rainer has noted that a pastor only gives his or her church an average of two month's notice regarding their departure.<sup>1</sup> When a pastor concludes their season with the church this abruptly, the church leadership is responsible to pick up the pieces and manage the different emotions the church family might feel during the major change.

This is not an ideal transition and this dissertation project has helped point churches and pastors to another way. This research has argued that pastoral transitions are best planned out, and worked out, within the context of the church family. Unexpected circumstances can change the best-laid plans, but that does not mean one should not try to prepare for transition, even if it requires adjustment along the way.

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<sup>1</sup> Thom S. Rainer, *Who Moved My Pulpit? Leading Change in the Church* (Nashville, TN: B&H Books, 2016), 8.

This section will review how these findings and theories can practically play out in a church family, and will explore how the recommendations have played out in my own personal leadership transition. I am a successor pastor: the 29-year founding pastor will soon be moving into a new role in our church. Our church family's transition has not been perfect, and there are many things along the way that we might have chosen to do differently. We also find ourselves in the early stages of the transition, and time will tell how healthy the handoff has been. However, as a community, we have walked through the leadership theories and the findings in this project, and this chapter will examine how these theories have been applied to an actual succession plan, and how these findings can help others.

### **Understanding Context**

Chapter 2 looked at biblical examples of leadership transition. This review helped us to recognize different leadership styles and context, and how these can impact a leadership transition moving forward. We concluded that understanding the style of the outgoing leader is important to understanding the needs of the church. We also recognized the importance of assessing the current health of the church in order to understand emotional and relational issues that might affect a successful transition.

Ideally, a leadership team within the church or organization should take the time to assess their situation before a transition plan is implemented. Max Weber, argued that

founding leaders generally have a charismatic leadership style.<sup>2</sup> As with the example of Elijah to Elisha, Moses to Joshua, or Jesus to his disciples, charismatic leaders are either best followed by either: another charismatic leader who will duplicate his or her ministry, or a bureaucratic leader who leads the church into a new season/direction. A third option is for the organization to disperse the charismatic leader's gifting onto many different leaders.

It is also important to ask questions about the context in which the transition is occurring. Is it a toxic environment, similar to Solomon's transition to Rehoboam? Is the church heading into a new season, where a new leadership gifting is needed, much like the transition between Moses to Joshua? Or is the context relatively the same and a duplicate leader is needed, much like Elijah to Elisha's transition.

Self-awareness is greatly needed for a church family to best understand the context they find themselves in. To help with self-awareness, our church has a long term outside consultant with whom we regularly communicate, and every few years he will visit, assess the church, and consult with us. Our church staff uses the Grip-Birkman personality assessment tool to better understand ourselves, and how our team functions together. When looking at these assessments we have identified that our founding pastor falls into the charismatic leader and I find myself more of a bureaucratic leader.

Ideally, these leadership styles would have been identified and discussed before a transition plan was put in place. However, our leadership team gave more of the weight and responsibility of the transition over to our founding pastor and did not participate in

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<sup>2</sup> Max Weber and A. M. Henderson, *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization* (New York, NY: Martino Fine Books, 2012), 363.

many leadership transition discussions in the early years of our transition. Our founding pastor moved forward following his intuition and discernment. It was not until after I was hired, and later into our transition, that we have been able to more formally assess leadership styles and giftings. The transition has worked in our situation, because our founding pastor has had great discernment and wisdom through this process.

Another important component of the process is that we have been in a five-year transition plan. This is considerably longer than most plans probably need to be, but it has given us the ability to have greater self-awareness of what the transition plan requires, and what it will look like. While most churches do not need five years, a leadership team would be wise to make their transition overlap long enough to get an honest self-assessment of their situation and leadership styles.

Understanding context is important in every leadership transition, and self-awareness is needed to understand context. Self-awareness can be developed by intentionally using tools like consultants and assessment tests. Self-awareness can also occur through the gifts of discernment, and with time and intentional reflection. A church would be wise to intentionally assess their context and give attention to their leadership styles before moving forward with a leadership transition.

### **Moving from Sole Leader to Leadership**

Because a founding pastor starts a church with a handful of families, the leadership style and personality of the founder shapes the culture and direction of this

new church.<sup>3</sup> The founding pastor plays an enormous role in the early days of a church, often doing all the preaching/teaching, pastoral care, administration, and sometimes even the cleaning and finances. When a church starts to grow, the leadership responsibilities start to be shared. The extent to which the founding pastor's leadership is shared plays a role in the transition of a new, incoming leader.

Chapter 3 discussed the combination of theology of leadership and leadership theory, suggesting the need to see everyone within the church as a leader, and to see leadership as flowing from the members of the body of Christ. If the vision-casting and leadership is placed solely on a founding pastor, then the new incoming senior pastor will have impossible shoes to fill or will possibly lead the church/organization in a totally new direction, making the church unrecognizable from its earlier vision/values/goals. Kondrath articulates this need for leadership responsibilities to shift from solely the founding pastor to the leadership found within the church family. "The vision-keeping needs to become the responsibility of a designated group within the community whose job it is to see that the new leader remains faithful to the vision that created the community. . . . What needs to take place is a shift from trust in the leader to confidence in the leadership of the community, its goals, and its structure."<sup>4</sup>

This can often be very hard for founding pastors, as it is difficult to let go of something that they have carefully shaped and have so much of their time and personality invested in. A founding pastor must have a good understanding of a theology of

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<sup>3</sup> Nelson, 51.

<sup>4</sup> Kondrath, "Transitioning from Charismatic Founder," 95.

leadership and the ability to let go for the sake of the church family's future, for generations to come.

I have been fortunate to have a founding pastor who is willing, and faithful, to let go. In the early days, our founding pastor played many roles. Like typical founding pastors, he would preach, do all the pastoral care, set vision, clean the building, oversee the leadership team meetings, etc. As the church grew, he carefully and thoughtfully handed off responsibilities. Yet for many years he continued to lead the Leadership Team meetings. About 15 years into the church's conception, he realized the healthy step of handing off the Leadership Team chairperson role to others in our church and it became a revolving position. That step allowed our Leadership Team to play a more active role in crafting our church vision and took the weight off of a sole leader.

The longevity of our transition has also helped transfer responsibility from our founding pastor. The long transition has given us time to see gaps that need to be filled and to discuss core values that are important to maintain through the transition. The extended period of our transition has also allowed me to voice areas where I want to lead and feel gifted to lead, and allowed me to seek others to lead in areas I am not as gifted/willing.

One of the difficulties within our context and church culture is the role of the occupational pastor. Any pastor who makes his or her living from full-time pastoral work is naturally expected to play a greater leadership role in the church. This can make it difficult to instill the importance of leadership throughout the entire church family and volunteers. We are still struggling to instill this leadership principle throughout our entire church family and, as a result, I am expected to be the primary vision caster and "doer"

within our leadership team. Due to the long nature of our transition, we have been able to navigate this issue, but it could prove to be difficult for incoming pastors with less history and understanding of our church family.

I believe it is necessary for our church to continue moving more towards a theology of leadership within the entire body of Christ to ensure continued healthy leadership transitions in the future.

### **Emotional Intelligence**

It has been said that a founding pastor transition can feel like a death or like a divorce. Anyone moving through death or divorce would be wise to get counseling and help, in engaging in the different emotions involved. The emotions involved in these situations should not be ignored, and acknowledging these emotions and walking through them, is a part of the process in moving forward.

The same can be said for a church family dealing with the major change that comes with leadership transition. The goal should not be to forgo leadership transitions, as that is impossible, but to move through leadership transitions in as healthy a way as possible. When a church walks through a healthy emotional leadership transition, it helps the transition feel less like divorce and more like giving your daughter away in marriage. There is both a time of grieving—letting go—but also a time of excitement—anticipation—for the new journey ahead.

Using emotional intelligence to help a church navigate this transition acknowledges the complex emotions that will inevitably surface. There are many different emotions and tensions to navigate as the church family, staff, elders, founding



pastor, and incoming pastor find their new norm in the midst of the transition. Struggles for control often take place, and there is a great sense of loss, confusion, and fear for many in the church family.<sup>5</sup> Every transition has its own unique story. Some transitions go smoothly while some result in pain and a disaster, yet in every transition one will find a mix of emotions, both high and low.

While many churches successfully follow popular business succession plans, these plans can sometimes neglect the emotional needs of the church family.<sup>6</sup> Creating a process that includes attention to the emotional needs of the church family ensures that everyone feels included in the process.

Addressing the emotional needs can happen in both direct ways and indirect ways.<sup>7</sup> In my personal leadership transition, the extended amount of time in which our transition has taken place has provided for many indirect ways for our church family to process this transition. For years our church family has seen me preach, teach, lead, do pastoral care, and has been given the time to personally get to know me and my family. They have not been surprised by the transition coming and the long period of time has ensured many opportunities for all involved to have many conversations.

However, we have not directly addressed the church family's emotions very well. Even though the long period of our transition means that people will not be caught by surprise, there are still differing levels of grief that some in the church family are feeling,

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<sup>5</sup> Gilbert, *Extraordinary Leadership*, 12.

<sup>6</sup> Friedman, *Generation to Generation*, 113.

<sup>7</sup> Travis Bradberry and Jean Greaves, *Emotional Intelligence 2.0* (San Diego, CA: TalentSmart, 2009), 179.

due to “their” founding pastor moving into a new role. Organizations often neglect to mention the more difficult emotions, and instead default toward creating excitement for the “new” transition. Our church has focused more on the excitement of something new, and without adequately addressing the more difficult emotions. It would be wise for us to acknowledge these emotions more directly, whether in a sermon series on moving through grief, open forums for question/answer times, or just regularly talking about these emotions. A good question for church families to answer is whether the founding pastor, succeeding pastor, or leadership team be the leading presence in helping the church family navigate these more direct avenues for emotions. Without direction, it can be uncomfortable for the founding pastor to initiate these times.

Self-awareness is also very valuable in regards to emotional intelligence.<sup>8</sup> In retrospect, one of the opportunities our church missed in helping us directly deal with the complex emotions involved in our transition was in not bringing in our outside church consultant to help us. While our staff and leadership team continually reviewed our Grip-Birkman assessment and looked at how our team functions together, we went the last 5+ years of the transition without bringing in our outside consultant. I believe an outside set of eyes might have been able to see and address the difficult emotional conversations needed to help walk some people through the emotional process that those of us within the church family might have difficulty seeing. An outside set of eyes also might have been able to help us more quickly navigate the complex transition process by facilitating

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 61.

some of the difficult conversations and helping everyone see the financial reality and implications involved due to founding pastor transitions.

### *Build Trust and Listening*

A long term founding pastor through time has built the trust of the church family and this trust will play a significant role in helping the church family navigate the complex emotional process that occurs when a founding pastor transitions. However, the succeeding pastor will need to do the important work to gain the church family's trust and also play a healthy role in navigating the many complex emotions.

The establishment of trust between a pastor and church family is a key ingredient in a fruitful ministry. Mark Littleton quotes Clarence Frances as saying, "you can buy a man's time, his physical presence, a measured number of his skilled muscular motions; but you cannot buy his enthusiasm, initiative, and loyalty. These you must earn."<sup>9</sup> Littleton writes about a pastor who listens carefully and places a priority on remembering peoples' names: "It was easy to see why this pastor was loved; because he listened, he conveyed respect and acceptance, two essential builders of trust."<sup>10</sup>

Roy Price writes of how the simple act of listening has helped him to develop the trust that was lacking in his ministry. To start building trust he said, "I would listen in the foyer when greeting people and try to ask something I am aware of in their families, jobs, or personal lives. I listen at committee meetings. I listen in personal conversation. I listen

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<sup>9</sup> Mark Littleton, "Trust: A Crucial Ingredient for Survival," *Leadership* (Winter 1981): 101.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 103

in counseling. By listening, I have nurtured trust.”<sup>11</sup> He acknowledges that frequent criticism can cause pastors to become distant and confesses, “I have been weary of church boards, fearful of rejection, and hesitant of self-disclosure. Obviously, my attitude has not been an aid in building trust.”<sup>12</sup> Nevertheless, God often uses painful situations to mold pastors into more vulnerable and authentic people who can be used in church families. When those situations are handled with integrity and faithfulness, trust will be the result.

John Fletcher explores the role of spiritual authenticity in the relationship between pastor and people. In conversations with many people, Fletcher discovered a lack of trust many had toward pastors. He states that, “A pastor needs to be reasonably trusted before he or she is called into the deeper life problems of the church family or into a helping role in the wider community.”<sup>13</sup> Fletcher asserts that, “once established, trust becomes a launching pad onto greater heights of relationship and transformation, for both the change agent and those he or she is seeking to serve.”<sup>14</sup>

The process of building trust with a church family must begin early in the relationship between pastor and people. Robert Kemper calls for an intentional beginning for a new pastoral assignment. He suggests that this requires constant renegotiation and the building of trust: “The objective before us is to design a first year that helps us get

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<sup>11</sup> Roy Price, “Building Trust Between Pastor and Congregation,” *Leadership* (Spring 1980): 50.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 52.

<sup>13</sup> John C. Fletcher, *Religious Authenticity in the Clergy: Implications for Theological Education* (Washington, DC: The Alban Institute, 1979), 4.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 54.

acquainted so that trust grows; so we can continually negotiate a lasting relationship of growth and trust.”<sup>15</sup>

In my personal transition, time has played a significant part in building trust between the church family and me. The great benefit of working closely with our founding pastor and staff, as well as the many ministry experiences I have been able to share with our church family, has played a significant role in building trust. I believe the trust that has been established will play a significant role as we continue to deal with the complex emotions involved in our transition.

### **Family Systems**

Being self-aware of your emotional setting is one thing, navigating complex emotions is another. It is possible to walk through the emotional process with a church family and surface emotions that become toxic or harmful to other family members. This is why just acknowledging emotions is not sufficient, and why just a single emotionally intelligent leader is not sufficient in navigating a founding pastor leadership transition. Many churches have used Family Systems Theory to help navigate this complex process.

Often in churches when a Senior Pastor leaves there is an expectation that they will not return for a significant period of time, to ensure that the incoming pastor is able to appropriately exercise his or her leadership. This practice does not recognize the family nature of the church. While a Senior Pastor might be ready to move into a new role, or while an incoming leader might be better equipped to lead the church in a new

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<sup>15</sup> Robert G. Kemper, *Beginning a New Pastorate* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1978), 93.

direction, neither of these realities make it is necessary for the senior pastor to disappear when retiring or taking a new role.

Much like on a family farm, a mother and father's abilities will eventually slow down as they age, and their children will continue in the family work, often times engaging in new innovations but keeping the same family purpose. In the family farm example, the children, and the family, must all learn how to navigate their new roles and the change that comes with their aging father and mother still playing a present role in the family.

Bowen Family Systems Theory helps navigate these emotions and changes, by helping churches see the different emotional triangles present, and by encouraging leaders to become self-differentiated. Our church incorporated Bowen's triangle theory in a very helpful way. Early on in the transition, our leadership team told our founding pastor and me that we could handle the details of the transition and just report back to them. This proved to be problematic because both of us were too passive regarding the transition and did not want to step on toes, so we needed a third party to help us. We also needed help in walking through the complex financial matters that come with succession. Bowen's theory helped us identify that we needed a healthy triangle to help us navigate some of the transition logistics. We also acknowledged that since we were establishing a triangle, that we needed to make sure that anything spoken to our founding pastor would also be spoken to me, and vice versa. That way no secrets or assumptions would be made that might turn a healthy transition into a toxic one.

I also was personally encouraged and challenged by Bowen's explanation of self-differentiation. This became a primary focus of growth for me during our transition.

Differentiation helped me to understand how to be in significant emotional contact with others and still be able to function as a more autonomous self, without having the automatic emotional system processes determine thinking and behavior.<sup>16</sup> For me, this was a way to gain emotional maturity.

Throughout the transition I have been challenged by some people to keep the church the “same,” and other people have challenged me to make quick changes to the church. I have had many express sadness over the transition, and many others express excitement for this new season in our church. I have been caught in all of these different emotional feelings. Bowen has helped me practice being emotionally connected to others while also having differing feelings and objectives for our church. Becoming a self-differentiated leader has allowed me to emotionally connect with those in my church family who might have strong feelings that are different than mine, but to engage with a non-anxious, secure presence.

Family Systems Theory has also helped our church imagine a process where we keep our founding pastor on staff, but just in a different role. No longer is there the need for us to ask our founding pastor to disappear so I can exercise my leadership. Instead we have a language and a vision for how a healthy family can age together, changing roles along the way, while maintaining a consistent vision through a new season in the life of the church family.

Church families that are navigating the complex emotions involved in long-term founding pastor succession would be wise to implement a plan and process to guide

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<sup>16</sup> Richardson, “Bowen Family Systems Theory,” 388.

them. Family Systems Theory can provide language and vision to help the congregation move forward and hopefully ensure a healthy emotional process during a challenging time in the life of a church family.

### *Embracing A Multi-Generational Church*

In their book, *Reaching People under 40 while Keeping People over 60: Being Church for All Generations*, Edward Hammett and James Pierce approach church family life through a family systems understanding. They state, “Heartfelt connection generates great power, even between different generations! Connection clarifies calling, fuels dreams, empowers ministry, and moves one toward fulfilling God’s unique mission for each person in the heartfelt connection.”<sup>17</sup> Acknowledging this truth can be very helpful for church families as the walk through leadership transition.

When a church is founded, it generally is made up of individuals and families that reflect the age and makeup of the founding pastor and her or his family. As the church ages, the families in the church also age. By the time a Founding pastor has been serving for 20+ years, a church family has had the time to grow and mature and there is likely to be a church made up of all sorts of different age groups.<sup>18</sup> This is important to acknowledge when a new, incoming, possibly younger, pastor transitions in. This is another reason why Family Systems Theory can be a helpful guide through a founding pastor transition.

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<sup>17</sup> Edward H. Hammett and James R. Pierce, *Reaching People under 40 while Keeping People over 60: Being Church for All Generations* (Danvers, MA: Chalice Press, 2007), 164.

<sup>18</sup> Nelson, 51.



Family Systems Theory used in a church context is one way in which a church family can discover a heartfelt connection between its people of all generations. The church can discover a heartfelt connection by establishing relationships across generational divides, especially by seeing how the different generations influence each other. When a church family is seen as being supportive for all generations, the church is equipped to reach people in the younger generation, while also keeping people in the older generation. It can be powerful for a church to see this modeled by the founding pastor and incoming pastor.

Churches may adopt the younger generation's way of thinking and doing church, in order to take the church into the future. Churches may also seek the older generation's way of thinking and doing church to keep their church in the successful past. If a church only sees these two extremes, then the church family will keep chasing one empty promise after another, confused about where God is guiding their church. If a church family sees both perspectives in a mysterious harmony, then the church can discover and discern a great vision forward.

Encouraging a multigenerational church has been very helpful for my personal leadership transition. Because it has been natural for me to connect with the younger families within my church, I have intentionally chosen to spend considerable time getting to know the numerous founding families and older families within my church. These relationships have provided me with endless stories, scenarios that have shaped our church history and purpose. Focusing on these relationships has also built a level of trust, as older families learn to embrace a new, younger pastor. I have also spoken numerous times on the importance of remaining a multigenerational church and made it a priority to

not just pursue younger families and have younger family church programming. Family system theory has helped our church have language and vision for embracing our multigenerational church family.

### **Walking through Leadership Transitions**

In *The Present Future: Six Tough Questions for the Church*, Reggie McNeal argues that church culture is struggling to survive. McNeal states, “The current church culture in North America is on life support. It is living off the work, money, and energy of previous generations from a previous world order.”<sup>19</sup> Leadership transitions are vital for the future of our churches to move from generation to generation. Yet too many churches are holding tight to the way they have always done church. Church leadership too often relies on past generations to sustain them, and they maintain church from that point of view. When churches are limited to the past perspective, they also limit themselves to what God is doing in front of them, and through them, in the present and into the future, and they neglect the value of leadership transition planning.

One example of how the church overlooks what is before them, is the church’s approach to leadership development. This has created problems in succession planning, and in younger leaders transitioning into more significant roles. Specifically, many churches are struggling to develop new leadership within the younger generation; the leadership of these churches tends to be the same people from the same previous

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<sup>19</sup> Reggie McNeal, *The Present Future: Six Tough Questions for the Church* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2003), 1.

generations.<sup>20</sup> The churches that are struggling to look to the younger generation for their leadership are also struggling to look at their community for ministry and mission. Churches have become so focused on their internal problems that they have overlooked the problems of their community, specifically the real brokenness in people's lives that Jesus came to heal. When the church focuses solely on their problems, church members no longer are equipped to do ministry and mission in their lives.

A proper understanding of a theology of leadership imparts the need for mentorship and discipleship. Through mentorships, the church's current leadership discovers the ones who God guides to leadership out of their relationships with the younger generation. The mentorship relationship for leadership development can help prepare everyone within the church family for their leadership role. This can help answer the church's problem of discovering, training, and empowering new leadership within the younger generation, which in turn will have a significant impact on the leadership transition process.

In her book, *Jesus, CEO: Using Ancient Wisdom for Visionary Leadership*, Laurie Jones describes Jesus as a CEO, but she does not do so from a business model. Jones' book title does reflect a business model, but she seeks to redefine business leadership through her understanding of Jesus' approach to leadership and I believe this has significant impact on how a church family can view leadership transitions. Jones states, "Probably most of us would choose the bouquet [of flowers over a packet of seeds]. But

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<sup>20</sup> Nelson, 88.

if you are a leader, you realize the limitations of cut flowers, no matter how beautiful they are, and are more apt to spend your time gathering, sorting, and planting seeds.”<sup>21</sup>

When the end result becomes the focus, leaders neglect to plant seeds and water gardens, and ignore the potential of relationships with future generations. Approaching leadership transitions through the business model focuses on the end result by looking at the church family who is already a bouquet of flowers. Approaching leadership transition within a church family with a long-term perspective focuses on the seeds of Jesus nurturing people into the leadership roles of God’s calling for generations to come.

In the competitive culture of the business model, one can demonstrate their leadership abilities by showing off the beauty of their flower bouquets. Yet, a culture of comparison does not create space for healthy leadership transitions and a culture of comparison and competition is not a way of nurturing a packet of seeds to become beautiful flowers. A theology of leadership played out in the church family is about nurturing people to become followers for Jesus and embrace their leadership gifting. When a church family is successfully transitioning leaders, they do so from the perspective of nurturing the seeds in people’s lives. When a business model adopts a competitive spirit within the organization, it creates a culture that does not have room for the tedious but important work of nurturing the garden of leadership transitions for the church family.

The nurturing work is not easy and can often times get your hands dirty. This is why emotional intelligence and Family Systems Theory can guide you through the

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<sup>21</sup> Laurie B. Jones, *Jesus, CEO: Using Ancient Wisdom for Visionary Leadership* (New York: Hyperion, 1995), 71, 73.

process. Nurturing healthy, growing seeds takes an intentional process and so does leadership transition. Sometimes there are weeds to pull, and sometimes there are uncontrollable circumstances within nature that slow the process down. Being self-aware and knowledgeable can help one intentionally nurture the seeds through an ever-changing process.

Leadership transition within the church family requires nurturing as well. Emotional intelligence provides insight to see and acknowledge the complex emotions involved in major change, while Family Systems Theory provides the intentionality and process to walk through that change in a secure and non-anxious way.

Nurturing church leadership and engaging in leadership transition planning are vital steps in guiding a church family through leadership transition. Throughout this dissertation, we have explored the following question for the church - how can church families prepare for the inevitable leadership transition that will occur within their church family, particularly the founding pastor transition? The question is vital in allowing the next generation to be equipped for ministry and mission as well as enlisting others to become followers of Jesus.

This dissertation has considered the question from several perspectives. The second chapter looked at context and leadership styles found in the scripture. The third chapter approached this question through examining theology of leadership versus the common practice of one sole leader. The role emotional intelligence can play in helping and shaping leadership transitions was discussed in the fourth chapter. The fifth chapter reviewed Family Systems Theory, particularly Bowen Family Systems Theory, to address the question within a church family context.

A church can use these findings to help guide and prioritize their need to plan leadership transitions within their church family. This will come through healthy dialogue within relationships and a vision for seeing their church family thrive into future generations. This takes a long-term perspective that is put in place long before a founding pastor or leader announces he or she is transitioning roles.

My personal transition story has not been perfect and time will tell whether it has been a healthy transition. Yet these findings and theories have given my church family a process to walk through, so that we do not blindly and wishfully hope our leadership transition will be successful. Leadership transition is too important to leave to happenstance. May our church families across the world take this issue seriously and plan appropriately for the sake of Jesus being made known for generations and generations.

## Addendum

This journey through the George Fox Leadership and Global Perspectives program has been life changing. I expected a challenge, I expected to make friends, and I expected to grow in knowledge and perspective, however, I've benefitted in a way I didn't fully expect. This program has challenged the way I think and has taught me how to go past the surface level insights and dig deeper in search for truth and meaning. I believe my work throughout the three years of this program displays the journey of my learning. In this addendum, I will share some of what I have learned in regards to the sources and voices I read and listen to.

Three years ago, when I started this program I came in as a pastor searching for a challenge. I never would have considered myself an academic or a scholar. For sermon or teaching preparation, after reading scripture and praying, I might scan devotional material for insights or common commentaries like J. Vernon McGee's *Thru The Bible* series. Through my basic study, I gathered up insights that would guide me as I lead my church family. While my preparation wasn't intentionally lazy, my eyes have been opened to a deeper way to engage the complex messy issues that often surround our studies and the scriptures.

As a reader of this dissertation you have maybe observed this journey. Early in my writings I used popular newspaper articles or devotional commentaries as sources. Often measuring them up against complex, deeper works. You may have noticed in Chapter 2 of this paper that I used insights from J. Vernon McGee's *Thru The Bible* series and shared them right alongside John Sailhamer's work in *The Pentateuch as*

*Narrative: a Biblical-Theological Commentary*. McGee's work is what many would consider a devotional commentary, full of great insights and learnings, but not based on deep, thorough research of the texts or contexts of a passage. John Sailhamer's work is what many would call an exegetical commentary. Sailhamer's work dives much deeper into the complex messy context of the scriptures searching for truth. I've learned through this doctorate journey that using McGee's work alongside of Sailhamer's work is not best practice.

In this journey, I have learned that the kinds of voices one listens to impacts the kind of work one outputs and this impressed upon me the importance of better understanding what I am reading and listening to. As a preacher and teacher, I often use commentaries, so a better understanding of commentaries has become very important and helpful to me. Biblical commentaries can be broadly divided into three types: exegetical, homiletical, and devotional. "Exegesis" can be defined as "the *practice* of and the set of *procedures* for discovering the author's intended meaning,"<sup>22</sup> and good exegetical commentaries then take readers through each passage, digging deep into the *content* of the chapters, paragraphs, and verses. They explain the meanings of the words, phrases, clauses, sentences, and paragraphs, and follow the flow of logic in the text.<sup>23</sup> They take readers back and forth between the "forest" and the "trees" giving proper attention (1) to the broad sweep of the large literary units and the theological messages at this level and

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<sup>22</sup> Walter C. Kaiser and Jr, *Toward an Exegetical Theology: Biblical Exegesis for Preaching and Teaching* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1998), 47.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*



(2) to the details of the individual words and phrases.<sup>24</sup> Such commentaries also show how each of these two levels interacts with the other. For scholarly academic research, exegetical commentaries are best practice.

Homiletical (or "preaching") commentaries are much more self-consciously focused upon making relevant applications of the text to the modern, contemporary world, and they commonly refer to events, ideas, and movements in contemporary culture.<sup>25</sup> As such, they often have an immediate relevance, but they also can become outdated quickly as the culture changes. Most such commentaries are weak concerning the exposition of the text's meaning, compared to exegetical commentaries. Devotional commentaries are often similar, but their focus usually is more individualistic. Often, they are very impressionistic, commenting at random on individual verses or portions of verses, but paying little or no attention to their context.<sup>26</sup> Homiletical and devotional commentaries have a place and purpose in our study, but should not be relied upon or elevated above deeper exegetical commentaries. This is what makes my use of McGee alongside Sailhamer not best practice for an academic work like this dissertation.

In discussing this journey with my advisors during my Oral Defense of this dissertation my eyes opened to just how far I have come in my studies. After going through this program, I have grown a deeper understanding of what it means to learn and search for truth. I can no longer just affirm devotional material in my teaching and

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<sup>24</sup> David Howard, "Evaluating Commentaries on Joshua," *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 2 no. 3 (Fall 1998): 4.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

preaching, but instead I've grown in my desire and understanding to think deeply though complex messy issues in the scriptures and lead my church family into actions from those revelations. Our world needs pastors that will be lifelong learners that enter their studies not just looking to be affirmed in their assumptions, but instead enter difficult conversations, pursue truth in complex issues, and search for the true meaning and purpose of the scriptures. I've grown significantly during this program and I will now forever have eyes for the kinds of voices, writings, and sources I listen to, knowing they impact the kind of work I will output.

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