2-2020

Leading Change Through Reactivity: Preparing Congregations for Change and Processing the Resultant Reactivity in a Healthy Manner

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LEADING CHANGE THROUGH REACTIVITY: PREPARING CONGREGATIONS FOR CHANGE AND PROCESSING THE RESULTANT REACTIVITY IN A HEALTHY MANNER

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF PORTLAND SEMINARY
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

BY
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PORTLAND, OR
FEBRUARY 2020

Portland Seminary
George Fox University
Portland, Oregon

CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

DMin Dissertation

This is to certify that the DMin Dissertation of

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has been approved by
the Dissertation Committee on February 17, 2020
for the degree of Doctor of Ministry in Leadership and Spiritual Formation

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To Dr. David Smith, Ph.D.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am grateful for the investment the faithful team of teachers and administrators at Portland Seminary has made in my life. I am especially thankful for Dr. Clifford Berger who made it easy to enroll in the program; Dr. Loren Kerns who pushed us where we needed to go in order to shape the structure of this project; Dr. MaryKate Morse, whose leadership and teaching have changed my life; and Dr. Lacy Borgo, whose encouragement, prayers, and advice have helped to carry me through. Your impact on my life over these last three years is overwhelming. I am so grateful for each of you.

It would not have been possible for me to engage in this work, let alone enroll in this program had it not been for the encouragement and support of Dr. David Smith. Dave, your belief in me when I hadn't even completed my undergrad degree inspired me to press forward. But beyond that, the way you worked with me to help me complete my degree and to enroll in my master's program has made all the difference. Now this pursuit of a Doctor of Ministry degree is only possible because I had someone like you reaching out to a fellow brother and helping him to achieve a life-long goal. I love and appreciate you, brother.

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ABSTRACT

When a pastor introduces systemic change to a congregation, it injects anxiety into the congregational system, which in turn leads to reactivity. The result is resistance to change, which often becomes hostile. Pastors who do not adequately prepare their people for change or who do not know how to help their people process the conflict that results from change resistance in a healthy manner face hostilities that most likely result in their termination or resignation. Consequently, this work seeks to analyze how reactivity results from proposed changes; what pastors can do to better prepare their people for change; and how pastors can nurture their people through change in a healthy manner.

Chapter one examines physiological reactions to change. Chapter two examines two ways that Jesus introduced change in his setting and his motives for driving change in an effort to intentionally stir up reactivity. There were other times when he nurtured change, meaning he introduced change in a way that allowed him to pastor the people he was leading. Chapter three looks at change through church history, focusing on examples of reactivity that turned violent, as well as a few examples of change that was led in a healthy manner. Chapter four examines the dynamics of internal family systems as a necessary focus for pastors who wish to successfully navigate change. Chapter five looks at how to lead a congregation in healthy conflict, as well as how to provide safe environments to allow people time and space to process the grief associated with change.

CHAPTER 1:

LEADING CHANGE IS DANGEROUS

This material has been birthed out of more than simple research. I walked through a difficult season in my life where my confidence was shaken, my leadership was questioned, and I doubted my calling. I had led change without properly preparing my congregation. The resultant reactivity from the congregation became hostile to the point that my physical health was at risk. I blamed the people, thinking them immature and selfish. I did not realize at the time that they were behaving in an instinctual manner. (Reactivity is always the result when anxiety is introduced into a family system). I also was not self-differentiated enough to process through the reactivity with them. I became an anxious presence, which only served to exacerbate the tension. It was because of these painful experiences that I set out on a journey to try to understand better how to lead people through the process of change in a way that is healthy and will honor Christ. Change is necessary if an organization is going to grow. The church is not exempt from that reality. But if the church must change, then it seemed to me there must be a way to walk through that process without it resulting in broken relationships and damaged testimonies. This dissertation is a result of that journey of discovery.

When pastors lead a church through change, it naturally introduces anxiety into the congregational system. Limbic reactivity is initiated, which can often lead to resistance. “Limbic reactivity”—an idea captured by Daniel Goleman, who coined the phrase “amygdala hijack” in his 1996 book, *Emotional Intelligence: Why It Can Matter More than IQ*— describes an emotional reaction that is out of proportion to the stimulus. Pastors who have not been trained to prepare their people for change, nor have been

equipped to help nurture their people through the change process, are likely to face termination or resignation. This work explores why limbic reactivity occurs and offers practical suggestions for leading change in a healthy manner.

In preparation for this project, I interviewed pastors from around the country. Upon request I have kept their identities anonymous. Several themes surfaced during my interviews. Each pastor went into his or her church situation with inaccurate expectations. They were expected to grow their churches and were encouraged to lead their people, but when changes necessary to leading growth were initiated, there was extreme resistance. Also, even though each pastor introduced systemic changes, there was little if any congregational preparation for the proposed changes. In each case, when change was initiated, the pastors sought to create buy-in from their respective congregations by casting vision, answering questions, and attempting to convince their people to join in the movement. Even so, every pastor experienced push back. In each situation, people left the church. In some cases, there was a mass exodus of people. Often when people left, they contacted those who stayed to complain about the pastor. In some cases, they attempted to recruit people out of the church. There was also excessive gossip on social media. Each pastor experienced such severe stress that there were physical ramifications. Every pastor except one eventually left his or her church due to hostile opposition.

I will refer to the first pastor as Ron. He currently serves in Oregon. When Ron went to his church, he did not expect the church to be a turn-around situation. The previous pastor had been there for twenty-one years. Things seemed healthy and he thought he would simply pick up where the previous pastor left off. However, as soon as he arrived, chaos erupted. Ron did not ask questions or seek guidance from his people but

made changes in an autocratic way. Ron suffered two heart attacks and five bleeding ulcers during his time of congregational resistance. Remarkably, he stayed in his position and he is still there.

I will call the second pastor Dominic. He pastored in the southeastern United States. Dominic said it was the most stressful time in his life. There was tension with his congregation, and his stress was exacerbated because he did not feel his District Superintendent supported him. In fact, he felt he might have been able to survive the reactivity if he had felt the support of denominational officials.

The third pastor is Dave. He led a turn-around church through change, but received such pushback that he had to leave. Immediately, after arriving, he assessed his church's ingrown situation; told the people that if they did not focus outward toward the community then they were going to die; and launched change initiatives. New people in the community were being reached, but the members rejected Dave's leadership. He experienced a sense of deep sorrow, describing it as "a broken heart."

Next was Barbara, who lives in Nova Scotia, but the church she spoke of was in Wisconsin. Due to her experience, she is currently not in ministry. Barbara made a major staff change by taking away a leadership role from one of the founding family members of the church. She did not discuss it with the individual; she simply made the change and the man who was released from his position found out about it through an accidental series of circumstances. That created such a swell of opposition that Barbara was eventually forced to resign.

Patty pastored a church in Alberta, Canada. She was told her new church was enthusiastic about her coming, and that she received a unanimous vote. What she did not

know was that the voting membership only consisted of four people. The other sixteen were non-voting attenders, and they did not approve of a woman pastor. The resistance was so strong that any changes were rejected out of hand.

Next was Anna, who pastored in Shelburne, Ontario. Anna came to church thinking the church was healthy. She based her assessments on the fact that everyone seemed to genuinely care for one another. She soon learned that once anxiety was introduced into the system because of proposed changes, any signs of unity were superficial. She only lasted a couple of months. She was physically affected, vomiting on a regular basis. Anna said she felt rejected; her confidence was depleted to the point that she contemplated leaving the ministry.

Finally, I interviewed Johnny. He led a church to growth, but once the new group of people approached critical mass, the original members resisted the changes. They even approached Johnny's District Superintendent to try and bring judicial action against him. Eventually Johnny felt compelled to leave.

I saw from the interviews that the pastors were encouraged to initiate change, but they were not taught to prepare their congregations or teach them how to process emotions in a healthy manner. The pastors thought their congregations were healthy, but the initiation of change revealed the grim reality that their congregations were neither prepared to handle conflict, nor ready to process the extreme emotional reactions that often accompany systemic changes. The limbic resistance to change, when the reptilian brain reacts instinctively, was something they were not prepared to face.[1] The reptilian

[1] Peter L. Steinke, *How Your Church Family Works: Understanding Congregations as Emotional Systems* (Herndon, VA: The Alban Institute, Inc., 2006), 21.

brain is the instinctual part of the brain. It controls bodily functions like breathing, heart rate, and perspiration. When anxiety is felt, the reptilian brain diverts blood flow from the reasoning centers of the brain to the extremities in preparation for a flight or fight response.

These are not isolated incidents. Pastors face change resistance on a regular basis. It is one of the greatest sources of stress and pastoral burn out. The purpose of this paper is to analyze the reasons for congregational resistance, and to examine alternative approaches to introducing change that will allow the pastor to work with the congregation in a healthy manner.

In chapter one I will share an all too common story. A pastor was ill-prepared to lead his congregation through change and, as a result, he almost left the ministry. In order to understand why resistance is often painful and sometimes hostile, this chapter also examines what happens in a congregational system when change is introduced.

Chapter two looks at change initiatives and resistance in the Bible. Scripture gives many examples of change and resistance, especially in the Gospels where Jesus introduced cultural change that so threatened the establishment that he was eventually killed in order to silence him. The chapter also shares other examples from the Biblical text, as well as considers a significant objection to this paper's thesis. This paper makes the case for the need to prepare a congregation for systemic changes in a way that ensures the highest possibility of healthy transition. However, an examination of the Gospels indicates that Jesus did not do that. He apparently proposed major change without concern about group reactivity; and in fact, may have used the hostile reactions to further his agenda.

Chapter three examines change throughout church history. The multiplicity of denominations is a testament to negative reactivity when change has been introduced. This chapter makes the point that chaos resulting from change is the historic pattern. The question is whether or not one should learn from that history and seek to alter one's approach to leading change, or follow in the path the church has seemingly practiced for two millennia.

In chapter four, the reader is introduced to possible solutions. It examines internal family systems as a means of understanding congregational reactivity when change is introduced. The chapter also looks at how to navigate change with an understanding of how internal family systems work within a local congregation.

Chapter five continues the process of preparing a congregation for change by looking at the triggers for limbic reactivity, offering an approach to healthy conflict resolution and helping a congregation understand the cycles of grief. Finally, this dissertation concludes with a review of the topics covered and suggestions for aiding church leaders when preparing to introduce change to their congregation. Ultimately, it should be remembered that the changes that are proposed in a church are never as important as the people who are being asked to change.

It Happened One Sunday

One pastor discovered the hard way the lesson Ronald Heifetz taught: "People resist in all kinds of creative and unexpected ways that can get you taken out of the game."[2] After the service, Pastor Steve was making his way through the lobby, greeting

[2] Ronald Heifetz and Marty Linsky, *Leadership on the Line: Staying Alive Through the Dangers of Change* (Boston: Harvard Business Review Press, 2017), introduction, Kindle.

people and thanking them for coming. He approached one of the regulars in the congregation. “How are you doing today, Ted?” he asked. “I sure wish I was one of your friends,” he answered. Steve was taken aback at his terse reply. “What do you mean?” he asked. Ted had heard Steve’s annual report the previous Sunday night when he shared his conviction to pour time and energy into leaders so the ministry could be multiplied through them. It seemed Ted had misunderstood Steve’s meaning, thinking he was going to isolate himself from the congregation and give his time and attention to only a few people.

The previous year, Steve launched a change initiative in the church. A consultation group analyzed their ministry and congregation. They created a “prescription,” which highlighted the things the church was doing well, the things that needed improvement, and their recommendations for change. The congregation was given a copy of the written report, instructed to pray over it for the next two weeks without speaking to anyone about it, and then voted on the proposed changes. There was a town meeting before the vote to give people a chance to ask questions, but beyond that the people were discouraged from discussing the prescription. The congregation voted in favor of the changes by ninety six percent.

The leadership team was ready to forge ahead, not realizing that an initial positive response to change is typically not a true reading of the congregation. In speaking about a congregation’s response to change, Gilbert R. Rendle writes, “The initial expressions of excitement or relief allow participants to be hopeful that they will be able to march through change untouched. Leaders and members alike often become discouraged and

disillusioned later as members of the congregational system begin to work through more difficult feelings."[3]

Steve's leadership team began implementing the changes and all seemed well. Part of the prescription was for the pastoral team to multiply their leadership by giving specific attention to potential leaders. That was what Steve's layman was referring to when he said he wished he could be one of Steve's friends. When Steve tried to explain what that meant, Ted interrupted, "You are ruining the church." He said it loud enough to be overheard by several people. Steve tried to contain the situation, but Ted went on for ten minutes in front of children and guests. It was not the first indication that there was trouble. The previous month, two families visibly left the church. The consultants warned that many churches are in favor of needed change until those changes affect people personally. The consultants cautioned the pastors to be prepared for resistance from the congregation. Steve thought they were prepared, but he did not anticipate the level of resistance that came.

Over the course of a year, the church made several significant changes, all according to the prescription of the consultants. The leadership shifted their focus from looking inward, to reaching outside the church to serve the community. The church partnered with fourteen different agencies in their town to engage their community with the love of Jesus. Various people from the congregation began to serve at the local soup kitchen, the food pantry, the United Way, Big Brothers and Big Sisters of America, the local pregnancy care center, community organizations focused on kids in need, and the

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[3] Gilbert R. Rendle, *Leading Change in the Congregation: Spiritual and Organizational Tools for Leaders* (Herndon, VA: Alban Institute, 1998), chap. 5, Kindle.

local schools. The church was beginning to be seen as a congregation who cares about their neighbors. In addition to those changes, the congregation repurposed their fellowship center, a space that had previously been used primarily for dinners and social functions. The fellowship hall was turned it into a kids' space and the congregation focused their ministry efforts on children. It worked. Within six months, the children's ministry grew from five children to thirty children during the Sunday kids programming.

Per the prescription, they also hired a worship leader, so the music changed. They were told they needed to update their music if they wanted to reach young adults. They reorganized the church board to become a governance board rather than an administrative board. They launched a small groups ministry. There were literally three pages of prescriptions, and Pastor Steve was meticulous in making sure they followed every one of them to the letter. It worked in that the church grew. That year they broke every statistical record in the recent history of the church: attendance, budget, commitments to follow Christ, and baptisms. It was radical, but it was working.

Yet, something was happening beneath the surface of the congregation, of which Steve was unaware. There was a growing group of people who were unhappy with the changes. There was also a ruling family in the church who did not approve of the changes, which complicated things as they held several key leadership positions in the church. Shortly after Ted confronted Pastor Steve in the lobby, the board convened a meeting. Steve was not invited to attend. He thought the board was going to discuss the need for them to be more supportive of him. Instead, they gave him a vote of no confidence with five voting against him, four in favor, and one abstaining. Members from the ruling family lobbied the board to remove Pastor Steve from his position, going so far

as to provide a photocopied list of names of people who were unhappy with Pastor Steve's leadership.

Pastor Steve was accused of dishonesty, laziness, using church time to do personal work, and a host of other accusations. He was devastated. Not only did he feel that the accusations were false, but he was totally blindsided by the negative resistance to his leadership. In time, he discovered that the list was made up from thin air. Many people on the list were unaware that their names were included, and angered when they discovered their names were used for such a purpose.

In a subsequent interview with Pastor Steve, it was made clear that the resistance came as a result of introducing the changes proposed by the consultation group. The resistance did not stop there. Over the next couple of months, there were many accusations against Pastor Steve. He was in a swirl of reactivity and did not know how to stabilize the groundswell of negative feelings. The attacks became more and more personal. Pastor Steve was accused of hindering the work of the Holy Spirit, and of being self-centered and non-relational. The people said he was unloving and unwilling to shepherd the people or make any real connections with them. So many rumors were flying around that Pastor Steve felt it was too toxic for him to stay. He, like many others who were interviewed for this dissertation, resigned his post. He was heartbroken and battered.

In retrospect, Pastor Steve believed that one of his mistakes was framing leadership as a transformational process.[4] Ronald Heifetz concedes that the concept of

[4] Ronald Heifetz, *Leadership Without Easy Answers* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994), 92, Kindle.

"transformational leadership" as presented in his earlier work, *Leadership Without Easy Answers*, is "problematic as a frame for leadership."[5] Heifetz explains why that often becomes the perception of the group:

> Leadership seen in this light too readily becomes about "me and my vision" rather than the collective work to be done. The transformational mindset does not begin with a diagnostic focus and search process: the crucial step of listening to comprehend the gap between values, capacities, and conditions, before formulating a path forward. Rarely does it encourage the quest for shared purposes; far too often, the self-styled "transformational leader" begins with a solution and then views leadership as a sales problem of inspiration and persuasion.[6]

Far too often, pastors formulate change plans without wide participation from the congregation. A small group of leaders discuss needed changes and then decide on a course of action. They recruit early adopters to their cause, launch the vision, and then try to convince the congregation to accept and embrace the new way forward. Such an approach can feel like a sales presentation. Without preparing their people to process change, and without including them in the "diagnostic process," they inadvertently place themselves in an adversarial role with their congregations.

Change Is Always Met with Resistance

When a pastor leads a congregation through systemic change, he or she experiences resistance, which often can be hostile. The common approach to leading systemic change in the church has been through a technical approach, rather than an adaptive one. Ronald Heifetz and Marty Linsky define "adaptive change" as answers that require a shift in priorities, values or behaviors, and "technical change" as solutions

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[5] Ibid.

[6] Ibid.

where the answers and resources are already present within the group.[7] In other words, "technical change" addresses the logical, reasoning centers of the brain, whereas "adaptive change" affects the emotional centers of the brain.

Though pastors routinely propose changes that call for a shift in focus, priorities, or behavior, they often approach them as if they were technical—changes where the solution is obvious, well within the existing resources at hand, and readily agreeable to all.[8] Technical changes elicit little emotional response because there is little at stake. Adaptive, or systemic changes have the potential to explode with negative reactivity. By the time pastors have introduced systemic changes to the congregation, the pastors often have already processed the emotional challenges. Therefore, pastors present the change as if it were technical in nature. Such an approach to adaptive challenges only serves to heighten emotional reactivity. To introduce systemic change without the requisite sensitivity increases the anxiety level of the congregation and multiplies the negative reactivity.

Robert Kegan, in his book *Immunity to Change: Leadership for the Common Good*, explains how the confusion between adaptive and technical change works. He calls resistance to change "an immunity." Immune systems are important for continued health but can at times do harm. For example, they can reject internal treatments, such as needed medicine.

Kegan describes a process whereby his organization leads people through a self-analysis with three columns. The first describes the change(s) an individual wishes to

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[7] Heifetz and Linsky, chap. 1, Kindle.

[8] Ibid.

make. The second column represents the behaviors the person does or does not do that keeps the individual from going through with the change. The third column lists the reasons the person does not alter the items in column two. As an example, he writes that someone might put in the first column that they wish to lose weight. The second column would list the behavioral changes needed: stop eating late at night, reduce the portions at meals, and cut out sugar and unhealthy carbs. In the final column he lists the reasons a person might continue to engage in counterproductive behaviors: They do not want to be bored; they crave the social interaction of eating; and they are seeking to bury their feelings. When people seek to lose weight, they focus on column two, the needed behavioral changes. If a person could, at will, alter those behaviors, then that would be a technical change. However, many dieters try to do that every year and end up gaining back 107 percent of the weight they lose[9] because what actually needs to change are the items in column three—an adaptive change. People are taking an adaptive challenge (column one) and treating it as a technical challenge (column two). As a result, more often than not, they fail.[10]

Churches often fall into this same pattern, and as a result do not experience lasting change. Many pastors are told in interviews with pastoral search committees that the church wants to grow. For example, if a three-column table were made for the typical church, the first item in column one would be numerical growth. Churches say they wish to grow. When the new pastor comes to the church, she or he analyzes the situation and

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[9] Robert Kegan and Lisa Laskow Lahey, *Immunity to Change: Leadership for the Common Good* (Boston: Harvard Business Review Press, 2009), chap. 2, Kindle.

[10] Ibid.

in time sees the behaviors that need to change in order to grow. These items represent the second column, which might be: A greater focus on children's ministry; update the worship style of the Sunday service; and have a greater focus on outreach into the community. The congregation is typically enthusiastic at first, but then resists the change. Their immunity to change is represented by the third column, which could include: They feel threatened by a changing congregation; they are not willing to let go of cherished traditions; and they feel a sense of disloyalty to those of the past by changing long cherished practices.[11]

The pastor who focuses on column two without first understanding the dynamics of column three is leading adaptive change as if it were a technical matter. The chances are that such change efforts will fail. Instead, preparation for change may need to include a deeper understanding of the items that are driving the behaviors and values in column three.[12] Only one tenth of an iceberg sits above the water. In written correspondence with this author on November 6, intercultural expert Cierra N. Wallace observed,

> It's similar to the late Dr. Gary Weaver's (my mentor) iceberg model of culture and culture shock (influenced largely by his mentor Dr. Edward T. Hall). They are often known, respectively, as the father and grandfather of the academic field of intercultural communication. The part of the iceberg that we can see is the visual culture (food, clothing, mannerisms). The part of the iceberg that we cannot see is the "hidden culture"—the underlying beliefs and values that are often subconscious and ultimately inform the visual culture. When cultures (and icebergs) collide, they collide at their bases. Consequently, some of the most severe cases of culture shock are the ones in which someone goes between two cultures that are visually similar, such as the US and the UK. There is an assumption that we are similar and on the same page, yet, deep down, the underlying beliefs and values are very different. For cultures that are visibly different, we prepare ourselves more and anticipate the differences more readily,

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[11] Peter L. Steinke, *How Your Church Family Works: Understanding Congregations as Emotional Systems* (Herndon, VA: Alban Institute, 2006), 25, Kindle.

[12] Ibid., 25.

> so we are not as shocked when there is tension or conflict. Similarly, when a pastor is hired into a new congregation, the visual culture between the pastor and the congregation may look similar, but ultimately, they clash at the base. Because the pastor and the congregation are not prepared for it, there is a kind of shock.

It is significant when connecting those dots to a pastoral experience, because the majority of the iceberg is beneath the surface. Likewise, the dynamics of congregational change are similar in that above the water are the obvious behaviors that need to change, but beneath the surface are much deeper issues, that unless addressed, will hinder if not totally halt the desired change.

Instead of addressing the items in column three, pastors often reinforce their efforts at leading change by casting vision, making logical appeals, and explaining the reasoning behind the proposed changes. However, change fires up the reptilian brain, which will be discussed later in this paper, and the reptilian brain will not listen to reason, or be inspired by vision. Its survival instinct takes control of the mind so that its reasoning powers are mitigated.[13] Change introduces anxiety into the system, which causes fear to emerge. In turn, fear causes the system to go on high alert, triggering "fight" or "flight" responses, or for others a "tend" or "befriend" approach. Regardless of the approach that is taken, people react to change in ways that are calculated to reestablish the system's equilibrium. People react emotionally, and the unprepared leader may try to respond logically, but the potential future the leader describes is the very cause of the anxiety over potential loss that the change represents.[14]

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[13] Steinke, 25, Kindle.

[14] Rendle, chap. 5, Kindle.

The problem goes even deeper. Pastors can change tactics and try to win the opposition over through kindness and reasonableness, but that will not accomplish the desired end:

> Governed by instinct rather than insight, they [chronically anxious people] cannot be stopped by reasoning or appeasing. Mistakenly, those who must deal with them think being "nice" to the chronically anxious will earn cooperation in return. Or that being reasonable will get the reactive forces to follow suit. But the reptilian brain does not respond to nice behavior, clear thought, or sugar and roses. Under the siege of the Automatic Pilot, thoughtful and careful approaches are ignored.[15]

The result is that pastors have unwittingly opened a Pandora's box of reactivity. Many pastors have triggered limbic reactions in their congregations. Without understanding how to respond to limbic reactivity in a congregation, they have found themselves under attack, without the proper means of leading through the conflict. A reasonable approach to walking a congregation through conflict and negative reactivity is addressed in subsequent chapters.

Statistics show that 50 percent of the people in a typical congregation are either skeptical about change or are highly resistant to it.[16] In his book, *Diffusion of Innovations*, communication theorist and sociologist, Everett M. Rogers identifies categories of people when facing change:[17]

- Innovators or "The Brave": These folks are enthusiastic about finding and implementing new ideas. They make up about 2.5 percent of the group.
- Early Adopters or "The Respectable": These people are able to quickly assess the possibilities in change and comfortably adapt to change. They are also well respected in the organization and make up about 1.5 percent of the group.

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[15] Steinke, 25, Kindle.

[16] Anita L. Bradshaw, *Change and Conflict in Your Congregation (Even If You Hate Both): How to Implement Conscious Choices, Manage Emotions and Build a Thriving Christian Community* (Woodstock, VT: Skylight Paths Publishing, 2015), chap. 3, Kindle.

[17] Everett M. Rogers, *Diffusion of Innovations,* 4th ed. (New York: Free Press, 1995), 254, Kindle.

- Early Majority or "The Thoughtful": These individuals listen carefully to the early adopters but take more time to evaluate and decide. They make up about 34 percent of an organization.
- Late Majority or "The Skeptical": These people are, as the name suggests, skeptical of change. They will eventually go along but not until the change is proven to be a success. They make up about 34 percent of the organization.
- Laggards or "The Traditional": These people are usually not going to change. If they do change, it takes quite a while for them to do so. The term "laggards" may seem judgmental, but it is accurate. They make up about 16 percent of the organization.[18]

These numbers suggest that even if the proposed changes are needed, the majority of people will resist at first. When pastors lead a change initiative, they immediately establish themselves in an adversarial role, asking for conflict. Many of the pastors interviewed for this paper made it clear that they dislike and avoid conflict. Thus, introducing change that ensures a pastor will be in the middle of conflict often results in them either ignoring it, or trying to push through it in order to bring about the needed changes. Without adequate preparation, they are asking to be a target.

The Science of Resistance

Resistance to change is more than simple stubbornness. In many ways people cannot help the automatic responses that are internally triggered when anxiety from change is introduced into the system. Neurologists have identified three main regions of the brain: the neocortex, the mammalian, and the reptilian brain. The neocortex is the part of the brain that facilitates the higher reasoning powers: language, imagination, and reasoning. The mammalian brain is the center of our emotions, and the reptilian brain is the instinctual part of our brain.[19] When adaptive challenges are introduced, they create

[18] Rogers, 254, Kindle.

[19] Steinke, 19, Kindle.

anxiety. Intense anxiety triggers the reptilian brain, causing reasoning powers to diminish and survival instincts take over.[20]

When challenged, our bodies naturally supply extra adrenaline into the bloodstream. We are automatically prepared to fight or flee: "You don't choose to do this. Your adrenal glands do it, and then you have to live with it. And that's not all. Your brain then diverts blood from activities it deems nonessential to high-priority tasks such as hitting and running. Unfortunately, as the large muscles of the arms and legs get more blood, the higher-level reasoning sections of your brain get less."[21] When the reptilian brain is in control, it dominates the neocortex. In this condition, people do not respond logically; their reptilian brain interprets the rush of anxiety as an attack.[22] Steinke writes, "We have less capacity to distinguish between thought and feeling. Anxiety throws us into a state of emotional survival. We are less capable of hearing and seeing without coloring what we observe to fit our feelings. When feelings take over, distortion and misconceptions occur."[23]

The mammalian brain has the capacity to love and feel affection. The reptilian brain is instinctual—it reacts without feeling or thought. In the way a lizard would not think twice about eating its young, the reptilian brain can lead people to exhibit hurtful

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[20] Ibid., 21, Kindle.

[21] Kerry Patterson et al., *Crucial Conversations: Tools for Talking When Stakes Are High*, 2nd ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill Education, 2012), 5, Kindle.

[22] Heifetz, chap. 1, Kindle.

[23] Steinke, 33, Kindle.

behaviors toward others.[24] Thomas Lewis writes, "The limbic brain will direct the reptilian brain to change cardiovascular function. Heart rate will increase, as will blood flow to the arms and hands—because the outcome of anger may be a fight, the limbic brain readies the physiologic systems most suited to fisticuffs."[25] People are hardwired to respond to threats with the limbic brain, which means they are instinctively set to flee or fight. It is vital that a leader understand these reactions so that he or she does not take them personally, thus helping the leader better prepare her or his people for change.

When the attacks come, they feel personal. In fact, sometimes they are: the opposition demeans one's character, gossips against someone, or makes assumptions about their motives. Influencing that negative behavior is an instinctual drive to restore things to a state of equilibrium. It does not excuse poor behavior, but it can better prepare a leader for what he or she might face. It can also be reassuring to know that the negative things that are done or said are often fueled by primal instincts. Such knowledge may help the leader function in a more self-differentiated manner.

Compounding this situation is the fact that limbic states have the ability to "leap between minds."[26] Lewis asserts that emotions can be shared. He lists as an example how fans in a theater collectively feel the same sensations when watching a movie:

> Because limbic states can leap between minds, feelings are contagious, while notions are not. If one person germinates an ingenious idea, it's no surprise that those in the vicinity fail to develop the same concept spontaneously. But the limbic activity of those around us draws our emotions into almost immediate congruence. That's why a movie viewed in a theater of thrilled fans is electrifying, when its living room version disappoints—it's not the size of the

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[24] Thomas Lewis, Fari Amini, and Richard Lannon, *A General Theory of Love* (New York: Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, 2000), 23–24.

[25] Lewis, Amini, and Lannon, 52.

[26] Ibid., 62.

> screen or the speakers (as the literal-minded home electronics industry would have it)—it's the crowd that releases storytelling magic, the essential, communal, multiplied wonder. The same limbic evocation sends waves of emotion rolling through a throng, making scattered individuals into a unitary, panic-stricken herd or hate-filled lynch mob.[27]

This was part of the dynamic when Jesus stood before the crowd at his trial with Pilate. A few days earlier, the crowd rejoiced at his arrival into Jerusalem, waving palm branches and spreading their coats on the ground before him. However, Jesus introduced radical change that threatened the balance of power between the Jews and the Romans. Jewish officials worked the crowd to inject fear in the people. When they saw Jesus beaten and broken, the religious leaders were certain Jesus could not be a messenger from God. To be publically shamed in an honor culture would have been all the justification they needed. Anger spread rapidly across the crowd and those who had only recently hailed him as their king, shouted for his crucifixion (Matthew 27:15–26; Mark 15:6–15; Luke 23:18–25).

The same kind of resonance happens in a church setting. When the leader introduces adaptive change, anxiety spreads like an out of control fire, and anxiety triggers the limbic brain. People automatically move into survival mode. Emotion takes over and cognitive control is diminished. Soon anxiety is widespread, passing from person to person, and the unsuspecting pastor has triggered a reactive firestorm. In many cases when this happens, the group will direct their anxiety toward the leader. He or she will feel under attack, but in reality the group is seeking to restore a sense of equilibrium. Though it may take the form of personal attack, it is more instinctual than it is personal.

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[27]Lewis, Amini, and Lannon, 62.

Sadly, pastors often view these instinctive reactions as immaturity, fleshly behavior, or intrinsic character flaws. We automatically assume the worst motive in others. It is so common; psychologists refer to it as "the fundamental attribution error":[28] "Whenever others cause us inconvenience or pain, we have a natural tendency to suspect they have selfish motives coupled with malicious intentions."[29] In reality, congregations are not trying to be hurtful. They are reacting instinctively in order to restore balance and peace to a system that has experienced anxiety and threat. This is important in order to keep from making assumptions and growing cynical over the negative behavior of others.

Problematic Approaches

When pastors lead congregations through significant change, it threatens the equilibrium of the congregation. The core values and identity of a group are at risk. When pastors open that door without adequately preparing for the ensuing journey, they likely find themselves "pushed aside, undermined, or eliminated."[30] One hundred percent of the pastors interviewed for my field research project said there was little congregational anxiety until change was proposed. From that moment forward, each congregation became anxious, emotional, reactive, and hostile. Every pastor that faced resistance traced its beginning to the initiation of change.

The statistics for pastors are sobering:

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

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[28] Joseph Grenny et al., *Influencer: The New Science of Leading Change*, 2nd ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill Education, 2013), 83.

[29] Ibid.

[30] Heifetz and Linsky, introduction, Kindle.

- 78% were forced to resign and 63% at least twice, most commonly because of church conflict.
- 80% will not be in ministry ten years later and only a fraction make it a lifelong career.
- 100% of 1,050 Reformed and Evangelical pastors had a colleague who had left the ministry because of burnout, church conflict, or moral failure.[31]

Three out of the four statistics reference conflict. Forty percent experience serious conflict once a month. The sources of the conflicts are not stated, but it would be reasonable to assume that many of the conflicts revolve around change. The interviews cited above support this observation. Heifetz and Linsky also make a clear connection between conflict and change: "With deep change comes loss, people left behind, long-held values questioned, beloved norms and practices undone, and the security of jobs, familiarity, and predictability gone, simply and suddenly gone."[32]

When resistance is expressed, the standard response is to reiterate the vision louder. Earnest Shackleton defined a leader as one who is "a dealer in hope."[33] While that may be true, it seems that many pastors try to overcome the resistance to change by sharing their hopes for the future, which only serves to exacerbate the anxiety. Part of the reason for this is the denominational pressures pastors feel to make their churches grow. They have fallen into the trap of wanting "…more success in our ministries, greater spiritual growth in ourselves or others, or more dramatic spiritual experiences."[34] There is

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[31] "Pastor Stress Statistics," Soul Shepherding, November 11, 2009, https://www.soulshepherding.org/pastors-under-stress/.

[32] Heifetz and Linsky, 60.

[33] Margot Morrell and Stephanie Capparell, *Shackleton's Way: Leadership Lessons from the Great Antarctic Explorer* (New York: Penguin Books, 2001), introduction, Kindle.

[34] Christine D. Pohl, *Living Into Community: Cultivating Practices that Sustain Us* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2012), chap. 2, Kindle.

a significant drive to push systemic change in churches because the idea that healthy churches will grow numerically is often promoted in pastoral circles. Though seldom stated directly, pressure is placed on a pastor to succeed, and success is measured in attendance and budgets. There is a generally accepted expectation that pastors will not make changes too soon after accepting a new ministry position. The generally held belief is that pastors first need to get to know the people, the power players, and the unique niche the church can fill. After getting to know the key players and the relational dynamics of the congregation, pastors can launch the church into change. However, what seems to be missing is any attention to how to prepare the congregation for change.

Added to the stress of resistance is the fact that eventually a leader will be in an adversarial role with her or his supporters. Tod Bolsinger states a harsh reality: "We assume that our followers will have our backs. But that is all a comforting fantasy if you are truly trying to bring change to an organizational system."[35] The leader may self-identify as a change agent who is there to bring about a better future, but his or her constituents often do not view the leader that way. Heifetz warns, "You appear dangerous to people when you question their values, beliefs, or habits of a lifetime…. Although you may see with clarity and passion a promising future of progress and gain, people will see with equal passion the losses you are asking them to sustain."[36]

Taken in this light, it is easy to see how proposed changes can be interpreted as insulting the values the congregants hold dear. "Sacred idols," as they are sometimes

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[35] Tod Bolsinger, *Canoeing the Mountains: Christian Leadership in Uncharted Territory* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2015), 172–173.

[36] Heifetz and Linsky, chap. 1, Kindle.

called, were elevated to a place of status in a congregation because at one time they represented something that was successful, or that helped to accomplish the church's mission. A past tradition, custom, or memento may also be in honor of a patriarch or matriarch who once influenced the life of the congregation. When people are called to change, it can feel like they are being asked to let go of the past. Worse still, it can feel like they are jettisoning the memory of a highly revered individual. That is a loss that runs to the core of one's identity. That is a lot to ask a congregant to give up; especially if they have not been part of the diagnostic phase or if they have not had time to process the proposed changes.

Another factor that militates against pastors attempting to initiate change using a technical approach is the inherent drive toward "loss aversion."[37] People will hang on to what they do know and forfeit the possibility of what could be, because the present reality is a sure thing. People dislike certain loss more than they like potential gain. In order for people to take hold of a potential future, they have to let go of a cherished past. The congregation is suffering a form of grief. When a pastor responds to their sense of loss with further explanations and vision casting, it is like singing songs to a grieving heart.[38]

Something deeper is going on than simply adopting a new idea or direction. When people face change, "They must experience the loss of a relationship."[39] They are being asked to trust the leader enough to let go of the familiar which brings comfort and stability. At a more fundamental level, leaders are asking their people to change their

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[37] Erik Johnson, "Book Summary: Thinking Fast and Slow," *Erik Reads* (blog), accessed October 13, 2018, https://erikreads.files.wordpress.com/2014/04/thinking-fast-and-slow-book-summary.pdf.

[38] Prov. 25:20.

[39] Heifetz and Linsky, chap. 1, Kindle.

sense of identity: "Habits, values, and attitudes, even dysfunctional ones, are part of one's identity. To change the way people see and do things is to challenge how they define themselves."[40] It has been the author's experience that often when leadership introduces change, it is precisely because they want to form a new identity for the church. In major change initiatives, churches reexamine their value statements and form new vision and mission statements. All three components speak directly to a church's identity. It may very likely be true that those things need a rebirth, but the congregants, especially the veteran members, can feel like the past identity is somehow deficient. It can even call into question if what was done in the past was wrong. In most cases, the issue is that the church is facing a new generation and thus, a new approach is needed, but it may not feel that way to the people.

Dr. William Bridges, in his book *Managing Transitions*, draws out an important distinction in the change process that is often overlooked. He asserts there is a marked difference between change and transition.[41] Bridges says, "With a change, you naturally focus on the outcome that the change produces."[42] However, "transition is different. The starting point for dealing with transition is not the outcome but the ending that you'll have to make to leave the old situation behind."[43] Thus adjusting to the new reality involves the head—learning new skills and behaving in a new manner—while letting go of the past involves the heart. Churches that do not give adequate attention to the

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[40] Heifetz and Linsky, chap. 1, Kindle.

[41] William Bridges and Susan Bridges, *Managing Transitions: Making the Most of Change*, 4th ed. (Boston: Da Capo Press, 2016), chap. 1, Kindle.

[42] Ibid.

[43] Ibid.

psychological trauma of departing from the old identity increase the odds that the transition will be difficult if not stopped. Change is primarily about endings, and endings introduce anxiety, which produces walls of resistance.[44]

Change sets pastors up to be attacked, because of the "fundamental attribution error" mentioned above:[45] People assume the worst motives in the pastor. In defining the positive and negative effects of social power, Dr. MaryKate Morse reveals different ways motives can be misinterpreted. Though a leader shares knowledge in order to convince his or her congregants of the necessity of change, the limbic brain of the individual congregants, sees the leader's actions as controlling or judgmental. Genuine care for others will be seen as manipulation. Encouragement will feel like punishment. Instead of people being open to growth and change, they will grow more closed.[46] The pastor who wants to build a larger sanctuary to reach more people may be accused of building a monument to him or herself. A pastor who proposes an initiative to reach children may be accused of not caring about the elderly. A pastor who makes a personnel shift may be accused of firing someone because of jealousy. On and on it can go. We impose nefarious motives onto others, while sanctifying our own.

Another factor that works against change is that it often seems illogical and invariably results in leaders making change for the sake of change. Progressive pastors sometimes initiate change when an organization is at the height of its growth. Things are running smoothly, why would the pastor disturb that? Yet, informed leaders are aware of

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[44] Bridges and Bridges, chap. 1, Kindle.

[45] Grenny et al., 83.

[46] MaryKate Morse, *Making Room for Leadership: Power, Space and Influence* (Downers Grove, IL: International Varsity Press, 2008), 47.

institutional cycles as depicted by the Sigmoid Curve.[47] The curve represents the cycle of inception, growth, maturity, and decline. From the bottom left of the page, the line ascends upward toward the upper right edge of the page. At the highest point, the line takes a sharp turn and heads downward. The highest point of the line is the point of maturity. Shortly after, if something is not done, the congregation will drift into decline. When organizations are at the height of success the temptation is to bask in the accomplishment, but immediately organizations start to decline. Before that natural dip occurs, a wise leader initiates change to start a new cycle of inception. It is natural, however, for those in the organization to question the need. Many would think the things that led to the current success will inevitably take the organization to the next level of success, when in fact, that is not true.[48] Churches that fail to re-launch will decline. Sadly, as the cliché says, this is why many churches, are completely ready if the 1980s ever come back. These issues are addressed more thoroughly with possible solutions in chapters four and five.

A Commitment to Conflict

One of the grim truths pastors learn, often too late, is that leadership is a commitment to conflict. Often that conflict is hostile. Pastors are introducing ideas where the "stakes are high, opinions vary, and emotions run strong."[49] Ronald Heifetz paints a grim picture. "The attacks may go after your character, your competence, or your family,

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[47] Roger Heuser and Norman Shawchuck, *Leading the Congregation: Caring for Yourself While Serving the People* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2010), 274.

[48] Heuser and Shawchuck, 274.

[49] Patterson et al., 3–4.

or may simply distort and misrepresent your views. They will come in whatever form your opponents think will work. Through trial and error, they will find your Achilles' heel. They will come at you wherever you are most vulnerable."[50] Pastor Steve in the opening example experienced this. At first, some of his congregation attacked his character, accusing him of being dishonest and disingenuous. In time, however, they began to complain about his preaching, saying it was devoid of the Spirit and that it was more like sitting in a classroom than in a church. In fact, they suggested (demanded) that he quit and teach at a university. That was a hurtful blow, because Pastor Steve had always excelled in preaching. It was considered by congregants and peers to be his strongest ministry gift. When they attacked there, they hurt him at a deep level.

Pastors who are unprepared for this will react in ways that exacerbate the anxiety. Unless they know how to lead in a self-differentiated manner, they will trigger limbic reactions in their congregations and only intensify the resistance. Instead of responding appropriately to the resistance, such leaders will behave in reactive ways that only worsen the situation.[51] Their own limbic brains will fire up and they will begin to react in emotionally charged ways, either fighting the opponents, or isolating themselves from the offense. The instinctive reaction is to push harder for change, eliminate the resistance, or avoid it altogether by either ignoring the opposing voices or abandoning the change effort.[52]

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[50] Heifetz and Linskey, chap. 2, Kindle.

[51] Thomas Frederick, Susan Purrington, and Scott Dunbar, "Differentiation of Self, Religious Coping, and Subjective Well-Being," *Mental Health, Religion and Culture* 19, no. 6 (July 2016): 553–64, https://doi.org/10.1080/13674676.2016.1216530.

[52] Heuser and Shawchuck, 280.

"All too often," Gilbert Rendle writes, "people have a very limited repertoire for dealing with differences. They center their efforts on persuasion and winning."[53] Rendle identifies the hurdles that keep conflict from being productive. Churches often do not establish the presence and practice of a safe space where honest dialogue can be shared.[54] A safe space is not a gathering where conflict is absent. In fact, conflict is a sign of a healthy church and without it a church, a team, or a staff cannot grow. The confusion comes when members fail to recognize the difference between conflict and a fight. Fighting will destroy a safe space, but conflict, managed properly will ensure the safe space is productive.[55] Some churches approach conflict as if it were sin. There are certainly passages that teach the church to live in harmony (Philippians 2, Matthew 18), but they do not prohibit conflict. An honest look at the Scriptures could be instructive in understanding how to navigate conflict in a healthy manner. The Jerusalem Counsel in Acts 15, the parting of Paul and Barnabas, Paul's public confrontation with Peter are a few examples among many in the Bible that teach how to deal with conflict, rather than avoid it. A "holy argument" is much to be preferred to what Rendle calls a "false and empty harmony."[56]

Too many congregations engage in unhealthy conflict, which tends to keep people from dealing with the conflict that change brings. In turn, this derails the change effort.

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[53] Rendle, chap. 1, Kindle.

[54] Ibid., chap. 7, Kindle.

[55] Ibid.

[56] Ibid.

Sam Leonard, in his book, *Mediation: The Book*, outlines the differences between healthy and unhealthy conflict. Healthy conflict is characterized by:

1. Attitude: Conflict is inevitable; it is a chance to grow.
2. Personalized: Disputants are clearly able to see the difference between the people and the problems and do not mix the two.
3. Communication is open, people speak directly to one another and everyone has the same information.
4. The Balance Sheet is short. The principals address the issue at hand, not what happened months or years ago.
5. The Church is Interactive. There is give and take and exchange of ideas and a spirit of cooperation and openness. There is careful listening and thought-out statements.
6. Acceptance: Disputants acknowledge the existence of a problem and the need to solve it.
7. Timeliness: Resolution takes as much time as needed. The parties involved take the time to go through the journey together, to experience the pain, and to come out together on the other side.

Unhealthy conflict is seen in the following ways:

1. Attitude: Conflict is wrong or sinful.
2. Personalized: Disputants quickly mix people and problems together and assume by changing or eliminating the people that the problem will be solved.
3. Communication is diminished with people only speaking to those with whom they already agree. Third parties or letters are used to carry messages.
4. The Balance Sheet is long. The list of grievances grows and examples are collected. People recall not only what they think was done to them, but what was said or done to their friends as well.
5. The Church is Reactive. It cannot be "touched" without exploding. I write a memo to you and you immediately fire back a nasty letter to me.
6. Denial: Disputants tend to ignore the real problems and deny what is going on.
7. Lack of Time: There is a strong need to clove the problems too quickly. People are very "solution-oriented" and seek to avoid the pain of conflict by saying: "Let's get it over with."[57]

Congregations that learn to work toward healthy practices have a better chance at successfully facing change. Those who do not will strengthen the probability that they will derail change and sabotage the change leaders. Leading adaptive change is

[57] Sam Leonard, *Mediation: The Book* (n.p.: Evanston Publishing, 1994), 42–44.

dangerous, and as Heifetz stated, "takes the capacity to stomach hostility so that you can stay connected to people, lest you disengage from them and exacerbate the danger."[58] Heifetz believed that if leaders faced adaptive challenges in the correct way, they could eventually find a path to resolution. However, in his review of Heifetz' book, *Leadership on the Line: Staying Alive through the Dangers of Leading*, Andrew Leigh challenges that assertion:

> The greatest problem with the theory of adaptive leadership is that it presumes that each problematic reality has its own right answer, which will become clear to all participants if only they focus on the underlying issues. Heifetz and Linsky appear to believe that all problems have an inherent truth—the challenge is to search for it. Missing almost entirely is the recognition that many problems have no ''right'' answer—and are themselves the product of differing sets of values…When core values differ, applying adaptive leadership becomes a far more difficult task.[59]

Though Leigh's view that the task is more difficult may be correct, it must be conceded that finding a solution to adaptive challenges is not impossible. With patience and empathetic listening, it is even probable.Chances of surviving resistance that comes from introducing adaptive challenges can be heightened if leaders take the time to understand the dynamics of adaptive change.

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[58] Heifetz and Linskey, chap. 1, Kindle.

[59] Andrew Leigh, "Leadership on the Line: Staying Alive through the Dangers of Leading," *The Leadership Quarterly* 14, no. 3 (June 2003): 347–56, https://doi.org/10.1016/S1048-9843(03)00022-5.

CHAPTER 2:

JESUS INTRODUCED CHANGE

Jesus of Nazareth is considered by scholars (both those who are supportive of his story and those who are critics) to have been an incredible leader.[1] He launched a movement that grew to the point that it impacted the known world in only a few years, and still holds significant influence today. Jesus' method of leading change, however, was not without controversy. He introduced systemic changes that immediately disturbed the equilibrium of his community. They were so threatening to the identity and security of the people in his hometown, that they tried to kill him. This begs the question of whether Jesus is an appropriate model for leading change. It is the belief of this author that he is, but that one must be selective in following his methods, as Jesus proposed systemic changes for multiple reasons: there were times when Jesus drove change, and there were times when he nurtured change. When Jesus drove change, it provoked reactivity among the people. This chapter will attempt to demonstrate that, at times, Jesus intentionally drove change because he wanted to provoke limbic reactivity. His goal was not only to bring about systemic change, but he also wanted to prompt his own death at the hands of his enemies, because ultimately the inauguration of his kingdom required his death (Isaiah 53:5; Matthew 20:28; Luke 19:10; John 3:16, 10:17–18; 2 Corinthians 5:21; Hebrews 2:14; and 1 John 3:5) N. T. Wright reminds us "the Kingdom of heaven is not

[1] For example, see: *Leadership Lessons of Jesus: A Timeless Model for Today's Leaders* by Bob Briner and Ray Pritchard; *Learning to Lead Like Jesus: 11 Principles to Help You Serve, Inspire, and Equip Others* by Boyd Bailey; *Jesus on Leadership: Timeless Wisdom on Servant Leadership* by C. Gene Wilkes and Calvin Miller; *In the Name of Jesus: Reflections on Christian Leadership* by Henri J. M. Nouwen; *The Leadership Style of Jesus: How To Make a Lasting Impact* by Michael Youssef; and literally hundreds more titles on the same subject.

about people going to heaven. It is about the rule of heaven coming to earth."[2] That alone would create controversy, as it did, but Jesus also challenged several well-established social norms that ran cross grain to the Kingdom of Heaven, as discussed later in this chapter.

The thesis of this dissertation is that church leaders must prepare their people for change in order to minimize limbic reactivity and to help them process change in a healthy manner. Many of those who analyze Jesus' approach to leading change adapt a model that runs contrary to the one proposed in this dissertation. It is suggested that those may be the wrong examples to follow because the primary motive in those instances was, in fact, reactivity. There were many other instances where Jesus led change in a different manner, where he nurtured change. In those instances, Jesus introduced change, but in a pastoral manner, meaning that he sought to nurture people through change in a healthy way. Most often this was done with his disciples, in private. That method of leading change will also be touched on briefly in this chapter, but will be developed further in subsequent chapters as a proposed path moving forward.

Pastors are often taught to lead change in ways that provokes limbic reactivity. That has often resulted in church splits or pastoral dismissals. This may be due in part to using those times when Jesus intentionally drove change to provoke his enemies as a model for pastoral leadership. A few examples may help to clarify meaning.

The reactions of those who encounter change are so universal they that are predictable. Dr. Charles Arn, who serves as the Missional Church Professor at Wesley

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[2] N. T. Wright, *How God Became King: The Forgotten Story of the Gospels* (New York: Harper Collins, 2012), 43.

Seminary, identifies the predictable reactions of people when change is introduced: "Business studies have examined the 'diffusion of innovation' and discovered there are predictable responses when a group of people are confronted with a new idea."[3] Dr. Arn illustrates this with a bell curve chart that identifies the percentage break down of reactive categories. Two percent are identified as "Innovators." Innovators and dreamers are the visionaries in your church. Eighteen percent are "Early Adopters." These people do not necessarily introduce the proposed change, but quickly embrace it when it is proposed.[4] The largest group is the "Middle adopters," representing 60 percent of the population. Arn describes them as "reasonable in their assessment of a new idea, they are more inclined to maintain the status quo, and are more easily influenced by those opposing change than by those supporting it."[5] The "Late adopters" represent about 18 percent of the people. They are last to accept change, and though often opposed to new ideas, may change their opinions if the early and middle adopters can persuade them.[6] There are about 2 percent who will never accept change. Arn calls these "Never adopters."[7]

Arn makes the point that the 2 percent categories on each end of the scale represent the people most likely to leave the church over the issue of change. The "Never adopters" will leave if change is introduced and the "Innovators" will leave if it is not introduced. Arn suggests the decision the pastor has to make is which group the pastor

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[3] Gary McIntosh and Charles Arn, *What Every Pastor Should Know* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2013), chap. 13, Kindle.

[4] Ibid.

[5] Ibid.

[6] Ibid.

[7] Ibid.

wants to keep; the "Innovators" or the "Never adopters." The group that has to be persuaded to successfully navigate change is the "Middle adopters" who represent 60 percent of the entire group. They can best be persuaded by the "Early adopters" so that is where the pastoral leader must focus.[8]

Arn then uses the rest of the paper to articulate strategies to convince the early and middle adopters. His strategies fall in line with others who write on leading change. For example, Arn titles his sixth "rule" for leading change, "Discontentment: To increase the likelihood of adopting a new idea, sow seeds of creative discontent."[9] This is similar to the advice given by John Kotter in his book, *Leading Change*. Kotter suggests a leader must create a sense of urgency in order to persuade people to change: "Create a crisis by allowing a financial loss, exposing managers to major weaknesses vis-à-vis competitors, or allowing errors to blow up instead of being corrected at the last minute."[10] These kinds of pressures drive change. The strong leader may successfully push change forward, but in a congregational family system, people will likely be hurt in the wake of chaos.

Creating that sense of urgency is exactly the method prescribed by Dr. Paul Borden, a church growth consultant, in his approach to congregational renewal. Borden advises that a consultation group visit a church, analyze its strengths and weaknesses, and then offer a prescription for change. The consultation weekend culminates in a review of the prescription. The congregation is advised to pray over the prescription, and then is invited to return to another meeting where they are instructed to vote for the proposed

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[8] McIntosh and Arn, 4295.

[9] Ibid., 4508.

[10] John P. Kotter, *Leading Change* (Boston, MA: Harvard Business Review Press, 2012), 44.

changes. Borden instructs leaders to make it an up or down vote—vote the entire prescription for change through or reject the entire prescription. He then advises leaders to warn their congregations:

> Failure to vote or failure to embrace the entire report is seen as rejection. If the congregation votes to embrace the report, the judicatory or associational leaders commit to walking alongside the congregation for a minimum of one year to provide the needed resources to effectively implement the report. If the congregation rejects the report, the judicatory or associational leaders tell the congregation that they will not work with them in any intentional way to encourage health and effectiveness.[11]

Kotter teaches that a strong leader must push change through. When assembling a team to lead the change, Kotter asks, "Are enough key players on board, especially the main line managers, so that those left out cannot easily block progress?"[12] Change must happen and those who oppose it must not be allowed to get in the way. In fact, Kotter uses forceful language when he asks, "Does the group include enough proven leaders to be able to drive the change process?"[13] Kotter's language demonstrates an affinity toward an aggressive change strategy in that the approach intentionally forces change on a people by corralling the strongest supporters and using them to push change forward. It may result in reaching the goal of the leadership, but in a church setting, it increases the potential for congregational reactivity and unhealthy conflict.

Kotter supports the idea of "driving" change. Borden is sympathetic with that approach when he writes: "Change will not occur in any dying organization without pain. The question is whether the rate of pain will be gradual, as is happening in most

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[11] Paul D. Borden, *Assaulting the Gates: Aiming All God's People at the Mission Field* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2009), 29–30.

[12] Kotter, 57.

[13] Ibid.

denominations (slow death), or whether the rate will be more instantaneous and therefore the change more significant."[14] He goes on to advise that the changes will require significant pain that key people will leave, and that budgets will be negatively impacted.[15] The losses are seen as insignificant compared to the gains that will eventually come, but the approach seems strident and some might even say resembles a "slash and burn" mentality. Borden defends his position by identifying it as "telling the truth":[16]

> Telling the truth means addressing those issues that are the causes of decline and ineffectiveness. Sometimes this truth telling includes looking congregational "power brokers" in the eye and letting them know that they must either change or be removed from their positions of influence. Truth telling is often not easy and is many times unpleasant, yet it must happen if there is to be systemic change. Those in the judicatory or association must understand that often the pain they will hear about or experience is coming from long-time, denominational-stalwart members who are being removed from power in their congregations. Such people will expect the denomination to come to their aid out of regard for their years of faithful attendance and giving. To support these people in their complaint will doom the experiment to failure. It is essential that judicatory leaders stand firm at this point, regardless of how many e-mails or phone calls they receive. Backing down will undermine the entire effort.[17]

There were times when this seemed to be the approach Jesus used when leading change. He gathered early adopters (his disciples), he communicated the vision, he allowed those who would not comply with his vision to walk away (the rich, young ruler), he stirred considerable controversy and pushed through the opposition, even to the point of personally attacking his opponents (Mark 7:6–7). Jesus' method for leading change appears, in many regards, to be in complete alignment with the methods proposed

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[14] Borden, 44–45.

[15] Ibid.

[16] Ibid., 45.

[17] Ibid., 45–46.

by authors like Borden, Kotter, and Arn. It is noted that Jesus was most effective in leading change, however, as stated earlier, his motives encompassed more than change. His intention was to provoke his opponents, as this chapter seeks to demonstrate. Jesus' provocations were numerous.

Jesus Challenged Purity Boundaries

He provoked his peers by challenging their understanding of purity boundaries. Dr. Paul Rozin studied the psychology of disgust.[18] He conducted research using a Dixie cup. He measured the reactions between swallowing one's own saliva versus expelling the saliva into a Dixie cup and then immediately drinking it. Richard Beck, a professor of psychology at Abilene University, and who studied Dr. Rozin's work, observes that when the saliva is in the mouth, it is considered sanitary and normal to swallow. However, once it leaves the mouth, it is considered unclean. People have difficulty drinking their own saliva even if it only left the mouth seconds ago. Beck observes, "It is no longer saliva—it is spit. Consequently, although there seems to be little physical difference between swallowing the saliva in your mouth versus spiting it out and quickly drinking it, there is a vast psychological difference between the two acts."[19] When something goes from the inside to the outside, it crosses a purity boundary. Beck observed this was true from a societal standpoint as well: outsiders are seen as unclean.[20]

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[18] Richard Beck, *Unclean: Meditations on Purity, Hospitality, and Mortality* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2011), 1.

[19] Ibid., 2.

[20] Ibid.

The Jewish people of Jesus' day were a closed society, literally believing Gentiles to be unclean. When members of the Sanhedrin visited Pontius Pilate to receive permission to execute Jesus of Nazareth, they were careful about crossing purity boundaries. Pilate was a Gentile. If a Jew entered the home of a Gentile, he or she would be contaminated. William Barclay states, "If they had gone into Pilate's headquarters, they would have incurred uncleanness in a double way. First, the scribal law said: 'The dwelling-places of Gentiles are unclean.' Second, the Passover was the Feast of Unleavened Bread. Part of the preparation for it was a ceremonial search for leaven, and the banishing of every particle of leaven from every house because it was the symbol of evil."[21] Entrance into the home of a Gentile would have contaminated them. However, there is disagreement over the exact motive of the Pharisees, because even if they had entered Pilate's home, they would have been unclean only until that evening. By the time of the impending feast, they would have been ceremonially qualified to participate.[22] Even so, when the Pharisees came to Pilate's home, they refused to enter, but instead asked that Pilate step out to talk with them.[23] It is ironic that their actions would result in the murder of an innocent man, yet they were being careful not to contaminate themselves.

Such an incident goes to show there were strict purity boundaries established between Jew and Gentile. Jesus intentionally pushed past those barriers. The seventh

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[21] William Barclay, "William Barclay Study Bible," Study Light, accessed August 30, 2019, https://www.studylight.org/commentaries/dsb/john-18.html.

[22] Ibid.

[23] John 18:28 (New American Standard Bible).

chapter of the Gospel according to Mark gives an example of Jesus thrusting change onto a community by bridging purity boundaries both in terms of food and people. A group of Pharisees and scribes were dispatched from Jerusalem to investigate the reports of Jesus from Nazareth. Their purpose was to find cause for accusation. Robert Stein notes, "The listing of both groups gathering together against Jesus is especially sinister."[24] They noticed that Jesus and his disciples did not ceremonially wash their hands before eating. They interrogated Jesus about this: "The Pharisees and the scribes asked Him, 'Why do Your disciples not walk according to the tradition of the elders, but eat their bread with impure hands?'"[25] The text says that the Scribes and Pharisees "gathered around" Jesus. Stein notes the Greek word used for gathered is "συνάγονται," and "is used positively in 2:2; 4:1; 5:21; 6:30, but here it gives the sense that they were ganging up against Jesus (cf. 3:6)."[26]

Their subsequent interrogation indicates their inquiries were an attempt to discredit Jesus, rather than a desire to acquire information. In fact, in an honor/shame culture, questions asked publicly were not usually to gather information. Randolph Richards asserts, "Public questions were contests. The winner was determined by the audience, who represented the community. If you silenced your opponent, you gained honor and they lost some."[27] Therefore, in verse two, when the Pharisees questioned

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[24] Robert H Stein, *Mark: Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Publishing Group, 2008), sec. IV D, Kindle.

[25] Mark. 7:5.

[26] Stein, sec. IV D, Kindle.

[27] E. Randolph Richards and Brandon J. O'Brien, *Misreading Scripture with Western Eyes: Removing Cultural Blinders to Better Understand the Bible* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2012), 129.

Jesus as to why he and his disciples did not wash before eating, they were issuing a challenge.

The issue was not completely a matter of hygiene, but rather morality, established through ceremonial ritual. James Edwards, Jr. explains:

> It is important to understand that "cleanness" was not limited to or even primarily concerned with matters of hygiene, nor are distinctions between clean and unclean entirely understandable on the basis of rational explanation alone. The Mishnah, for instance, declared that the Aramaic sections of Daniel and Ezra rendered the hands of anyone who touched them unclean, as did the Holy Scriptures themselves if they were translated into Assyrian. On the other hand, translating the Aramaic sections of Scripture into Hebrew made them clean. This text is one of many instances indicating that "cleanness" was a ritual or cultic distinction as opposed to a practical or hygienic distinction.[28]

Ceremonial washing was a part of Jewish culture. The ritual was based on purification laws recorded in Leviticus 15, which focused on cleansing after touching something unclean, but grew to include washing before a meal. The Pharisees ceremonially washed their hands, emphasizing their penchant for distinguishing the clean from the unclean. Their ancient laws emphasized this distinction (Leviticus 11:46–47), but in time the tradition of the elders grew to the point where ceremonial cleansing was practiced multiple times a day due to the concern that any contact with the world was spiritually contaminating.

The aversion toward unclean animals and other contaminants grew to include people. Mark 7:4 says, "And when they come from the market place, they do not eat unless they cleanse themselves." The market place was filled with Gentiles and thus, heightened the possibility of coming into contact with someone or something that would

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[28] James R. Edwards Jr., *The Gospel According to Mark: The Pillar New Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002), chap. 6, Kindle.

render them unclean and in need of purification. Mary Healy writes, "Moreover, any contact with potentially unclean persons or products in the marketplace necessitated a ritual washing, and all items used to prepare or serve food, such as cups and jugs and kettles, also needed purification."[29]

When the Pharisees asked, "Why do Your disciples not walk according to the tradition of the elders, but eat their bread with impure hands,"[30] it was not an inquiry as much as it was an accusation. Jesus responded by cutting to the heart of the matter:

> And He said to them, "Rightly did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written: 'This people honors Me with their lips, but their heart is far away from me. But in vain do they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the precepts of men.' Neglecting the commandment of God, you hold to the tradition of men."[31]

Stein writes, "This expression [the tradition of men] refers to the traditions, supposedly given orally by God to Moses on Mount Sinai, that were codified into the Mishnah, which along with its Aramaic commentary, the Gemara, make up the Jerusalem Talmud and the larger Babylonian Talmud."[32] The people held the Mishnah in higher regard than the Torah; they had taken laws that were intended to protect them from disease and expanded them to segregate them from people.[33]

Jesus made it clear that food does not contaminate a person (Mark 7:14–19). The Jews had expanded food rules to include people. Jesus made it clear that all people are equally contaminated by sin (Mark 7:20–23), and thus in need of a Savior. The Jews had

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[29] Mary Healy, *The Gospel of Mark: Catholic Commentary on Sacred Scripture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008), 135.

[30] Mark 7:5.

[31] Mark 7:6–8.

[32] Stein, sec. IV D, Kindle.

[33] Ibid.

created a system of insiders and outsiders and their traditions had become a binding reality in that culture. Jesus immediately challenged those ideas. He introduced change by challenging the purity laws. He ate without ceremonially washing and he spent time in close contact with Gentiles. When challenged by the Pharisees and Scribes on this account, Jesus further provoked them by publicly declaring them hypocrites. Jesus' charge was iconoclastic in that it challenged "the entire edifice of Pharisaic legalism."[34] Jesus was "invalidating food and purity laws which were essential to the Jewish way of life."[35] His actions and his response to the Pharisees and Scribes, was a double assault because he was not challenging them as one rebelling against their religious system, but rather was opposing their understanding of purity laws on the basis of a moral principle.[36]

This breaking of the purity laws was further emphasized with the apostle Peter. Against his better judgment, Peter was commanded by God to enter a Gentile's home in order to introduce him and his family to the gospel (Acts 10:1–48). When Peter reported the events to the Church in Jerusalem, they were skeptical about Gentiles being part of their movement. They too were faced with accepting that which they believed to be unclean, as now being clean. The distinctions between insiders and outsiders were being broken down. Jesus had introduced change by challenging the purity laws and the Spirit of God continued that change until there was a cultural shift in the early Church.

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[34] Healy, 137.

[35] Ben Witherington III, *The Gospel of Mark: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2001), introduction, Kindle.

[36] Ibid., chap. 9, Kindle.

That shift was a significant factor in how the early church grew. The early Christians focused specifically on serving the poor, widows, prisoners, orphans and those who suffered from intolerable working conditions or from natural disasters.[37] Emperor Julian noted the clear distinction between the Christians, whom he called atheists, and the pagan citizenry of Rome: "Atheism has been specially advanced through the loving service rendered to stranger, and through their care for the burial of the dead. It is a scandal that there is not a single Jew who is a beggar, and that the godless Galileans care not only for their own poor but for ours as well; while those who belong to us look in vain for the help that we should render them."[38] Jesus was effective in bringing change, as is seen in the church's focus on those traditionally thought of as outsiders. There is no argument against the fact that Jesus successfully led change. However, the manner in which he did so was at times intended to exacerbate his enemies' wrath to the point of occasioning his own execution.

Jesus Challenged the Acceptance of a Closed Community

Jesus' mission was to establish a Kingdom that would include all people, but prejudices ran deep in the Jewish community. To lead change that broke racial barriers would be monumental. Jesus continually challenged the Jewish leaders in this arena. Mark 12:28–34 records the exchange between Jesus and a scribe who wanted to know which commandment Jesus thought was the most important. When Mark wrote this story

[37] Bruce L. Shelley, *Church History In Plain Language*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, TX: Word Publishing, 1985), 35.

[38] Shelley, 36.

he filled the account with surprises his original readers would not have expected. To begin with, he portrayed the scribe in a favorable light. Consistently through out the book, Mark highlighted the sins of the scribes (Mark 2:6–7, 16; 3:22; 7:1, 5; 11:18; 14:1; 15:31).[39] But Mark presents this scribe differently. A scribe was considered an expert in Jewish, religious Law. The Pharisees and Sadducees were trying to trap Jesus (Mark 12:13, 18) and this scribe was impressed with Jesus' answers. He had a real question for Jesus rather than a trick one. He asked Jesus, "What commandment is the foremost of all?"[40] This opened into an honest conversation. Mark's readers would not have seen that coming since scribes were so poorly represented in Mark's account.

The inquisitive scribe seemed to be "a genuine seeker of knowledge who admires Jesus' responses under pressure to the Sadducees and others, and responds well and wisely to Jesus' teaching."[41] There was a current debate at that time among Jewish religious scholars as to which of the 613 commandments was primary. This was more than an academic curiosity. It was believed that if one could discern that, it would serve as a "hermeneutical tool to interpret the rest."[42]

Jesus' answer would have been even more surprising to Mark's readers. First, Jesus answered the question directly without telling a parable or responding with a question of his own. He began by stating the great creed of the Jewish people. Jesus answered, "The foremost is, 'Hear, O Israel! The Lord our God is one Lord.'"[43] This was

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[39] Stein, chap. 6, sec. G, Kindle.

[40] Mark 12:28.

[41] Witherington, chap. 11, sec. D, Kindle.

[42] Ibid.

[43] Mark 11:29.

Israel's great monotheistic declaration. When originally penned by Moses, it distinguished Israel from the others nations, who were polytheistic. Because there is only one God, Israel's devotion to him must not be divided. "…and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength."[44] This answer would not have been unexpected, but then Jesus added something to it that would have shocked his listeners. He added a second law and stated it was equal to the first. "The second is this, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these."[45] Both laws existed in ancient Jewish writings (Deuteronomy 6:5; Leviticus 19:18). The surprise was that Jesus grouped both laws together, giving them equal importance.

These two laws were widely known and discussed in Israel, but to combine the two was unique. There is no evidence that anyone had done that before Jesus.[46] The implication of combining the two was that the love of God was demonstrated via the love of neighbor. It must be noted that Jewish literature does reveal the joining of these two commandments, however there is no indication that the pairing was before the time of Jesus.[47] In effect, Jesus made the two laws into one. Witherington notes, "It is interesting that v. 31 mentions 'these,' but then the word 'commandment' is in the singular. Possibly Mark wants us to think that for Jesus these two commandments are integrally related,

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[44] Mark 11:30.

[45] Mark 11:31.

[46] Edwards, chap. 12, Kindle.

[47] Stein, chap. 6, sec. G, Kindle.

love of God and neighbor being two expressions of the same basic impulse."[48] Such a combination of ideas would make his teaching unique, and would demonstrate that he fashioned himself as one in authority over the text.

How might one love a God who is invisible, intangible, or inaudible? It is accomplished by loving others. When Jesus asked Peter if he loved him, Peter responded that he did. Jesus replied to Peter by telling him to feed his sheep (John 21:17). Serving others was how Peter would demonstrate his love for his Lord. On another occasion, Jesus said when someone gives a drink of cold water to a needy individual they are, in reality, giving a drink of water to the Lord (Matthew 25:40–45). The Old Testament reflects the same connection when it reads, "One who is gracious to a poor man lends to the Lord."[49] In fact, the Scripture makes it clear that if one does not love others, it is impossible to love God:

> If someone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for the one who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen. 21 And this commandment we have from Him, that the one who loves God should love his brother also.[50]

The scribe was impressed with Jesus' answer. "The scribe said to Him, 'Right, Teacher; You have truly stated that He is One, and there is no one else besides Him; and to love Him with all the heart and with all the understanding and with all the strength, and to love one's neighbor as himself, is much more than all burnt offerings and sacrifices.'"[51] One might think at this point that Jesus would commend the scribe's

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[48] Witherington, chap. 11, sec. D, Kindle.

[49] Prov. 19:17.

[50] 1 John 4:20–21.

[51] Mark 12:32–33.

congenial attitude. Instead, Jesus challenged him with words that would have been upsetting: "He said to him, 'You are not far from the kingdom of God.'"[52] The scribe would have been taken aback by this comment, because the religious leaders of that day thought they were in the Kingdom of God more than anyone else. They were the insiders, part of the elite religious establishment. It is for that reason Jesus joined the second commandment with the first, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."[53] If he had only referenced the first commandment, to love God with all one's heart, soul and mind, the scribe would likely have responded that he did that. Their entire life was religious. However, to love others the way they love self would have been a challenge. The religious sect was biased and judgmental toward any outside of their social circle. In fact, the Jews believed they did love others if they loved fellow Jews, but that they were justified in holding resentment and contempt toward Gentiles. This is perhaps why in Luke's account of this story he has Jesus respond to the scribe with the episode known as the "Good Samaritan."

In Luke's account the scribe asked Jesus who qualifies as a neighbor. Luke says the man asked that question to challenge Jesus' assertion that he was not far from the Kingdom of God (Luke 10:25–37). In Jesus' response, a man was beaten, robbed, and left for dead on the side of the road. A priest and then a Levite passed by him, and instead of helping, crossed to the other side of the road. They did not want to get involved. A Samaritan passed by the wounded man and stopped to help. The Samaritans were the consummate outsiders. The scribe would have identified the Samaritan as the one who

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[52] Mark 12:34.

[53] Mark 11:31.

was outside the Kingdom of God. When Jesus asked the scribe who was a neighbor to the wounded man, the scribe would not say it was the Samaritan. He only said it was the man who helped the wounded person. His contempt for the Samaritan was so great he would not even say the word Samaritan. Jesus challenged the assertion that loving others only referred to fellow Jews. He introduced the idea that God expected them to love others outside their closed community.

Jesus Challenged the Honor Culture

Jesus lived in an honor/shame culture. The understanding of right and wrong are determined on a completely different basis than in an individualistic culture wherein morality is a matter of one's personal conviction:[54] "In shame cultures, people are more likely to choose right behavior on the basis of what society expects from them. It is not a matter of guilt, nor an inner voice of direction, but outer pressures and opinions that direct a person to behave a certain way."[55] Jesus introduced great change to the people he sought to lead because he lived in a way that diametrically challenged the honor/shame practices of his culture. He elevated the lowly at the consternation of the Jewish leaders. He intentionally provoked them by openly debating them on issues of morality and Jewish Law.

It was his disputes with the religious leaders, and their being dishonored publicly by Jesus that eventually led to his death. He openly responded to their challenges, and also publicly rebuked and condemned them: "They didn't kill him for going around

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[54] Richards and O'Brien, 113.

[55] Ibid., 116.

preaching 'love one another' or for healing the sick or for performing miracles. They killed him because he had taken their honor—a limited resource."[56] Every time they lost a public debate with Jesus, he gained honor and they lost it.[57] Thus Matthew records that at one point, they stopped challenging Jesus (Matthews 22:46), and instead, decided to kill him. He had to be shamed in his death, and it had to be done in a way that would reestablish their honor.[58] Though, to an individualistic culture, such a plan appears to be sinful, and one might wonder how the Jewish leaders could be so evil, in an honor culture, if the community supported their decisions, the religious leaders would have felt vindicated and justified. That is exactly what happened: Jesus was publicly disgraced and the religious leaders were vindicated. Wright drives that point home:

> "YOUNG HERO WINS HEARTS." Had there been newspapers in Jerusalem in the year we now call AD 33, this was the headline you would not have seen. When Jesus of Nazareth died the horrible death of crucifixion at the hands of the Roman army, nobody thought him a hero. Nobody was saying, as they hurriedly laid his body in a tomb, that his death had been a splendid victory, a heroic martyrdom. His movement, which had in any case been something of a ragtag group of followers, was over. Nothing had changed. Another young leader had been brutally liquidated. This was the sort of thing that Rome did best. Caesar was on his throne. Death, as usual, had the last word.[59]

Jesus died a shameful death. Though we revere his sacrifice, in that day, it would have been looked down on, and would not have inspired others to follow him. In fact, it appears Jesus' disciples were disillusioned to the point that they decided to return to their old ways of life (John 21). Jesus told his disciples that if they were to follow him, they

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[56] Ibid., 119.

[57] Richards and O'Brien, 130.

[58] Ibid.

[59] N. T. Wright, *The Day the Revolution Began: Reconsidering the Meaning of Jesus's Crucifixion* (New York: HarperCollins, 2016), 3.

would have to voluntarily give up their lives, love their enemies, and take up their own cross of execution, which would be a call for them to embrace shame in a culture that valued honor (Matthew 16:24–25, 5:44). Jesus introduced a new way of living. He provoked his enemies by introducing change that challenged cherished values.

Change that Cut to the Heart of Society

Jesus introduced change that brought harsh reactions. He inaugurated his ministry by speaking in his hometown synagogue. He was given the scroll to read:

> And the book of the prophet Isaiah was handed to Him. And He opened the book and found the place where it was written, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor. He has sent Me to proclaim release to the captives, and recovery of sight to the blind, to set free those who are oppressed, to proclaim the favorable year of the Lord."[60]

Jesus began to elaborate on the reading for the day. At first, the people were amazed. Luke says they spoke "well of him."[61] After listening to him, they began to wonder how he could speak with such authority. They said among themselves, "Is this not Joseph's son?"[62] Joseph was a mere carpenter. In a culture where everyone knew their place and was expected to stay in it, Jesus was an anomaly. Knowing what they were thinking, Jesus responded, "No doubt you will quote this proverb to Me, 'Physician, heal yourself! Whatever we heard was done at Capernaum, do here in your hometown as well.' And He said, 'Truly I say to you, no prophet is welcome in his hometown.'"[63]

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[60] Luke 4:17–19.

[61] Luke 4:22.

[62] Ibid.

[63] Luke 4:23–24.

Jesus was not attempting to gain status in order to promote his own welfare. He used his position to challenge their thinking. They were prejudiced against anyone that was not a Jew. Jesus' next statement directly assaulted their tribal ideals and stirred no small controversy:

> But I say to you in truth, there were many widows in Israel in the days of Elijah, when the sky was shut up for three years and six months, when a great famine came over all the land; and yet Elijah was sent to none of them, but only to Zarephath, in the land of Sidon, to a woman who was a widow. And there were many lepers in Israel in the time of Elisha the prophet; and none of them was cleansed, but only Naaman the Syrian.[64]

This example was extremely offensive. In effect, Jesus was saying that in the ministry he was launching, "the people who will benefit will be the outsiders, the wrong people, the foreigners. Even, perhaps, the commander of the enemy army. Naaman the Syrian, to whom Jesus refers as the one man who was healed by the prophet Elisha, was the commander of the army that, in the old story, had been attacking the Israelites (2 Kings 5)."[65] This would have been highly offensive to people in an honor culture. The Israelites saw themselves as the chosen people of God, and they took pride in their favored status. Their oppression by the Romans and past humiliations by previous empires was a point of contention. For Jesus to suggest that God would defer to people outside their group, particularly enemies of their nation, was outrageous.

At that point, the people were murderous. They escorted Jesus to the edge of town, fully intending to push him off a cliff and end his life. When he introduced a change in thinking, their identity as the exclusive people of God was threatened. Their

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[64] Luke 4:25–27.

[65] N. T. Wright, *Simply Jesus: A New Vision of Who He Was, What He Did, and Why He Matters* (New York: HarperCollins, 2011), 76.

pride was already damaged by Roman occupation. Jesus' references to Elijah indicated that God loved the Gentiles as much as he did the Jews. Their reptilian brains launched into fight or flight responses and limbic reactivity rushed through the crowd. In an instant, everyone he grew up with was ready to kill him. This was Jesus' experience over and over again as he challenged the accepted norms of Jewish society.

Intentionally Antagonizing the Religious Leaders

On another occasion, Jesus deliberately defied the authorities by healing on the Sabbath: "And it came about on another Sabbath, that He entered the synagogue and was teaching; and there was a man there whose right hand was withered."[66] This was on the heels of a confrontation Jesus had with the religious rulers only a few days earlier. His disciples were eating grain while walking through a field. In his commentary on Luke, Darrell Bock writes, "They were watching him precisely in order to bring a charge against Jesus for healing unnecessarily on the Sabbath."[67] Jesus knew what they were doing, and yet it appears that he intentionally chose Sabbaths to do His work.

The Scriptures say, "There was a man there whose right hand was withered."[68] The word "withered" literally means all dried up. The tense of the Greek word indicates that this happened to the man some time ago.[69] There is much speculation about the cause

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[66] Luke 6:6.

[67] Darrell L. Bock, *Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, Luke,* vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1994), 529.

[68] Luke 6:6.

[69] Spiros Zodhiates et al., eds., *The Complete Word Study New Testament*, 2nd ed. (Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 1992), 211.

of the man's condition. Some have ventured it was the result of an accident, injury, or disease. One tradition holds that the man was a stonemason and injured his hand while working; but there is no conclusive evidence for that theory.[70]

The Scribes and the Pharisees were interested in how Jesus would respond to the injured man: "And the scribes and the Pharisees were watching Him closely, to see if He healed on the Sabbath, in order that they might find reason to accuse Him."[71] The Greek word used to communicate with the reader that the Pharisees were watching Jesus is *paratereo*, meaning, "to spy on or watch out of the corner of one's eye, which adds a sinister note."[72] The Scribes and Pharisees were suspicious of Jesus and looked for any opportunity to accuse him: "Moulton and Milligan note that this verb, "watching," was used for keeping a careful eye on criminals."[73] Jesus provoked the religious leaders often enough that they considered Jesus a criminal threat.

The Gospel of Luke says, "They questioned Him, saying, 'Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?'"[74] Luke tells us that Jesus knew exactly what they were thinking (Luke 6:8). In spite of the veiled warning in the question, Jesus had the man step to the front of the synagogue so everyone could see him. Tension in this incident is raised because the man's condition was not critical, so he could have been healed at a different time. If his life were in danger, it would have been acceptable to heal him on the Sabbath. Thus the

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[70] Bock, 528.

[71] Luke 6:7.

[72] Bock, 528.

[73] Ralph Earle, *Word Meanings in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1986), 33.

[74] Matt. 12:10.

fact that Jesus chose to heal the man on the Sabbath in front of everyone was a deliberate provocation.[75]

Instead of rejoicing that the man's hand was healed and that he could now provide for his family, the religious leaders were filled with rage (Luke 6:11). In fact, Mark's Gospel says, "the Pharisees went out and immediately began taking counsel with the Herodians against Him, as to how they might destroy Him."[76] It seems that Jesus' actions ignited limbic reactivity in the Pharisees. Technically Jesus did not break the Sabbath law. It was not illegal for one to stretch out one's hand, nor was it forbidden for God to heal. If one did unintentionally break the Sabbath, then the consequence was typically minor. Capital punishment was only reserved for those who deliberately rejected the Sabbath. Yet the Pharisees responded in a manner disproportionate to the offense.[77]

Provocation Unto Death

On those occasions when Jesus drove change, it seems he intentionally provoked his opposition in order to spur on his death. There are many who believe this is precisely the motive for his actions during the event referred to as the "Triumphal Entry" (Matthew 21:1–11; Mark 11:1–11; Luke 19:28–47; John 12:12–19). As a case in point, in his commentary on the Gospel of John, James Montgomery Boice comments:

> Against this background it is certain that Jesus entered Jerusalem as He did, not to win over the people (the time for that had long passed), but rather to goad the Pharisees and chief priests into action and thus precipitate the events that He

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[75] Bock, 528.

[76] Mark 3:6.

[77] Craig S. Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 204.

> knew awaited Him. It is in accord with this view that we find Jesus taking the initiative at every point. It was not the multitude that prepared the triumphal entry. Rather it was Jesus who dispatched two of His disciples to Bethphage to get the colt. It was He who mounted it. Therefore, it was also He who triggered the tumultuous reception.[78]

Had Jesus entered into Jerusalem proclaiming himself the king, or the Messiah, it would have raised an uproar and threatened the Jewish leaders. Scholars, however, are divided over whether or not that was his intended purpose. Witherington writes, "If Jesus did indeed ride into town on a colt, there seems little doubt that he associated himself with Zech. 9:9 or at least with traditions involving kings, and it needs to be noted that here alone in the Gospels Jesus chooses to ride rather than walk, so we need to see this as some sort of prophetic sign act."[79] James Edwards Jr., in his commentary on the Gospel of Mark, proposes that the phrase, "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the LORD"[80] does not refer to the Messiah, but rather, was a designation referring to those on pilgrimage. He thus suggests that later Christian readers interpreted the statements in the ninth and tenth verses to be more Messianic than originally intended.[81] Edwards writes:

> The acclamation in v. 10, "Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David!" is not part of Psalm 118 or of any psalm. The reference to the coming kingdom is certainly eschatological, but the reference to "our father David," which is not elsewhere found in Judaism, is not necessarily messianic, as "son of David" would be. At any rate, Jesus preached about the kingdom of God, not "the coming kingdom of our father David," and the ascription of the latter to him reveals a confusion on the part of the crowd about his true mission. The summary effect of the quotation in vv. 9–10 is thus not overtly messianic. Indeed, had the crowd intended the acclamations of vv. 9–10 to refer to a specific messianic fulfillment in Jesus we should be surprised that Jesus was not promptly arrested by Roman

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[78] James Montgomery Boice, *The Gospel of John: An Expositional Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1985), 806.

[79] Witherington, chap. 11, sec. A, Kindle.

[80] Ps. 118:25–26.

[81] Edwards, chap. 11, Kindle.

> authorities (see Acts 5:37; 21:38), or that charges to that effect were not raised at his trial (14:55–58).[82]

Edwards pushes for the case that the crowd was not celebrating Jesus as their hoped for Messiah. If Edwards was right, it would seem that Jesus' entry into Jerusalem was not a deliberate provocation of the Jewish religious leaders. However, other Biblical scholars disagree. R.C. Sproul makes the case that the mission was both Messianic and royal:

> When we say that almost no one could see it at the time, we are not speaking of what the crowd of Passover pilgrims first thought when they saw Jesus approaching Jerusalem on a donkey. The greatest king in their history, after all, often rode through the Holy City and the Promised Land in a similar manner (2 Sam. 13:29; 1 Kings 1:33). Thus, the people who cried "Hosanna to the Son of David!" on Palm Sunday expected a mighty, conquering king, one who would throw off the yoke of their Gentile oppressors just as David had defeated the Philistines centuries earlier.[83]

Sproul is not the only one who believes Jesus' intensions were to make a Messianic statement. Robert Jamieson, Doctor of Divinity and minister of St. Paul's church in Glasgow, Scotland, and famed author of the commentary by his name, believes people laying garments on the ground before Jesus was distinctly an action to signify their hope in him as their coming king.[84] Bultmann believed the incident was simply "a Messianic legend under the influence of Zechariah."[85] Kingsbury argues that at least

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[82] Ibid.

[83] R. C. Sproul, "Triumphal Entry," *Tabletalk Magazine*, Ligonier Ministries, accessed September 5, 2019, https://www.ligonier.org/learn/devotionals/triumphal-entry/.

[84] Robert Jamieson, Andrew Fausset, and David Brown, *A Commentary Critical, Experimental, and Practical on the Old and New Testaments*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1984), 315.

[85] Joel B. Green et al., eds., *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1992), 854.

Mark's Gospel was written to "portray Jesus in a Messianic light."[86] Finally, Keener believes the people adding the phrase "Son of David" onto their shouts of "Hosanna," indicates they hoped Jesus was the awaited Messiah.[87] The expectations of the crowd and Jesus' deliberate Messianic actions demonstrate on Jesus' part an intentional provocation of the Jewish religious leaders. Jesus deliberately portrayed himself in Messianic form, whereas on other occasions he suppressed any Messianic claims from the people.

Throughout Jesus' public ministry, he was reluctant to receive public acclaim. After feeding a crowd of five thousand men, plus women and children, with a few loaves of bread and some fish, the people wanted to stage a coup to make him the new king. The Gospel of John says, "Jesus therefore perceiving that they were intending to come and take Him by force, to make Him king, withdrew again to the mountain by Himself alone."[88] He constantly avoided any declarations of his royal identity. On many occasions, when Jesus healed people, he instructed them to tell no one (Mark 1:40–44; Matthew 8:1–4; Luke 5:12–15). When he revealed his Messianic identity to his disciples, he instructed them to keep silent about it (Matthew 16:20; Mark 8:29–30; Luke 9:20–21). On a number of occasions, when Jesus cast demons out of people, the spirits declared they knew who he was, and his response was to command them to be silent (Mark 1:34, 3:11–12). Such examples demonstrate Jesus was holding back any claims of his royal position or Messianic role until the time was right.

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[86] Ibid., 855.

[87] Keener, 100.

[88] John 6:15.

All that changed on Palm Sunday when he arranged for the procession and did not shun the praise of the crowd. Jesus attended to every detail to ensure the prophecy about that day was fulfilled: "Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout in triumph, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your king is coming to you; He is just and endowed with salvation, Humble, and mounted on a donkey, even on a colt, the foal of a donkey."[89] Prior to that day, Jesus concealed his identity, but on that day he insisted on allowing the people to celebrate his entrance into the city. It appears his actions were designed to provoke the Jewish leaders. It can reasonably be conjectured that Jesus orchestrated the events of Palm Sunday to provoke the Jewish leaders into reacting within the prophetic timetable established by Daniel and Zechariah (Daniel 9:24–27; Zechariah 9:9). His death was necessary for "Jesus's death was seen by Jesus himself, and then by those who told and ultimately wrote his story, as the ultimate means by which God's kingdom was established."[90]

The Jewish leaders had already planned to kill Jesus, but they decided to wait until after the Passover, so as not to cause a riot among the crowds (Mark 14:1–2). They asked Jesus to quiet the people out of concern for the political implications of such a public display.[91] I. H. Marshall also affirms that the Jewish leaders saw the celebrations as more than acknowledging a pilgrim journey, but rather viewed the display as a political threat.[92] However, when the Pharisees asked Jesus to quiet down the crowds, he

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[89] Zech. 9:9.

[90] Wright, *Simply Jesus*, 185–186.

[91] Bock, 1559.

[92] I. H. Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke: A Commentary on the Greek Text*: *New International Greek Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1978), 71.

refused. His response provoked the realization that they could not wait until after Passover. F.W. Danker likewise believes the celebration of the crowed was "a blatant display of Messianic fervor."[93]

The Jewish leaders were afraid of an insurrection that would bring down the wrath of Rome. They had to move quickly before things got out of hand. They had to kill Jesus soon, which seemed to be exactly what Jesus wanted. Though Jesus' actions when driving change exacerbated the limbic reactivity of the Jewish authorities, there were also occasions when Jesus nurtured change. Jesus also challenged his disciples because they were a product of their society and therefore functioned in ways diametrically opposed to the principles of the new Kingdom Jesus was establishing. However, unlike Jesus' disputes with the religious leaders, Jesus addressed these issues differently. When dealing with his disciples, rather than driving change, he nurtured it. He corrected them in private; he was careful not to shame them. He practiced self-differentiation and engaged in active listening. He practiced healthy conflict, created safe spaces, and gave time for people to process the change.

In his book, *Lead Like Jesus*, Ken Blanchard asks the question, "Do you know how long it took Jesus to change His disciples' attitudes and behaviors related to servant leadership? Three years of daily interactions."[94] Jesus gave time for his disciples to process the enormous changes he was proposing. The Gospels are filled with multiple examples of Jesus reiterating the new ways of relating in his new Kingdom. As stated, he

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[93] F. W. Danker, *Jesus and the New Age: A Commentary on St. Luke's Gospel* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1988), 313.

[94] Ken Blanchard and Phil Hodges, *Lead Like Jesus: Lessons from the Greatest Leadership Role Model of All Time* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2008), 12.

challenged the concepts of an honor/shame culture. He redefined what it means to be great. He rebuked the notion of hierarchical supremacy.

Mark records an incident when Jesus shared with his disciples his coming suffering and death (Mark 10:32–45). It seems his disciples did not fully understand what he meant. They heard he was establishing a kingdom, but thought it was political and missed the hard reality of his impending execution. Immediately after pouring out his heart, Mark records a question from Jesus' disciples that betrays incredible insensitivity:[95] "James and John, the two sons of Zebedee, came up to Jesus, saying, 'Teacher, we want You to do for us whatever we ask of You.' And He said to them, 'What do you want Me to do for you?' They said to Him, 'Grant that we may sit, one on Your right and one on Your left, in Your glory.'"[96] One must concede some measure of grace, because, according to Luke's account, the disciples simply did not understand what Jesus meant (Luke 18:34).

Mark placed this incident just before the Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem. The intensity grows in the narrative, revealing to the reader that a climactic moment is at hand. The disciples sensed the momentum was picking up and things were moving forward. James and John's first concern was to secure their places in the new kingdom, which was offensive, both to Jesus and the other disciples.[97] The other disciples heard the discussion unfold and were incensed that they had not been included in the

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[95] Stein, chap. 5, sec. M, Kindle.

[96] Mark 10:35–37.

[97] Stein, chap. 5, sec. M, Kindle.

conversation.[98] If one is elevated in an honor culture, someone else must by default be demoted, which exacerbated the other disciples' motives to ensure their place in Jesus' new Kingdom.[99]

When Jesus addressed James, John, and the other disciples about their ambition to sit at his right hand, he was forthright, but he also spoke to them in private: "You know that those who are recognized as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them; and their great men exercise authority over them. But it is not this way among you, but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant; and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be slave of all."[100] The slave will be the lord and the lord will be the slave. Jesus demonstrated that success was not to gain the advantage of being positioned at the place of highest honor, but rather, advancement was achieved in order to enable one to leverage their service to others.

Jesus said to his disciples in the debriefing, after they asked to sit on his right hand, "Whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant."[101] Jesus redefined greatness. Philippians 2:5–8 says that Jesus came to earth to serve, and he stayed in the position of a servant all his life. Rather than being exalted or promoted, he was killed. The kingdom, according to Jesus, was about being last and staying there. He said if someone was going to follow him, they had to take up a cross daily and march to their own execution (Matthew 16:24). These were all concepts that challenged the widely

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[98] Ibid.

[99] Edwards, chap. 10, Kindle.

[100] Mark 10:42–44.

[101] Mark 10:43.

held views of success. Though Jesus intentionally provoked the Jewish leaders with these ideas, he introduced his disciples to these ideas in a more careful manner. Jesus spent many months reiterating his different view of the Kingdom of God in private with his disciples to give them time to adjust to the new kind of society he was establishing.

As another example, the disciples were arguing among themselves as to who was the greatest among them (Mark 9:33–37). When Jesus asked them about their conversation, they were silent. Their mute response suggests they understood enough to know such discussions were inappropriate. Jesus took advantage of a teaching moment: Mark says, "Sitting down, He called the twelve and said to them, 'If anyone wants to be first, he shall be last of all and servant of all.'"[102] It is to be noted that Jesus invited the disciples to sit down with him. The implication is that this was a private debriefing. Private correction was important in an honor/shame culture.

Jesus began his teaching moment by standing a child in front of the disciples (Mark 9:36). "Whoever receives one child like this in My name receives Me; and whoever receives Me does not receive Me, but Him who sent Me."[103] Some have taken this episode as an example of Jesus elevating the place of a child, but children were viewed differently in an honor/shame culture: "Children were not romanticized as examples of innocence and purity. On the contrary, unable to keep the law, little children were seen in Judaism at best as 'weak' and not yet 'people of the covenant.' Thus, to receive such insignificant people means to humble oneself and become last and servant of

[102] Mark 9:35.

[103] Mark 9:37.

all."[104] Thus, in an honor culture, a child is among the lowest in the social strata, helpless and without merit, as they had no voice or rights.

The disciples recognized that Jesus was establishing himself as the head of this new kingdom. Yet Jesus was placing this child, who is among the lowest, at a level equal to his own. Witherington observes that the Aramaic "word for child [*paidion*] is the same as the word for servant."[105] Therefore, the child represented the one thing people in an honor/shame culture did not want to be: one without honor. By serving the child, Jesus was placing himself beneath the least in society. In the new kingdom, one was not to seek honor, but to serve those without it.[106]

Jesus' movement took everything they knew about an honor culture and flipped it on its head. Jesus had said as much on another occasion: "Truly I say to you, among those born of women there has not arisen anyone greater than John the Baptist! Yet the one who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he."[107] This type of thinking cut deep against the grain of long-established social norms.

It is important that Jesus did this in a private, safe space, because it appears the disciples struggled with Jesus' instruction. The apostle John reacted to Jesus' statement in a way that seems to be a change in subject, but on further reflection reveals he is still steeped in the honor/shame paradigm of his society: "John said to Him, 'Teacher, we saw someone casting out demons in Your name, and we tried to prevent him because he was

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[104] Stein, chap. 5, sec. H, Kindle.

[105] Witherington, chap. 10, sec. D, Kindle.

[106] Edwards, chap. 9, Kindle.

[107] Matt 11:11.

not following us.'"[108] John was concerned about another person outside their group performing an exorcism. It is telling that John remarks that the man was "not following us." Because their group was setting up the new Kingdom, honor culture thinking would see an outsider as an unwelcome competitor. The irony is that the man was successfully casting out demons, while the disciples had failed in that regard, yet felt that any other evangelists should come under their authority (Mark 9:14–29).[109] Jesus challenged their notion of honor by evaluating ministry according to its effectiveness, rather than by which group the participants belonged (Mark 9:41).

Jesus then turned their attention back to the child. He said if someone causes a child to stumble it would be better to jump off a bridge with a millstone around his or her neck. He repeats these three times, varying the point by talking about the hand, the foot and the eye causing a child to stumble.[110] Though the child represented all children, it could have also represented a poor beggar, an elderly widow, a prostitute, or a leper. Jesus pushed against well-established social norms with strong hyperbolic language, saying that elitism is serious enough to merit cutting off one's hand, poking out one's eye, or throwing one into hell. An honor culture naturally strikes at the identity of those who are at the bottom. They have and are not given any sense of worth. Jesus turned that notion on its head by honoring those without it and challenging those deemed most worthy.

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[108] Mark 9:38.

[109] Witherington, chap. 10, sec. D, Kindle.

[110] Mark 9:41–50.

Jesus engaged in healthy conflict when dealing with his disciples in that he created safe spaces for honest dialogue; he practiced self-differentiation by engaging with those who disagreed with him, rather than avoiding them; and he interacted with them in private. Edwin Friedman describes a self-differentiated leader:

> The basic concept of leadership through self-differentiation is this: If a leader will take primary responsibility for his or her own position as "head" and work to define his or her own goals and self, while staying in touch with the rest of the organism, there is a more than reasonable chance that the body will follow. There may be initial resistance but, if the leader can stay in touch with the resisters, the body will usually go along.[111]

By that definition, Jesus functioned as a self-differentiated leader, especially when dealing with his disciples. Ken Blanchard writes, "Jesus spent significant time interacting in positive ways with people who disagreed with Him. He did not isolate Himself from those who disagreed; he embraced those who disagreed. He did not change His message to gain approval, but He continued to love those who did not accept His message."[112]

The twenty-first chapter of John's Gospel records the incident when Jesus confronted the apostle Peter over his denial of Jesus. It was early in the morning when the disciples were coming to shore after having fished all night. Jesus met them there for a private encounter. By this time he had resurrected from the dead and they were still trying to process all that had happened. Peter denied the Lord, just as Jesus predicted. Their meeting on the beach is an example of self-differentiated leadership. Jesus created a safe space (a private beach); he addressed the issue directly, but also stayed emotionally connected with Peter.

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[111] Edwin H. Friedman, Gary Emanuel, and Mickie Crimone, *Generation to Generation: Family Process in Church and Synagogue* (New York: The Guilford Press, 1985), 229.

[112] Blanchard, *Leading Like Jesus*, 44.

John relates that Jesus had a charcoal fire burning on shore (John 21:9). The word John used was *ἀνθρακιά.* The only other place John uses that word is in chapter 18, the moment when Peter was sitting in the courtyard during Jesus' trial, where Peter denied the Lord (John 18:18). The Gospel writer ties the two incidents together.[113] Jesus questioned Peter three times. Each was a challenge to Peter's earlier boast that he would never deny the Lord. Each was a reminder that Peter had indeed denied the Lord three times. Instead of ignoring the incident, Jesus confronted it, but he did so in private in order to spare Peter any further shame. Jesus instructed his disciples that when there was conflict between them and another, they were to go directly to the individual and confront them face-to-face (Matthew 18:15). Jesus practiced self-differentiation regularly when training his disciples. They were challenged at many points, but they stayed together and accepted, embraced and led the changes Jesus introduced. Jesus nurtured them to a place of extraordinary change.

As Jesus nurtured change with his disciples, pastoral leaders can also lead change in a healthier manner. Thrusting change on people with inadequate preparation leads to confusion, disillusionment, and possible destruction. Churches can split and pastoral positions can be lost. The premise of this work is that there is a better way. People must be adequately prepared for change. Driving change forward provokes reactivity. Nurturing change still presents challenges, but mitigates the level of reactivity leaders face. Chapters four and five explore ways of nurturing change: understanding internal family systems and leading accordingly, practicing self-differentiation, creating safe

[113] Phil Ware, "A Charcoal Fire and the Smell of Redemption," Heartlight, July 17, 2015, https://www.heartlight.org/articles/201508/20150817_charcoalfire.html.

spaces for transparent conversation that allows one to process the loss aversion that accompanies change, and engaging in healthy conflict.

CHAPTER 3:

LIMBIC REACTIVITY

Change triggers limbic reactivity. As stated in the previous chapter, driving change forward often results in the reactivity turning hostile. As demonstrated in this chapter, the history of the church is rife with leaders who drove systemic changes only to encounter a phalanx of resistance. At times, leaders remained steadfast and undifferentiated and the changes were eventually accepted. At other times, the resistance was too much and the movement was put down. This chapter also examines this author's faith tradition; how it began through systemic change, and how battle lines from change are still drawn today. Finally, this chapter considers a major change in church history that did not produce harsh resistance and how a similar movement is happening today.

As soon as Jesus launched his Church, change was afoot. Immediately the Jewish custom of Pentecost was changed. What had been a Jewish feast to celebrate the giving of the Law under Moses, and the birth of the Jewish nation, became a symbol of the birth of the Church. Only months after the Church began, she was accepting Gentiles into her ranks (Acts 15). Early Christian leaders did not require Gentile Christians to become Jewish (See Galatians). These were major changes from the way the Jewish community had worshipped for thousands of years. One practice that distinguished the early Christians from others in society was that they targeted the "contemptible" of society. In his book *Church History*, Bruce Shelly writes,

> At any rate, Celsus, the outspoken critic of Christianity, took note of it: "Far from us, say the Christians, be any man possessed of any culture of wisdom or judgment; their aim is to convince only worthless and contemptible people, idiots, slaves, poor women and children…These are the only ones whom they manage to

> turn into believers." For the most part Celsus was probably telling the truth. It is to the church's credit that it did not neglect the poor and despised.[1]

The early Church was a change movement, but in time it became more institutionalized. By the end of Constantine's reign, it was an institutional powerhouse.[2] From that point forward, systemic changes were met with divisive—and often violent—resistance. Many changes were political in nature, the result of men seeking power. The succession of Popes and the battle for power erupted in the Great Schism of 1054, when the Eastern Church and the Western Church split.[3] Within each branch of the Church there were subsequent battles for control and battles over doctrinal disputes. The greatest systemic changes that were introduced to the Church were when the reformers challenged centuries-old traditions, beliefs, and practices.

Martin Luther

Martin Luther is known as the Great Reformer, though there were many before him. However, his story provides a glimpse into the violent resistance that can erupt when systemic change is introduced and limbic reactivity is released. Luther did not simply seek reformation, as the name of the movement he is most identified with suggests. He challenged long-held beliefs that, if abandoned, would threaten to undo the

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[1] Bruce L. Shelley, *Church History in Plain Language*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, TX: Word Publishing, 1985), 33.

[2] Kenneth Scott Latourette, *A History of Christianity* (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1953), 93.

[3] Justo L. González, *The Story of Christianity: The Early Church to the Present Day* (Peabody, MA: Prince Press, 1999), 251.

very foundations of the Church. He opposed the doctrine of transubstantiation,[4] which was, and still is, the very heart of salvific theology for the Catholic Church. He rejected five of the seven sacraments (Confirmation, Reconciliation, Anointing of the sick, Marriage, and Holy Orders), while accepting Baptism and Holy Communion. He also challenged the undisputed authority of the Pope.[5] Luther was particularly opposed to priestly mediation and Papal authority. His positions nailed on the door of the church in Wittenberg on October 31, 1517, stated clearly,

> In the sixth thesis: "The pope cannot remit any guilt (*culpa*), except by declaring that it had been remitted by God and by asserting to God's remission…" However, according to traditional teaching the pope possessed the power of the keys, the authority to bind and loose. Most of the theses sharply criticized current practices relating to indulgences, and in some Luther protested that formal, mercenary expedients avail naught in to spiritual a thing as religion.[6]

Those kinds of changes were a direct threat to the Papacy and were not received without resistance. Church officials quickly assembled to deal with Luther's criticisms. Shortly thereafter, Luther was summoned to the Diet of Worms in April of 1521. The purpose of the meeting, as far as the Emperor was concerned, was for Luther to recant his statements. Luther said he would review his writings to ensure that what he said was in alignment with Scripture, and asked for a day to reconsider his position. He was granted a recess, but the next day he stood firm, making his famed statement: "Here I stand. I cannot do otherwise."[7] This was a pivotal moment in Church history, for the fires of

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[4] Transubstantiation is the belief that the bread and wine used in the Eucharist are literally transformed into the actual body and blood of Jesus.

[5] Henry S. Lucas, *The Renaissance and the Reformation*, 2nd. ed. (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1934), 443.

[6] Ibid., 461.

[7] Latourette, 717.

reformation would exponentially erupt from that confrontation. It also introduced the epitome of reactivity because "a single individual was pitting his reason and his integrity against established institutions which were the bulwark of society."[8] This was proposed change on a colossal scale. Though the Church leaders were offended and irritated with Luther to an extreme, they hardly could have known the firestorm that meeting would ignite and the impact it would have across the world and down through time.

The Church's Reaction to Luther's Proposed Changes

Shocked by a monk who would dare to challenge one thousand years of Church teaching and tradition, The Holy Roman Emperor, Charles V of Spain, formally declared his intentions to stand against Luther. In 1521 he described Luther as "a limb cut off from the Church of God, an obstinate schismatic and manifest heretic."[9] He officially moved to destroy Luther by commanding his subjects to refuse Luther food, lodging, and drink. Also, Luther's writings were declared contraband.[10] This was not new to Luther as Pope Leo X excommunicated him from the Church in June of 1520.[11]

When anxiety is introduced into a system, the way Luther did with his public challenges, it sparks a fight or flight response. The Church chose to fight. Dr. Johann Eck, Church official and professor of the University of Ingolstadt, declared Luther a

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[8] Latourette, 717.

[9] Ibid., 718.

[10] Ibid.

[11] Shelley, 242.

heretic.[12] When he ascertained that Luther opposed Church councils, he reportedly said, "If you believe that a council, legitimately called, has erred and can err, be then to me as a Gentile and a publican. I do not have to explain further what a heretic is."[13] When Luther admitted agreement with many of Jan Hus' writings, the Duke of Saxony accused him of being sympathetic with the Devil. It is reported that the Duke declared, "The plague is upon us!"[14] Describing Luther as being in league with the Devil served to spread limbic reactivity. Personally attacking Luther and labeling him as "satanic" is a common reaction when change is introduced and people feel pressure to reestablish equilibrium.

Systems thinking postulates that people will resort to many different tactics to keep a system in balance once change is introduced. In *Systems Theory in Action*, Shelly Smith-Acuña writes,

> So how do systems change? Interestingly, early systems theorists focused more on how systems stay the same than on how systems change. Early family therapy theorists were heavily influenced by the study of cybernetics, or self-regulating systems. During World War II, the science of cybernetics made huge strides through the work of a number of prominent scientists and mathematicians, including Norbert Wiener (1948). Rather than looking at simple cause and effect, physicists such as Wiener looked at, and then created, systems that used external feedback to provide crucial information on maintaining the system's functioning. Using the concept that systems seek to maintain a steady state of equilibrium, or homeostasis, Wiener examined the processes by which a system can both pursue and then incorporate feedback from the supporting environment or context.[15]

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[12] John D. Woodbridge, *Church History: From Pre-Reformation to the Present Day,* vol. 2 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2013), 118.

[13] Ibid.

[14] Ibid.

[15] Shelly Smith-Acuña, *Systems Theory in Action: Applications to Individual, Couples, and Family Therapy* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2010), 69.

This research has direct implications for congregational life as well. In fact, Smith-Acuña's work has a direct correlation for the church since a congregation is a family system. To illustrate the connectedness of a family system, Smith-Acuña offers an example of a thermostat. The mechanism constantly measures the temperature in a room and offers regular feedback. When a thermostat is set to a particular temperate, the system recognizes when the room's temperature reaches a point at which the furnace is ignited in order to bring the temperature back within the desired range. Once temperature has risen to the desired level the furnace is shut off. Though the temperature may not be exactly at the desired degree, it still regulates the room so that it stays within an acceptable range.[16] Connecting this self-regulating system to internal family systems, Smith-Acuña notes:

> Bateson and colleagues used these principles of homeostasis and feedback loops to understand the ways that human groups resist change (Bateson, (1972); Nichols & Schwartz, 2001). As in nonorganic systems, Bateson argued that there are rules that establish the types of behaviors that are permitted within a given system. These rules, which are often implicit, serve as a system's thermostat…when behaviors begin to exceed certain rules within the system, some type of feedback will occur to keep the behavior in line.[17]

Change was coming so fast that it almost took on a life of its own. Calls for reformation were coming from many quarters, but the loudest messages were swirling around Luther. The system was thrown into chaos, and like a giant thermostat, forces were put in motion to quell the changes and return the church back to a state of balance. It was too late, however, to bring things back to a state of equilibrium. Reactivity was

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[16] Smith-Acuña, 69.

[17] Ibid.

rampant. The forces driving change and the forces resisting it were in a heated state of opposition.

Reactivity from Luther Spread in Two Directions

Luther introduced changes that completely disturbed the religious system of his day. Limbic reactivity was ignited as forces tried to reestablish balance. Sides were quickly polarized. Violence ensued. When Luther led change, it sparked reactivity in two directions: those who vehemently opposed the changes he sought to bring, and those who enthusiastically pushed for further change, emboldened by Luther's example. There were peasant "rebellions in 1476, 1491, 1498, 1503, and 1514. But none of these were as widespread nor as devastating as the uprisings of 1524 and 1525"[18] that resulted from Luther's influence.

Frustrations over societal injustices reached a breaking point. First, the rebels claimed biblical authority, siting that the teachings of the reformers supported their cause. Luther did not support the rebellion and tried to distance himself from it, but the movement had taken on a life of its own. Like Luther's ninety-five statements he nailed to the Wittenberg church, the peasants produced what they called the "Twelve Articles," which represented their protestations against the injustices committed against the peasant class. Again, like Luther, "They sought to base their claims on the authority of Scripture, and concluded by declaring that, if any of their demands were shown to be contrary to Scripture, it would be withdrawn."[19] When first reading the "Twelve Articles," Luther

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[18] González, 41.

[19] Ibid.

agreed that the demands of the peasants were just. They were oppressed, but when the authorities refused to concede to their demands, the peasants threatened to revolt. Luther advised against it, but he could not stop it. The conflict resulted in the death of more than 100,000 peasants.[20] The reaction to demanded change was swift and violent.

Violent Reactivity as the Result of Change

Though the Church sought to quell the changes brought on by reformation movements (Luther's as well as many others), it could not. Change came at a bloody price, but it did come. It not only sparked the Reformation, but it also prompted the Counter-Reformation, which in many ways altered the Roman Church. In answer to the Reformation, the Church convened the Council of Trent, which has served to shape modern Catholicism.[21]

Luther is the quintessential example of a leader who tries to bring systemic change in hopes of affecting reformation in the church. Luther never intended to start a new denomination. He only wanted to bring reform to the church he loved. The criticisms he cited and the subsequent changes he introduced, however, were not accepted, but rather, met with violent resistance. His future in the Catholic Church was impossible. On a lesser scale, many pastors have introduced systemic changes to their churches without properly preparing the soil for change, and have consequently found themselves embroiled in a battle that has either lead to church splits or their own unemployment.

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[20] González, 42.

[21] Lance Ralston, "Martin Luther Posts 95 Thesis At Wittenberg," March 18, 2018, https://www.sanctorum.us/seven-key-moments-in-church-history/.

The Many Tributaries of Reformation

Resistance to change is a universal human condition. Even though the Reformation sparked massive changes, when those within the movement proposed further changes, their own people opposed them. One of the long-held assumptions that was challenged was the matter of Jesus' presence at the sacramental meal. Millard Erickson has taken all the various positions on this issue and synthesized it down to four basic views.[22] While the Catholic Church held the traditional view of transubstantiation,[23] the reformers proposed several new ideas: consubstantiation, the mystical presence of Jesus, and the symbolic presence of Jesus.[24] The Catholic Church viciously opposed these views. The reformers were labeled as agents of Satan. Though men were trying to understand the Scriptures and propose an approach to the sacraments that reflected their understanding of the Bible, the systemic changes were seen as a threat to long held beliefs, and were consequently resisted with force.[25]

These were more than doctrinal disputes—reformers were introducing ideas that changed the understanding of salvation and the Church's involvement in it. Was the Church the channel of grace, or simply a witness to it? The resistance that came from the Catholic Church cannot be overstated; the western world was literally divided. However,

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[22] Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013), 1121.

[23] Joseph Pohle, *The Sacraments: A Dogmatic Treatise*, ed. Arthur Preuss, vol. 2 (St. Louis, MO: Wentworth Press, 2019), 25.

[24] Franz Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, vol. 3 (St. Louis, MO: Concordia, 1953), 435.

[25] Transubstantiation is the view that the eucharistic elements in Holy Communion are literally transformed into the body and blood of Jesus. Consubstantiation is the view that the substance of the communion elements coexist with the body and blood of Jesus. The mystical presence of Jesus is the belief that the spiritual presence of Jesus exists in a special way with the communion elements. Symbolic presence is the belief that the Holy Communion elements merely represent the body and blood of Jesus.

the birth of the Lutheran movement was not the end of systemic overhaul. Taking cues from the reformers, further changes were introduced by other radical agents of change.

The Anabaptist Revolt

The Anabaptist movement was launched on several simultaneous fronts, but it is generally believed that the movement began in Switzerland and was led by Conrad Grebel and Felix Manz (1498–1527).[26] However, the movement is most associated with Menno Simons. His influence was so great that, in time, a segment of the Anabaptist movement became known as "Mennonites."[27] Again, change was resisted with violent intent. Menno was condemned to death and lived for years as a fugitive and an itinerant missionary.[28] Eventually, he found refuge in Denmark where he remained for the rest of his life. He predicted the movement would face persecution and suffering.[29]

The movement was a radical proposal for change. The Anabaptists were sympathizers with the Reformation, but took their freedom to interpret the Scriptures without ecclesiastical oversight to a level beyond Luther. They believed that baptism was an outward sign of the inner reality of regeneration and thus taught that infant baptism, as practiced by the Catholic Church, Lutherans, and Zwinglians,[30] was contrary to

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[26] Lucas, 528.

[27] Ibid.

[28] Latourette, 785.

[29] Ibid.

[30] Protestant reformers who followed the teachings of Ulrich Zwingli.

Scripture.[31] They taught that infant baptism was a "device of the devil."[32] A person was only to be baptized after confessing to a personal experience of being born again. The word Anabaptist means re-baptizers, but was rejected by the Anabaptists, because they believed infant baptism was no baptism at all. It was empty ritual, and therefore, adult baptism was the first and only real baptism. These types of changes were perhaps more stubbornly driven forward because their supporters felt they were standing on the Word of God. It was not just a matter of altering internal systems, but instead their battles were over moral principles.

Edwin Friedman comments that when a leader proposes changes, the attacks will turn personal as a tactic to reestablish equilibrium to the system.[33] The rhetoric between the reformers and their opponents bears this out as each accused the other of being in league with Satan. Vitriolic language incited bloodlust within the followers, and opposing sides often supported their cause at the end of a sword.

It is ironic that the movement was borne out of a desire to be true to the Scriptures, and yet the resistance to the radical change in religious practices was swift and fierce. In 1526 the officials of Zurich made an official decree that anyone holding to Anabaptist ideas was to suffer the penalty of drowning.[34] An official church decree was made in Zurich 1525 that all unbaptized children should be immediately baptized with

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[31] Lucas, 529.

[32] Ibid., 531.

[33] Edwin H. Friedman, *A Failure of Nerve: Leadership in the Age of the Quick Fix* (New York: Church, 2007), chap. 8, Kindle.

[34] Lucas, 531.

the threat of being removed from their parents' custody if the order was not fulfilled.[35] It is estimated that the persecution of Anabaptists exceeded that of Christians before the time of Constantine.[36] One historian reports, "Between four and five thousand Anabaptists were executed by fire, water, and sword."[37]

The reformers who proposed changes in the Catholic Church were persecuted for their ideas, so it is ironic that those same reformers persecuted the Anabaptists. This supports the consideration that limbic reactivity to change is a universal human reaction. Ronald Richard asserts, "our behavior is 'fused' to the behaviors of others in the system when our actions are reactions to their behaviors and their actions are reactions to our behaviors. Such a chain reaction is endless."[38] This reactive firestorm was more easily triggered because the religious community of Europe was for the most part undifferentiated. If people wanted to avoid persecution, they walked in step with the church. Such a condition tended to exacerbate limbic reactivity. Michael Kerr writes, "As differentiation decreases, individuality is less well developed, togetherness needs are stronger, emotional reactivity is more intense and more easily triggered."[39] Medieval society discouraged individuality. The community had to stay connected in order to

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[35] Ibid.

[36] González, 56.

[37] Shelley, 251.

[38] Ronald W. Richardson, *Polarization and the Healthier Church: Applying Bowen Family Systems Theory to Conflict and Change in Society and Congregational Life* (n.p.: BookBaby, 2012), 30.

[39] Michael E. Kerr and Murray Bowen, *Family Evaluation: An Approach Based On Bowen Theory* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1988), 75.

survive. These conditions set the stage for violent reactivity when novel ideas that ran counter to the established religious norms were introduced.

John Wesley

This author's own faith tradition was birthed out of resistance to systemic change. John Wesley was a powerful leader who led a movement that sparked the Great Awakening of England in the mid to late 18th century, impacted a nation, and influenced the world. However, Wesley was a radical leader of change. His hope was to bring change to the Church of England, of which he was a part, but his leadership was sternly resisted. As a result, Wesley ended up leading a movement outside of the official church, thus, in time, the "Methodists" were born. He was successful because he was a tireless worker and an administrative genius.[40]

One radical change Wesley proposed was the empowerment of lay preachers to fill preaching posts. At first, he was reluctant to do so, thinking only ordained clergy should be allowed to preach. A young man named Thomas Maxfield had been preaching and when John heard about it, he was going to stop it, but Wesley's mother, Susanna, talked him into listening to Maxfield before making a decision. Wesley agreed and after hearing Maxfield, realized God could use laymen to proclaim the word.[41] This was the beginning of empowering laymen and laywomen to engage in leading the ministry, allowing small communities of followers to spring up more quickly. Wesley was able to

[40] Shelley, 338.

[41] González, 214.

keep the growing movement organized and as a result, the movement outlasted his lifetime.

Wesleyans and Social Reform

John Wesley was an exceptional leader, able to push change through in spite of the forceful resistance that ensued. The roots of the Wesleyan Church were sunk deep into social justice issues. Wesley was actively involved in social justice causes, though he would not have used that language. Instead, he spoke of holiness and reform.[42] Early on, Wesley took up the causes against slavery. He created "interest-free loans, free medical services, and a jobs program" to aid the poor.[43] He supported the admission of women into pastoral ministry, and he opposed distilleries because of the burgeoning alcohol problem and the systemic poverty it produced.[44]

Wesley's influence on William Wilberforce, the reformer who led the movement to abolish slavery in England, encouraged Wilberforce to continue to fight against slavery, and years later, influenced abolitionists in the United States:

> In 1791 he [Wesley] wrote to William Wilberforce, encouraging him in his long campaign in Parliament for the abolition of the slave trade in Great Britain. In the letter, Wesley called slavery "that execrable villainy which is the scandal of religion, of England, and of human nature," and wrote, "Unless God has raised you up for this very thing, you will be worn out by the opposition of men and devils. But if God be for you, who can be against you? … Go on, in the name of God and in the power of his might, till even American slavery (the vilest that ever saw the sun) shall vanish away before it." Less than a week later, John Wesley died. It was the last letter he ever wrote.[45]

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[42] Robert Black and Keith Drury, *The Story of the Wesleyan Church* (Indianapolis, IN: Wesleyan Publishing House, 2012), 239.

[43] Ibid., 234.

[44] Ibid.

[45] Ibid., 338.

Letters like this demonstrate the passion Wesley held for social reform. Wesley was concerned for the poor, the needy, and the outcast. He worked to establish orphanages and medical help for the sick. His commitment to social needs influenced his followers to continue to advocate for the needy. That passion carried into the early 20th century.

Early Methodists followed Wesley's lead to oppose systemic injustice.[46] By the 1840s, a group in the United States had broken away from the Methodist Church because of their opposition to slavery. They were identified as the Wesleyan Methodist Connection, and were aggressively in support of abolition.[47] They took up the charge to support other social concerns as well, "advocating pacifism, denouncing secret societies and drink, and championing women's rights."[48] In addition, they fought for prison reform, "the Factory Acts, the protection of children, [and] the crusade against cruelty to animals,"[49] conditions that arose after the Civil War due to rapid industrialization and the accompanying urbanization and immigration.[50] However, these other concerns did not have the magnetic draw that abolition had commanded.[51]

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[46] Ingvar Haddal, *John Wesley: A Biography* (London: Epworth Press, 1961), 159.

[47] Randall J. Stephens, "From Abolitionists to Fundamentalists: The Transformation of the Wesleyan Methodists in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries," *American Nineteenth Century History* 16, no. 2 (May 4, 2015): 59–91, https://doi.org/10.1080/14664658.2015.1078141.

[48] Ibid., 59–91.

[49] Frank E. Gaebelein, "Evangelicals and Social Concern," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 25, no. 1 (March 1982): 17–22, EBSCOhost.

[50] Robert T. Handy, "George D. Herron and the Kingdom Movement," *Church History* 19 (June 1950): 97–115, EBSCOhost.

[51] Black and Drury, 1210–1213, Kindle.

The fledgling denomination found itself in an identity crisis.[52] The Wesleyan movement began to drift away from its roots. In increasing measure, the new denomination turned its focus toward the inward spiritual journey, leaving behind the concerns of systemic social injustice. Instead, they aligned themselves "with the post-Civil War holiness movement, a mass revival that tended to stress personal rather than social holiness."[53] There was a concern, and it still exists today, that social justice is code for liberalism. Taking the proverbial pendulum swing, the denomination moved away from anything that seemed in anyway associated with socialism or modernist ideas.

One of the deterrents to embracing a more robust involvement with social concerns was the rise of liberalism, which was supported predominately by groups still aligned with social justice. By the beginning of the 20th century, "the Wesleyan Methodist Connection had become a conservative, quasi-fundamentalist church, at war with liberal Protestantism, and on the defensive against the encroachments of modernism."[54] The gap between the Wesleyan denomination and social justice involvement continued to widen until, in the early 1940s, an official position was stated that would cause the denomination to completely abandon the social justice movement for the next sixty years. There were those who wanted to correct the gradual changes that had occurred during the past decades and get back to the practices of Wesley, but those changes were resisted:

> Wesleyans marked their 100th anniversary in 1942 and 1943, giving church leaders the chance to reflect on the denomination's roots and the course it had

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[52] Stephens, 59–91.

[53] Ibid.

[54] Ibid.

> taken. Commemorative issues of the denomination's paper marked the centenary. Contributors mentioned abolitionism only in passing. Wesleyan Methodism's flame keepers said nothing of other reforms, including pacifism, civil rights for African Americans, or women's rights. In their tributes officials seem almost embarrassed by the zealous activism of Orange Scott and other leading lights of the early denomination.[55]

Their careful posture and conservative positioning effectively removed Wesleyans from the market square. Caring for the poor and marginalized were causes that would be taken up on the mission field overseas, but the American church would be careful to disassociate itself with social justice causes. That reactive position by denominational leaders set the Wesleyan Church in a trajectory that has affected the church into the 21st century.

Battle Lines Drawn at the Threat of Systemic Change

Since the first part of the 20th century, another identity crisis has been brewing in the Wesleyan church. Today there is a growing desire for the church to return to her roots. The rising interest in social justice was sparked in part by a book by Donald W. Dayton, titled, *Rediscovering an Evangelical Heritage: A Tradition and Trajectory of Integrating Piety and Justice.* Dayton's book, first published in 1976 and reprinted in 2014, awakened young Wesleyans to the radical involvement in social justice by early Wesleyans. As a result, there is a growing interest in returning to the roots of the early movement.[56]

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[55] Stephens, 59-–91.

[56] Black and Drury, chap. 21, Kindle.

The desire among clergy for systemic change is increasing. For almost 100 years, Wesleyans have engaged in individual acts of mercy, but have shied away from a broader engagement in social reforms.[57] The denomination is at another crossroads, with a younger generation interested in broadening the scope of the gospel to include social reform. And yet, there is the expected resistance to change from those who hold some of the original fears that drove the Wesleyan Church away from social justice during its adolescent years. Even so, many in the Wesleyan church today are concerned about the denomination moving in the direction of social justice for fear of its close association with socialism.[58]

A statement of faith from *Sojourners Magazine* was posted on the Wesleyan Pastors' Facebook page. The document called for the church to be more active in social justice initiatives, an act that would change the practices of the last one hundred years. The article was criticized because it leaned politically left. One of the signers of the document was the General Superintendent Emerita of the Wesleyan Church, Dr. Jo Anne Lyon. Her signature on the document drew considerable debate. Some were excited she included her name to the document, because it unofficially indicated that the Wesleyan Church may again pick up the torch of social reform. There were some who were angered that an official would endorse a document that, in their opinion, was a propaganda piece for the Democratic Party. In response, a Wesleyan blogger posted her own statement in opposition to the one from *Sojourners*.

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[57] Black and Drury, chap. 11, Kindle.

[58] By socialism I am referring to a system where goods, products, and services are owned and regulated by the government.

Rev. Patty David began a blog titled *The Wesleyan Resistance*. The blog was started in opposition to what she believed to be an attempt by the more liberal pastors in the Wesleyan Church to take the denomination into liberalism. The resulting debate between Wesleyan pastors was impassioned and heated. The divide demonstrated that the Wesleyan Church is at another crossroads, on the brink of another identity crisis not unlike the one experienced in the early 20th century. Will the church follow the path of those taken in the early 20th century and retreat from the social justice arena? Or will the church return to the social justice practices of its founder, John Wesley? No one can know for now, but it is apparent change is coming. How explosive that change will be may depend on whether those proposing the systemic changes seek to drive the change, or instead nurture it.

The Monastic Movement

Many changes have been introduced to the church throughout history. Led by courageous leaders, most were met with opposition, always heated, and sometimes violent. One remarkable exception to this was the monastic movement, which was a grass roots movement that sprang up in the late 3rd century. Previously, there was only one Christian denomination at that time, though there is debate as to whether the first church was the Catholic Church or the Orthodox Church. The church began to gain acceptability in the empire and in time acquired enough influence, money, and power, that many thought it was corrupt. The monastic movement arose in reaction to the growing corruption.

Though seemingly an outlier, upon closer examination, it becomes clear that there was not widespread resistance to the monastic movement because change was not

initiated by a leader. Instead, it was a serendipitous reaction of the masses over the growing spiritual bankruptcy of the institutional church: "At first glance, the monastic movement appears to be a most unlikely agent for mission and transformation. The communities were certainly not founded as launching pads for mission. They were not even created out of a desire to get involved in society in their immediate environment."[59] Yet the movement so sparked change that it is credited with saving the medieval Church.

After Constantine removed the threat of persecution against the Christians once and for all, the church thrived. In fact, the movement became so popular that many were joining the ranks of the church because it was in vogue: "The narrow gate of which Jesus had spoken had become so wide that countless multitudes were hurrying past it—some seemingly after privilege and position, without caring to delve too deeply into the meaning of Christian baptism and life under the cross."[60]

It was in reaction to this phenomenon that the monastic movement was born. Many chose, in response to the declining condition of the church, to withdraw from society to pursue God. There was no leader calling for a movement. There was no memo instructing others to leave for the desert. Yet, thousands did just that.

The monastic movement is credited to Paul and Anthony, two desert fathers, but they were among many who chose to separate from society. Their stories became well known because of Jerome and Athanasius, respectively, who wrote about their exploits.[61] Church historian Justo L. Gonzales writes, "Monasticism was not the invention of an

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[59] Jerry Pillay, "The Church as a Transformation and Change Agent," *HTS Theological Studies* 73, no. 3 (2017): http://www.scielo.org.za/scielo.php?script=sci_arttext&pid=S0259-94222017000300025.

[60] González, 137.

[61] Ibid., 138.

individual, but rather a mass exodus, a contagion, which seems to have suddenly affected the thousands of people."[62] The movement profoundly changed Europe as leaders of the church noticed and admired the lives of the monks. They wrote about them and encouraged their piety. That caused the movement to grow, to the point that monasticism's influence is credited with saving the church from extinction during the Middle Ages.[63] This phenomenon lends support to the idea that systemic change is best introduced when a population is adequately prepared for, and when it is perceived as coming from the grass roots rather than a top-down declaration.

The growing discontentment with the spiritually bankrupt condition of the church created urgency for change. The movement still had to be fanned into flame by leaders who wrote about it, but its power was due in part to the fact that the masses saw the need for something different. The fact that change came from a grass-roots movement underscores the importance of congregations today creating safe spaces where open dialogue can make possible a more collaborative effort toward systemic changes.

Another Grassroots Phenomenon Is Unfolding in the Present Day

There is another movement underway that is not unlike the monastic movement of the Middle Ages. It is, however, suspected that it will not unite the church the way the monastic movement did because the institutional church no longer holds the place of honor or authority it once did. Unlike the Christians of the Middle Ages, Christians today are comfortable with leaving the church and finding an expression of spirituality outside

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[62] González, 139.

[63] Ibid., 146–147.

the institutional church. Therefore, if change is resisted, people will simply leave and find their own way to express their faith. This movement is, in part, some of the reason for the push among young Wesleyans to revert back to the practices of Wesley. John Woodbridge writes, "The twenty-first century is also witnessing a growing concern among younger evangelicals for social justice."[64] Woodbridge makes the interesting observation that a motivating factor in the millennial generation's interest in social reform has come, not from the church, but from the "Irish rock star Bono."[65] He has impacted the world by leading efforts to reduce global poverty in the developing world, especially in Africa.[66]

Those resisting change toward social justice in the Wesleyan Church are also voicing concerns that the social justice movement sparked by people like Bono will move the church toward socialistic practices of men like Walter Raushenbusch, an early advocate of social reform and a sympathizer of the socialist movement in the early 20th century. Woodbridge, however, believes that "for the most part such criticism has fallen on deaf ears."[67] Woodbridge asserts that postmodern evangelicals do not view themselves as aligning with any political affiliation. He writes, "Far from embracing the Protestant liberalism of Rauschenbusch, postmodern evangelicals see themselves as actively living out the gospel, perhaps with more consistency than their forebears. Abandoning the left-right dichotomy, they believe Jesus exemplifies a generous orthodoxy joined with a

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[64] Woodbridge, 815.

[65] Ibid.

[66] Ibid.

[67] Ibid., 815–816.

generous orthopraxis."[68] It seems the push for change by younger Wesleyans and the attendant resistance is a microcosm of what is happening on a broader scale.

This movement is happening as a grassroots movement, because evangelical, millennial youth are simply leaving the institutional church and pursuing mission on their own. George Barna peels away the veneer to expose the reality of this generation's thought process when it comes to the institutional church:

> They are often bored with local church activities: what should they do about their involvement at a local church? They have discovered biblical reasons to question the validity of the local church system: should they continue to support it or seek an alternative? They are painfully aware that their personal spiritual growth has plateaued: what must they do to reinvigorate their spiritual life? The teaching and challenges they have received for the past few years have been lightweight and repetitive: is there greater depth to the Christian life, and how can they pursue it? They have become tired of the pettiness, the politics and the meaninglessness of the relationships in their primary faith community: is the organized church a help or hindrance to a genuine Christian life, and how does one find or initiate a more appropriate community? The disorganized mission trips and community service projects they experience cannot be the best option for using their gifts in service to others: how would Jesus have them invest their life in meaningful transformational activity?[69]

Like the monks who left the institutional church in the Middle Ages, millennials are leaving the institutional church in pursuit of what they deem a more authentic expression of the faith. Though traditional evangelicals are concerned about the future of the institutional church, there is no official millennial church to resist. Thus, systemic change is coming, but it is happening spontaneously. Whether or not this will be good for the global Church of Jesus Christ remains to be seen.

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[68] Woodbridge, 815–816.

[69] George Barna, *Maximum Faith: Live Like Jesus* (Austin, TX: Fedd and Company, 2011), chap. 2, Kindle.

The quandary is that pastors of small, traditional churches who try to get their congregations to change and adapt their ways to a more modern expression of faith practices, face stern resistance. Sometimes change is pushed to the point of splitting the church, or the resistance is strong enough that it results in the dismissal of the pastor. Wondering where it is all headed, Woodbridge asks, "Is it too much to hope that instead of another schism within American evangelicalism, each side will embrace the best of what the other side has to offer and go forward arm in arm?"[70] Embracing the best would be a change of historical practice, as people tend to be entrenched in their positions.

History teaches that strong leaders can drive change, and perhaps that is necessary. James Hunter casts doubt on whether grassroots movements can really spark systemic change. He makes the bold statement that real change in the world never comes through the grassroots but only from leadership: "Cultural change…rarely if ever happens through grassroots political mobilization though grassroots mobilization can be a manifestation of deeper cultural transformation. Change of this nature can only come from the top down."[71] If that is truly the case, then change—driven or nurtured—has to come through capable leadership. The question is whether it will be more effective to drive the change or nurture it.

When thinking in the context of a pastor leading systemic change in his or her church, is there a more measured way? Is there a way that acknowledges the importance of self-differentiated leaders, yet also nurtures a grass roots approach? Is there a way to appropriately prepare people for systemic change without unnecessarily delaying needed

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[70] Woodbridge, 827.

[71] James Davison Hunter, *To Change the World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 42.

changes? Indeed, there are approaches to leading systemic change that will still require strong leadership, but will have a better chance of mitigating volatile reactivity. Learning how to host safe spaces for meaningful dialogue, how to engage in healthy conflict, and how to process with people through the states of grief associated with the loss aversion that comes with change, will be explored in the fifth chapter. Chapter four examines the importance of learning how to lead change with a family systems approach, as every congregation is a family system. When change is introduced, there are predictable patterns of reactivity. Understanding how those patterns work and how to respond to them will greatly increase the pastor's chance of success when leading systemic change.

CHAPTER 4:

FAMILY SYSTEMS THINKING

Congregations operate like other family systems so when anxiety is introduced they operate like families. Often the focus is on the symptomatic members, but the real issue is the internal family system that reacts with a life of its own. The introduction of change into a congregation evokes reactivity, like any other family system, which results in conflict. Conflict is inevitable because people have an innate drive to reestablish equilibrium in the family system. This chapter explains how family systems work so that pastoral leaders can be better equipped to prepare for change and to navigate change once it has been initiated.

Examining the church through the lens of family systems thinking will radically alter the way pastors approach the conflict that results from the introduction of change. Family systems theory "viewed the family as an emotional unit,"[1] which stands juxtaposed to psychoanalytic theory, which views "the family as a collection of relatively [psychologically] autonomous people."[2] Moving that analysis into the context of a church setting translates into interpreting the actions of individuals in a church conflict as separate and distinct from the actions of others. In contrast, family systems theory teaches that any group of people function "as an emotional unit, a network of interlocking relationships."[3] When conflict arises within the church between individuals, it is not

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[1] Michael E. Kerr and Murray Bowen, *Family Evaluation: An Approach Based On Bowen Theory* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1988), 387.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Kerr and Bowen, 387.

isolated to the people immediately involved in the disruption. Everyone within the unit is affected, and the interconnection of everyone within the group contributes to the disruption. The locus of conflict is not between the two, but is a manifestation of the interconnectedness of the group.

The Church is not a collection of individuals; it is an emotional system. Family theorist Lynn Hoffman defines a system as, "any entity the parts of which co-vary interdependently with one another, and which maintains equilibrium in an error-activated way."[4] Each person within a congregation makes up the "parts." Those parts function in a system that demands a sense of equilibrium, and the system will fight to maintain balance.[5]

That reality requires leaders to adjust their thinking from cause and effect analysis, to instead investigating the "emotional process going on among people."[6] "Family systems thinking" teaches leaders to observe the interconnectedness between the members of a group. It understands that each has a place in the system and each affects the system by their interactions. Often leaders will look at the symptomatic individual as the center of the conflict, but in family systems thinking, the symptomatic person is merely the revealer of an unhealthy system. It is the system that needs healing, not just the individual.[7]

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[4] Augustus Y. Napier and Carl A. Whitaker, *The Family Crucible: The Intense Experience of Family Therapy* (New York: HarperCollins, 1978), 47.

[5] Ibid.

[6] Roberta M. Gilbert, *The Eight Concepts of Bowen Theory* (Lake Frederick, VA: Leading Systems Press, 2006), 2.

[7] Jack Shitama, *Anxious Church, Anxious People: How to Lead Change in an Age of Anxiety* (Earleville, MD: Charis Works, 2018), 113.

In his book, *The Family Crucible*, therapist Augustus Napier brings the reader into the counseling room to overhear the conversation between members of a family in therapy. In a moment of reflection after therapy was completed, the father of the family described the moment he began to look at their family problems as a system problem, rather than just a problem of an individual within the family:

> "I was thinking about the individual therapy that both Carolyn and I had during the early years of our marriage, and I wondered what was so different about this family business. We were all there together, of course, but it was more than that. Suddenly it occurred to me that a big difference was the way you guys thought about people and relationships. I mean, the two of you have some interesting ideas, if a little strange at times." We grinned at each other before he resumed. "But there was also something—a kind of electricity—going on between us Brices. Always. And it always felt intense, as though something important were at stake. What struck me that day was that this process that was happening between us was bigger than all of us, that it had a life of its own. I remember the moment so clearly, sensing the power in that room and feeling a little anxious in the face of it."[8]

As Mr. Brice said, there is "a kind of electricity" that connects everyone in the group. In some ways the group is a living entity—"It has a life of its own."[9] The implication is that when analyzing the source of a conflict within a unit, including a local church, the leader who approaches the situation through family systems thinking, will not be quick to assign blame to an individual, but will recognize the conflict as a symptom of group pathology. When change is introduced and parishioners resist, sometimes in a hostile manner, the most symptomatic person is sometimes seen as the problem. Pastoral leaders may benefit by recognizing that the most symptomatic may be revealing a more

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[8] Napier and Whitaker, 38.

[9] Ibid.

systemic issue: the family system is struggling. The anxiety brought on by the change served to expose the issue that was lying beneath the surface.

In numerous interviews with pastors who were attacked after introducing change in their congregations, I heard repeatedly that the pastor thought the congregation was healthy, until change was proposed. It was at that time that the real condition of the family system was exposed. Often, however, the pastor focused on one or two symptomatic individuals as the problem, rather than recognizing it was a system wide issue. Perhaps this is why it is anecdotally suggested in pastoral circles, that when someone leaves a church because of conflict, if the issue is not dealt with, the church is fated to repeat the same cycle over and over. That would make sense if the issue were the family system reacting to the disequilibrium brought on by the change.

Therefore, the way pastoral leaders approach the conflict that ensues when change is introduced may need to be adjusted. Family systems thinking calls for the leader to view the individuals through which the conflict has manifested, not as people who need to be fixed, but rather as the ones through "whom the [church's] stress or pathology has surfaced."[10] The old paradigm is to analyze problems through a cause-and-effect lens. Person "A" behaved in a certain way, or said something that caused person "B" to behave in a certain way. Through that cause-effect rubric, the solution would be to correct the behavior, seek reconciliation and put the issue behind. Alternatively, family systems thinking teaches that such an approach may at best provide superficial, temporary relief.

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[10] Edwin H. Friedman, Gary Emanuel, and Mickie Crimone, *Generation to Generation: Family Process in Church and Synagogue* (New York: Guilford Press, 1985), 19.

The information of who did and said what, is only valuable when looked at as data that informs the "principles of organization" under which the family unit is functioning.[11]

Individuals within a congregation or family function far less in relation to their personality type, than they do "according to their position" in the family system.[12] Edwin Friedman reveals the problem with isolating the disruption to the symptomatic individual(s): "To take one part out of the whole and analyze its 'nature' will give misleading results, first, because each part will function differently outside the system, and second, because even its functioning inside the system will be different depending on where it is placed in relation to the others."[13] This has implications for the pastor, if for no other reason than to realize the symptomatic person is not the locus of the problem when conflict arises in the church. They are simply the tool that reveals that the system needs healing. Thus, the symptomatic person should not be treated as a problem. Everyone shares in the problem, because the problem is not a person, but the system within which everyone functions.

Relational Triangles

If pastoral leaders face conflict through a family systems approach, they will have to be aware of a number of important components. One of the most basic and important components to stay focused on when dealing with the conflict resulting from the introduction of change, are the "relational triangles." Churches can quickly polarize over

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[11] Friedman, 15.

[12] Friedman, 15.

[13] Ibid.

an issue, especially when it is due to the introduction of systemic change. The structural reality at the center of the polarization is relational triangles.[14]

Definition of Relational Triangles

Dr. Murray Bowen, one of the early promoters of Internal Family Systems referred to triangles as the "building block of emotional systems."[15] Every emotional system, family, church, school, team is made up of relational triangles. Every triangle has three points. Each point can represent a person or an issue. When two of the points are at a place of discomfort, one of the points will reach out to a third point to stabilize the relationship between the first two points.[16] The participants are typically not conscious of these moves. Triangulation is an automatic response in an attempt to bring the family system back to a place of homeostasis.

Every triangle has insiders and outsiders. The insiders will fight to stay in and the outsiders will fight to become an insider.[17] If person "A" is in conflict with person "B," person "A" might complain to person "B" about person "C." The shared negative focus on person "C" alleviates the tension between persons "A" and "B." Richardson says, "At some point, when there is some degree of increased tension, they will be more comfortable talking about a third person or an issue rather than addressing the source of

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[14] Ronald W. Richardson, *Polarization and the Healthier Church: Applying Bowen Family Systems Theory to Conflict and Change in Society and Congregational Life* (n.p.: BookBaby, 2012), 60.

[15] Richardson, *Polarization and the Healthier Church,* 51.

[16] Shitama, 25.

[17] Kerr and Bowen, 136.

the tension between them."[18] This gives insight into the problem of gossip within the church.

Triangulation is part of human nature, so perhaps it is part of our fallen nature, as it invariably leads to gossip and slander. Friedman speaks to this drive toward homeostasis: "The relationship of any two members of an emotional triangle is kept in balance by the way a third party relates to each of them or to their relationship. When a given relationship is stuck, therefore, there is probably a third person or issue that is part of the homeostasis."[19] This pattern is so predictable that when a pastor encounters conflict between two people, he or she can assume a third person is involved at some level. When change is introduced into a congregation and conflict arises between the leader and an individual as a result, there will almost always be a third person involved, which helps explain why reactivity can spread so quickly through out a congregation.

How Relational Triangles Work

Friedman proposed several laws of relational triangles. The first was stated in the paragraph above. The others are important to understanding how triangles work. If an individual is the third member of a relational triangle (they are the outsider), they cannot bring lasting change to the other two parts of the triangle.[20] In fact, Jack Shitama pointedly states, "You can't change a relationship to which you do not belong."[21] Because

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[18] Richardson, *Polarization and the Healthier Church,* 51.

[19] Friedman, Emanuel, and Crimone, 36.

[20] Ibid.

[21] Shitama, 69.

of the force of the system to drive the unit back to a place of homeostasis, efforts to bring two people together, or to separate two people, "often convert these efforts to their opposite intent."[22] Because of the intrinsic connection of an emotional system, unseen forces push for balance. Thus, the stereotypical scenario where the efforts of two parents to pressure their daughter to discontinue a relationship with an unworthy suitor, only serve to drive her into his arms, is accurate.

Friedman also states that when someone tries to change the relationship of two people in a triangle, the third person will take on the stress of the other two.[23] That holds significant implications for pastors who try to "fix" people in difficult relationships. Because people are part of multiple triangles in a relational system, pressure to change one triangle will be met with the homeostatic forces of the other triangles. The system as a whole will resist change.[24]

How Relational Triangles Are Broken

Because internal family systems seek equilibrium, people form triangles to dissipate anxiety. As a result, people constantly try to triangulate others in an attempt to create balance where homeostasis has been disturbed. A healthy congregation is one where people are not triangulating one another, but it takes strong leadership to teach people to live a different way. Triangles cannot be broken through direct assault. As stated above, such a maneuver will result in strengthening the triangle and will bring the

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[22] Friedman, Emanuel, and Crimone, 37.

[23] Friedman, Emanuel, and Crimone, 37.

[24] Ibid., 38.

stress of the triangle back on the leader. The key to disentangling relational triangles is for the leader to take an indirect approach.

Because the system is interconnected and is the real source of the problem and not the individuals, the leader must seek ways to address the relational system. This starts by the leader not allowing him or herself to become part of an emotional triangle. When resistance to change is expressed by people triangulating against the pastoral leadership, the temptation is to either confront those who are gossiping, or to avoid them. Either approach will exacerbate the problem. When someone resists an attempt to draw him or her into a triangle, it forces the other parties in the triangle to seek equilibrium by addressing their own issues. This is called self-differentiation, which will be examined in the next section.

Shitama advises, "The way to unlock a triangle is to give back the other two persons the responsibility for their relationship."[25] As long as the third person of the triangle takes responsibility for the other two, the issue that drove the two to seek equilibrium by triangulating a third person will remain and the triangle will continue. However, knowing about triangles and choosing to stay disentangled, is not enough to avoid them. To consistently detriangle will require one to become a family systems thinker.[26] Only then will a person begin to see the consistency with which relational triangles are a part of one's life.

The family system is bound together by an almost mysterious force. That force is held in place by relational triangles. Seeing relationships from a family systems

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[25] Shitama, 31.

[26] Kerr, 161.

perspective is helpful because, as Friedman states, "The emotional triangle concept focuses on process rather than content; it therefore provides a new way to hear people, as well as criteria for what information is important."[27] When someone tries to include another in a triangle, the content of his or her complaint is irrelevant.

When a pastor hears a dispute between two parishioners, the content of their disagreement is not nearly as important as the process that is taking place. In attempting to include the pastor in a triangle, they are seeking him or her to take responsibility for their strained relationship. A third person in a triangle cannot "fix" the relationship of the other two; a person can only fix the relationship to which they belong.[28] When a pastor refuses to take the bait, it places the responsibility back on the other two to work out their issues.

Self-Differentiation

Self-differentiation is difficult, but necessary when facing reactivity that has resulted from introducing change. This happened in several of the churches whose pastors I interviewed for a field research project. The pastor introduced change, stated his or her position and attempted to stay self-differentiated, but was not able to weather the storm. Most were dismissed and a few resigned. When dealing with systemic change, there is reactivity in the congregation. To survive, and even thrive, a leader must understand how family systems work, and a large part of that is that the leader must understand the nature of self-differentiation.

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[27] Friedman, Emanuel, and Crimone, 36.

[28] Shitama, 32.

When change is injected into a family system there will likely be disagreement. That is normal and even healthy. The difficulty is when the change ignites reactivity, which is different from disagreement. When people disagree, if they engage in healthy conflict (this will be examined in the next chapter), they will exchange ideas, work through their differences and work to find a path forward. Reactivity, however, is the result of anxiety. Those who behave in a reactive way resist any attempts to change the system, seek to sabotage the leader, and spread their anxiety throughout the system.[29]

Reactivity is the "first sign of an anxious family, church or organization."[30] The difficulty, however, is that reactivity can be hard to recognize at first, because people may respond in an adaptive way, thus camouflaging their true reactions to the change. Shitama clarifies:

> When a relationship gets uncomfortable, one of the persons can agree with the other, rather than saying how they feel. This is adaptive behavior because they are "adapting" to the other person, rather than dealing with the discomfort by taking a stand. If they release one's discomfort by expressing it to a third person, that is triangling. For example, a congregant may be uncomfortable with the pastor and unable to say what she feels. She just agrees with the pastor, but then she complains to the choir director. The anxiety that the congregant feels because she is unable to take a stand with her pastor is released by triangling the choir director.[31]

That kind of reaction serves to spread anxiety throughout the system. When my own church was taken through a change process with the consultation group, *Maximizing Impact*, they warned us that people would agree to the proposed changes, but then when implementation began, there would be resistance. Our congregation voted to approve the

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[29] Shitama, 41.

[30] Ibid., 46.

[31] Ibid.

prescribed changes by 96 percent, but during the implementation phase, there was much resistance. That is because congregations will often assume an adaptive posture, but will triangle others in order to dissipate their anxiety, which in turn spreads reactivity throughout the group.

Such activity inevitably leads to polarization among the congregation. The system receives positive feedback from the proposed changes. Positive feedback is a response to change that informs the system that homeostasis is being threatened, and thus, action must be taken to return balance. Polarization is an attempt to restore that balance.[32] The family system rebels, as if it has a life of its own. Because of the drive to restore balance to the system, reactivity and polarization can happen swiftly and under the radar so that conflict is at a chronic level before the pastoral leadership is even aware of it.

It is important for leaders to keep in mind that when they introduce change, adaptive behavior, passive aggressive responses, and the formation of triangles will be difficult to identify. Perhaps one way to spot these is to pay attention to what is not said or expressed: "The best clue to adaptive behavior is when a person rarely, if ever, defines her own position. In a system, whether family, church or organization, if a person always goes along with what others say without ever expressing her own beliefs, then it likely is adaptive behavior."[33]

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[32] Napier and Whitaker, 83.

[33] Shitama, 46.

Definition of Self-Differentiation

Because adaptive behavior, triangles, and polarization are such common responses to anxiety resulting from change, it is vital a leader learn how to operate in a self-differentiated manner. Friedman quotes psychiatrist, Dr. Murray Bowen, in defining self-differentiation: "Differentiation means 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."[34] The key to this definition is the need for the leader to maintain a balance between being self-defined, and yet staying emotionally connected to the people who oppose her or him. It holds two opposing approaches in juxtaposition: standing firm in one's beliefs, while at the same time being open to new information, curious enough to ask real questions and empathetic enough to receive the input from those who oppose the leader. For a pastor, that means staying emotionally connected to the people fighting against her or him, while also standing firm in his or her convictions. To learn to lead at that level requires significant self-work, but it is vital if a leader is going to lead a congregation through change.

Differentiation Is the Key to Reducing Anxiety in a Family System

Because change introduced into a family system disturbs the equilibrium of that system, thus causing anxiety and reactivity in the group, a leader who exhibits a self-differentiated presence, by virtue of his or her presence, reduces the anxiety. This is not a

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[34] Friedman, Emanuel, and Crimone, 27.

direct cause-effect relationship. Self-differentiation indirectly affects the levels of anxiety in a group: "The reduction of chronic anxiety is a by-product of increasing one's basic level of differentiation."[35] This is due to the nature of relational triangles. People are triangled within the family system. Those relational binds are like a system plugged into an electrical current. Self-differentiation from one of the members of the unit disconnects the circuit. The more self-differentiated a leader is, the more "he will reduce not only his own level of chronic anxiety but also the level of chronic anxiety in all the relationship systems in which his functioning has a significant emotional impact on others."[36] This is so important that Friedman says, "What is vital to changing any kind of 'family' is not knowledge of technique or even of pathology but, rather, the capacity of the family leader to define his or her own goals and values while trying to maintain a non-anxious presence within the system."[37] Jack Shitama states:

> Emotional triangles carry a paradox. The process by which they function is the major force that keeps systems stuck in chronic patterns of dysfunction. Yet unlocking them is the primary way that you, as a leader, can effect significant change. As we'll see, this has more to do with your own functioning and has nothing to do with trying to change others. You can only be responsible for yourself. But the more you do that, while staying connected emotionally, the more likely it is that others will change in positive ways.[38]

This suggests that leading through change requires an indirect approach. In other words, a leader cannot force others to change or control how others react to change. If a leader understands how triangles function and can maintain a non-anxious presence in the face

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[35] Kerr and Bowen, 126.

[36] Kerr and Bowen, 126.

[37] Friedman, Emanuel, and Crimone, 2.

[38] Shitama, 25.

of reactivity, it will have a positive effect on the system in that it will give the anxiety of the triangle back to the other people.

The Challenge of Self-Differentiation

The challenge is to maintain the balance between being self-defined, yet emotionally connected. If one leans too far toward self-definition where they refuse to listen to others or be open to new information, they become a narcissistic leader.[39] Further, if a leader withdraws emotionally, they will disconnect to a point where change will not occur. In fact, Shitama warns, "To give in and withdraw emotionally is the beginning of the end, if not the end itself, for the leader in any system."[40] Sadly, this was my experience after introducing systemic change in one of the positions I held. The reactivity was toxic and I withdrew emotionally. Not long after checking out, there was a point where I knew I would not continue in my leadership position.

On the other hand, if the leader gets drawn into the emotional dysfunction of others, he or she will be triangled and the family pathology will continue. That is why this is the most important self-work a leader must do if they are going to introduce systemic change in a family system. They must know their own heart and convictions and be resolved to stand on them, but also, a leader must commit to staying emotionally connected to those exhibiting emotional reactivity. That is the challenge, but as Friedman said, it is the "key to the kingdom."[41]

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[39] Ibid., 11.

[40] Shitama, 77.

[41] Friedman, Emanuel, and Crimone, 225.

Steps to Becoming Self-Differentiated

In order to be self-differentiated, a leader must develop a set of principles by which he or she is guided, and establish the values that will shape her or his position on ministry issues. Leaders who do this will be "constant and consistent in their behavior and in their relationships."[42] Leaders who operate from a principled position and are clear about their guiding values are free to be transparent and open about their intentions and actions.[43] These function as a foundation for the leader, allowing him or her to make difficult decisions without getting pulled into the vortex of the emotional dysfunction of a reactive family system.[44] This also means it is necessary for the leader to distinguish and recognize the difference between cognitive and emotional responses, and the verbal and non-verbal clues that communicate them.[45] Leaders must stay emotionally connected, but their responses must not become emotional or they will feed into and promote reactivity within the family system.

The place to start is to be curious enough to ask non-threatening questions. These would be open-ended questions, designed to learn what the other is actually thinking. Questions can be asked with an agenda to drive a point. These are usually questions that start with "why." Questions that ask about how, when, where, and what, provoke honest

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[42] Israel Galindo, *The Hidden Lives of Congregations: Discerning Church Dynamics* (Lamham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2014), 177.

[43] Galindo, 177.

[44] Ibid.

[45] Kerr and Bowen, 131.

dialogue. Questions are actually a means of defining self, because they present a heart that is curious, yet not confrontational.[46]

The pronouns used are also important. “You” and “we” statements automatically place others in a confrontational position. “You” statements speak of judgment, and “we” statements assume authority to proclaim another’s responsibility or obligations. “We” statements assume the leader knows what is best for everyone else. “I” statements, on the other hand, define one’s position without requiring others to adopt the same.[47] The leader can engage others by being genuinely interested in their position and seeking to learn from it. But once all information is received, the leader can still share her or his position without requiring others to agree. If others are reactive, the leader can give the anxiety back to them and allow them to work though their own feelings.

Shitama offers a statement a leader can make when challenged about a particular position.[48] I have reworked it into an outline for a reasoned response when challenged:

1. State one’s beliefs or position, founded upon one’s leadership principles and values. This necessitates working out one’s principles and values ahead of time. Thus, the leader needs to do his or her own work first.
2. Acknowledge the other person’s struggle with the leader’s position. This gives the other person opportunity to know they have been heard. Empathy can be offered without changing one’s position.

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[46] Richardson, *Polarization and the Healthier Church,* 146.

[47] Shitama, 42.

[48] Shitama, 76.

3. The leader can confess that he or she is genuinely sorry the other person is struggling with the leader's position. This is not an apology for the position, but sympathy toward the other person over their internal struggle. This also is not disparaging of their position. The other has the right to hold whatever position they choose. The sympathy is over the emotional pain the other is feeling, not over any particular position they may hold.
4. The leader must remember that he or she is not responsible for how others feel. Shitama suggests the leader should keep this part of the approach to him or herself.

Another adjustment to one's language is to ask clarifying questions. These are aimed at appropriately understanding the other's position. Genuine curiosity can serve to deescalate reactivity. There is no need to comment or reflect on their answers; the attempt to understand them better promotes empathy.

The Importance of a Non-Anxious Presence

"Anxiety can be defined as the response of an organism to a threat, real or imagined. It is assumed to be a process that, in some form, is present in all living things."[49] Anxiety drives reactivity, which can "manifest along a continuum that ranges from hyperactivity (the extreme is behavioral frenzy) to hypoactivity (the extreme is behavioral paralysis)."[50] When anxiety is manifested, it informs the leader that the homeostatic condition of the family system is threatened. However, instead of seeking

[49] Kerr and Bowen, 112.

[50] Ibid.

out the "problem" individuals in the congregation to either console or confront, the leader must seek to diminish the anxiety by maintaining a self-differentiated stance, while at the same time seeking to be emotionally connected to the most reactive ones in the system. Direct confrontation of their reactivity will not alleviate the anxiety, but rather empathy joined with self-differentiation will lessen the tension.

There are two kinds of anxiety, chronic and acute. Acute anxiety happens when there is a real threat. This is normal and to be expected. Chronic anxiety "generally occurs in response to imagined threats."[51] This type of anxiety has no time duration associated with it. Unlike acute anxiety, where the anxiety dissipates once the threat is removed, chronic anxiety can endure almost indefinitely. Though change is an event that is time-stamped, it produces chronic anxiety. Thus, reactivity to proposed changes can have lasting effects. The implication is that self-differentiation is not a static position that one takes in response to a specific situation. Rather, self-differentiation, if it is to diffuse chronic anxiety in a church system must be a defining characteristic of an effective leader of change.

The challenge of chronic anxiety, however is that "It is most accurately conceptualized as a system or process of actions and reactions that, once triggered, quickly provides its own momentum and becomes largely independent of the initial triggering stimuli."[52] The reactivity of people in the congregation causes it to take on a life of its own. Eventually, the reactiveness of the people is not so much about the proposed changes that caused the initial anxiety, but rather the anxiety that is shared

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[51] Ibid., 113.

[52] Kerr and Bowen, 113.

between people. The issue that started it soon fades and the power to keep reactivity alive in the congregation are the responses of the people themselves.[53]

The reactivity can spread and effect the congregation before people can even realize what has happened. A research paper from 2010 makes the connection between phobias and the pituitary gland:

> Phobias are believed to be associated with the amygdala, a part of the limbic system within the temporal lobe of the brain, found posterior to the pituitary gland, which is responsible for secreting hormones that regulate fear and aggression. Research using animals, where brain activity is recorded while fear is conditioned using an aversive stimulus, has revealed that the amygdala is active during presentations of the stimulus to which fear has been conditioned. Research with humans utilizing neuroimaging techniques such as positron-emission tomography (PET) and functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRi) have also shown that the amygdala is active during presentation of a phobic stimulus in humans.[54]

The chemical reaction is so instant that Karunaratne writes, "This pathway effects the 'fight or flight response' via action of hypothalamic hormones and causes an immediate reaction to a stimulus, even before it is registered consciously."[55] The implication is that reactiveness due to anxiety from change spreads among a congregation like wildfire. Thus, it is incumbent upon a leader to maintain a non-anxious presence when leading change.

Learning to be a non-anxious presence is vital if one is going to lead change in a self-differentiated way. The term, "non-anxious," however, does not mean the leader feels no anxiety. To the contrary, there may be great anxiety when facing the resistance

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[53] Ibid.

[54] Mahishika Karunaratne, "Neuro-Linguistic Programming and Application in Treatment of Phobias," *St. Georges University of London, Cranmer Terrace* (March 29, 2010): doi.org/10.1016/j.ctcp.2010.02.003.

[55] Ibid.

that attends congregational change. A non-anxious presence is when one contains their own anxiety and does not pass that on to others; but also stays emotionally connected to the people who are behaving reactively. That kind of emotional balance is termed "self-regulation."[56]

Karunaratne reinforces this key tool in the pastoral leader's arsenal:

> In fact, the capacity of members of the clergy to contain their own anxiety regarding congregational matters, both those not related to them, as well as those where they become the identified focus, may be the most significant capability in their arsenal. Not only can such capacity enable religious leaders to be more clear-headed about solutions and more adroit in triangles but, because of the systemic effect that a leader's functioning always has on an entire organism, a nonanxious presence will modify anxiety throughout the entire congregation.[57]

Karunaratne hits on what may be one of the most important leadership skills a pastor can learn. Maneuvering within a family system can seem intimidating, as it is a living entity, yet is not any single person. How does one deal with something that is, in a sense, alive, yet not tangible? The key, as mentioned, is not addressing anyone specifically, but adjusting one's own behavior within the system, which in turn reduces the anxiety within the system. It almost seems magical, and yet, the actual practice of self-differentiation is difficult work. Edwin Friedman, in his book *Generation to Generation*, affirms that a non-anxious presence by a pastoral leader when facing the reactivity caused by change is even more important than having content solutions. Because the congregation is a system, and systems have lives of their own, the non-

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[56] Shitama, 13.

[57] Karunaratne.

anxious presence of the leader can indirectly affect the system in that anxiety will be mitigated by the leader's non-anxious presence, in turn helping to calm the reactivity.[58]

In an *American Psychologist* article, D. H. Barlow references research by Dr. D. W. Winnicott, a pediatrician, that suggests that a mother's calm presence sets her baby at ease. The disposition of the mother is such that she transfers her non-anxious presence to the child. She does not have to have all the answers for her child, but her demeanor is "good enough" to calm the baby. Barlow uses that research to demonstrate that Jesus created a safe space by being a non-anxious presence to the woman with the internal hemorrhage, and the Synagogue official, Jairus (Mark 5:22–43). Like the mother to her child, his non-anxious presence provided space for their faith to grow. He then compared that to the power a pastoral counselor has to create a safe space for congregants seeking counsel. The pastor's non-anxious presence does not guarantee answers to the troubled congregant, but his or her non-anxious presence is "good enough" to instill confidence and diminish anxiety in the counselee.[59] The implications of this research can also transfer to the congregation at large. When a pastoral leader exhibits a non-anxious presence, it transfers hope to the laity and serves to mitigate anxiety.

Signs of an Anxious Presence

Because a non-anxious presence is so key to diminishing reactivity in a congregation, it is incumbent upon the church leader to know how to identify an anxious

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[58] Friedman, Emanuel, and Crimone, 208.

[59] D. H. Barlow, "Unraveling the Mysteries of Anxiety and its Disorders from the Perspective of Emotion Theory," *American Psychologist* 55, no. 11 (2002): 1247–63.

presence and how to develop a non-anxious presence. Friedman suggests a leader begin with "categories of playfulness and diagnosis."[60] When specific issues are discussed, such as a position one takes toward a suggested change, if the leader can keep a light attitude and be somewhat playful, it suggests a non-anxious presence. Alternatively, if the leader bifurcates the issues into categories, such as right and wrong, good or bad, it suggests an anxious presence. Another key suggested by Friedman is that the pastoral leader can keep a playful attitude in the face of charges brought up against him or her. If on the other hand, the leader categorizes those raising the charges, it is a strong indication the leader is spreading anxiety and thus, contributing to the reactivity of the congregation.[61]

There are several steps a leader can take to develop a non-anxious presence. He or she can be intentional; independently work to understand him or herself; learn to give people space to self-define; take care not to "fix" others or take on their anxiety; develop playfulness; learn how to communicate the right responses when their positions or person is challenged; and develop the technique of anchoring. These are key skills that need to be understood and developed if a leader is going to be ready to lead systemic change.

Be intentional. If a leader is going to be a non-anxious presence, he or she must be intentional about it. A non-anxious person will still feel anxiety when challenged by the reactivity that results from introducing change. A leader must acknowledge his or her anxiety and must be self-aware enough to process where that anxiety originates. If the pushback from a congregant touches a nerve in the leader, the intentional leader will seek

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[60] Friedman, Emanuel, and Crimone, 210.

[61] Ibid.

to understand his or her own background enough to identify the source of their own reactivity. This level of self-awareness takes intentionality, but it is necessary for a leader to deal appropriately with his or her anxiety.[62]

Do your own work. Being intentional about establishing a non-anxious presence means a leader must be willing to examine his or her family of origin. This means studying one's siblings, parents, and extended family, even grandparents if possible. Understanding one's place in the family structure, and becoming aware of the familial programming will help a leader realize where his or her anxiety stems from when faced with reactive congregants.[63] Creating a genogram can be helpful at this stage.[64] A genogram is a psychological family tree. It is a valuable tool in giving insight to the unwritten rules that guided a family. It can identify relational patterns, dysfunctions, and other pathologies in a family that can give insight into the automatic reactions a leader is tempted to assume when faced with reactivity. Until a leader can identify and acknowledge his or her automatic programming from his or her family of origin, he or she will be destined to continue to react as she or he has been trained.[65] If, for example, a person grew up in a family where love had to be earned, then a leader may develop the instinct to crave approval. In the face of reactivity and resistance to change, if a leader has not learned to self-differentiate, they may exhibit an anxious presence because they crave the approval of others.

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[62] Shitama, 16.

[63] Ibid.

[64] Standard software for creating a genogram can be found at https://www.genopro.com/genogram/.

[65] Shitama, 16.

This means when a leader feels anxious, he or she must identify from whence the anxiety stems. Thinking back to her or his family, the leader can ask where this feeling of anxiety has most often appeared in his or her family history, and then ask, "How can I rewrite the script so that I'm no longer captive to this feeling? This is a lifelong process, but the more you lean into and work through your anxiety, the better you will function as a self-differentiated leader."[66] Understanding this is helpful for leaders to engage with peer groups where it is safe to be accountable and transparent. The work can be difficult and perhaps even threatening, but it is necessary to becoming self-differentiated.

Give people space to self-define. One of the rules of engagement when dealing with conflicting points of view is to seek understanding over consensus. It is a powerful principle to acknowledge another's point of view without requiring them to agree with your own. The conversation of a leader who exhibits a non-anxious presence will be more about asking and listening than telling and convincing. Proverbs 18:13 says, "He who answers before he hears; it is folly and shame to him." The Hebrew word for "hears" means "to hear with understanding."[67] A non-anxious leader can provide emotional space for others to define their own position when the leader exhibits genuine curiosity.[68] When the leader seeks to understand it allows others to feel heard. If the leader is self-defined in that they hold their position in a non-anxious way, and allows others to hold their positions even when they do not agree, it creates a safe space for both parties to have an honest conversation. The point is to allow conversation, or "process," rather than

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[66] Ibid., 77.

[67] James Strong, *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2009), 118.

[68] Ibid., 63.

insisting on "content," or the agreement of ideas.[69] Process over content is key to being a non-anxious presence.

Do not "fix" others or take on their anxiety. When change is introduced, it is inevitable that triangles will form. People will manage their own anxiety by talking about others instead of taking to others. A leader may be tempted to try and "fix" the tension that results from a triangle by attempting to get directly involved with the members of the triangle. Such a move will only cause the leader to take on the anxiety of the people in the triangle. The non-anxious leader will feel anxiety and need to stay emotionally connected to the people, without taking on their anxiety. To do that, the leader's motive must not be to "fix" those who are triangling out of anxiety, but to stay emotionally close to them.[70] The goal is not to change content, but to create space for people to process. Richardson expressed this idea this way:

> Ed Friedman (1985), an early leader in applying Bowen theory to congregations, used to say that it is the job of leaders not to delegate responsibility but to delegate anxiety. I would go one step further and say, "Don't take it on at all. Leave the anxiety where it belongs." This is how I functioned in my clinical practice. The more dependent clients did everything they could to get me to take on the anxiety around their problems, to worry for them, and to come up with solutions for them. This is not helpful and it will not work. They were frustrated with me until they decided that their lives really were their responsibility. I talked with them about what they were thinking, but I did not do their thinking for them. Likewise, anxiety for the future of the church belonged to its members, not to me.[71]

A non-anxious leader is in some respects like a therapist. The job of a therapist is not to teach, direct, or instruct clients how to change their lives. Napier describes therapy

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[69] Shitama, 63.

[70] Ibid., 32.

[71] Richardson, *Polarization and the Healthier Church*, 109.

as a growth process where the clients find their own answers. He suggests that if they are told how to believe and behave, it will not last. He writes, "Therapy is a catalytic 'agent,' which we hope will help the family unlock their own resources. Therefore, we place great emphasis on the family's own initiative, assuming that if they cannot discover their own power to change themselves, therapy will have no enduring effect."[72] In the same way a successful therapist does not attempt to "fix" their clients, but gives them space to work out their own solutions, so a non-anxious leader allows people space to process their own feelings and ideas without corrosion.

Develop playfulness. Playfulness has the power to diminish anxiety. As Friedman says, "Anxiety's major tone is seriousness…its major antidote is playfulness."[73] Shitama says that "Anxiety is poison, and humor reduces anxiety."[74] Dianne Gammage explains the power of playfulness in her book, *Playful Awakening*: "Play is fundamentally a joyful, playful, fun experience, or it offers, at least, a welcome respite or escape from another situation, especially a distressing one. Whether it is frivolous play or solemn play, it has a pleasurable quality; it energizes us and takes us out of our everyday lives so that for a time we might forget our obligations."[75] A playful demeanor casts the leader in a non-anxious light; that he or she is not taking himself or herself too seriously, and thus, can diffuse the anxiety of the situation. Again, a leader has

[72] Napier and Whitaker, 62.

[73] Friedman, Emanuel, and Crimone, 209.

[74] Shitama, 78.

[75] Dianne Gammage, *Playful Awakening* (London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2017), 45.

to be intentional, self-defined, and self-differentiated to inject humor into an anxious situation.

Listen actively. An important skill to learn as a non-anxious leader is to ask coaching questions when challenged. Life coaches are taught that an important tactic in helping someone process through a situation is to practice "active listening." Active listening is when the coach pays attention to the sender's words, tone, and body language. The goal is not to listen in order to form a rebuttal or offer an opinion, but rather to follow one's curiosity in order to further explore the ideas and feelings of the other. A beginning coach can feel inadequate just listening, as a pastor may feel he or she has missed an opportunity if he or she does not explain the reasons for change when facing resistance. However, when a coach simply listens, it changes the atmosphere and creates a safe space where the other person can feel free to authentically express their ideas.[76] Keith Webb advises, "The coach does not provide content: the information, ideas, or recommendations. In coaching, the coach focuses almost entirely on the process, drawing out nearly all the content from within the coachee."[77] This approach requires a healthy curiosity that truly seeks to understand, rather than seeking to convince, positioning the leader to stay involved with a reactive person in a non-anxious way.

When people feel free to share their opinions, a non-anxious leader may also respond by acknowledging the other person's viewpoint and thanking the other person for sharing. There is no need to offer comment beyond acknowledgement and appreciation.

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[76] Tony Stoltzfus, *Leadership Coaching: The Disciplines, Skills and Heart of a Christian Coach* (Virginia Beach, VA: Coach22 Bookstore, 2005), chap. 11, Kindle.

[77] Keith E. Webb, *The COACH Model for Christian Leaders: Powerful Leadership Skills to Solve Problems, Reach Goals, and Develop Others* (Bellevue, WA: Active Results, 2012), chap. 2, Kindle.

This procedure allows the leader to engage in the process without arguing content: "It affirms their right to feel the way they do, however dysfunctional or threatening, without validating the logic behind the feeling."[78] That will help the leader not feel like she has to have an answer or response to every person's opinion or concern.

Anchor intentionally. Another technique that is helpful in maintaining a non-anxious presence is "anchoring." Anchoring allows the leader to create space in the moment so that his or her reaction to hostilities is non-anxious. One form of anchoring is deep breathing that focuses on the point of anxiety. It acknowledges the anxiety and objectively observes it, making a notation of where the anxiety stems from, and owning its reality. A long pause in a moment of tension may seem to produce its own anxiety, but "you should remind yourself that you don't have to respond immediately. It's OK to be thoughtful before you speak."[79] This is a method used in yogic practices. Pay attention to the parts of the body that feel the tension. The goal is not to try to change how it feels, but to acknowledge its presence. When one breathes deeply while concentrating on the point of tension, the body will automatically do the rest and relieve tension. This creates emotional and chronological space to respond in a non-anxious way.[80]

This method is not dissimilar from advice given by the apostle James when he wrote, "This you know, my beloved brethren. But everyone must be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger."[81] The Greek word, "ἀκούω" that is interpreted "hear" means to hear with understanding. The implication is that a quick response diminishes the

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[78] Shitama, 89.

[79] Ibid., 88.

[80] Shitama, 88.

[81] James 1:19.

likelihood of empathizing with the one who is sharing. To slow down, anchor and listen in order to understand will help one to face the hostilities that sometimes attend resistance to change.

To review; when pastoral leaders introduce change, it is important to understand that the congregation they are leading is a family system. The church is not a collection of individuals, but rather it is an emotional unit. Each member in a church functions in part according to their relationship with the others in the family system. Therefore, pastoral leaders are advantaged if they view the symptomatic individuals, not as problems to be fixed, but revealers of a troubled system.

Understanding the resistance that arises from introducing change as part of the family system is important to successfully navigate change. As family systems produce triangles, it is important to disentangle them while staying emotionally connected to those in the triangle without taking on their anxiety. Self-differentiation is also a major key to reducing anxiety in the family system as one successfully leads through the disruption that change produces. Closely connected to that is the importance of being a non-anxious presence. Anxiety is the alarm system that alerts a leader that reactivity is occurring. Therefore, it is imperative for the leader to know how to deescalate the anxiety in the system.

This chapter examined the signs of an anxious presence, whether there was an emphasis on playfulness or diagnosis. It also identified the necessary steps to become a non-anxious leader, including the importance of intentionality and the fact that a leader must do their own work in learning their internal programming from their family history. People also need space to self-define, meaning it is important not to try and “fix” people,

nor take on their anxiety. Instead, playfulness is a means of mitigating anxiety. Moreover, people can be engaged through process—being asked curious questions—rather than through content. Finally, anchoring is a means of centering oneself in an effort to respond to reactivity in a non-anxious way.

Each of these points of engagement can aid the leader in facing the resistance that comes with change in a healthy manner. However, there are other dynamics that ensue with reactivity. For example, people often resist change because of loss aversion. They are threatened more by forsaking the past than they are embracing an unknown future. Therefore, leaders who walk their people through change can learn to aid people through the process of letting go. Jesus sometimes drove change, as we saw in chapter two. However, there were also times when he nurtured change; he ministered to people in ways that helped them deal with their pain. For example, a leader can aid their people through the grieving process that is associated with loss aversion, as will be addressed in chapter six.

The final chapter will also examine how leaders can help their congregations by teaching them how to have healthy conflict. Triangles often occur because people are afraid to engage in conflict. They would rather talk about someone, instead of talking to someone. Pastors can aid the change process by teaching their congregation about how to engage in conflict, even before systemic change is introduced. They can also help their people engage in healthy conflict once the change has been introduced.

CHAPTER 5:

NAVIGATING CONFLICT AND PROCESSING GRIEF

This chapter examines the importance of navigating conflict in a healthy manner. Pastors who introduce change inevitably encounter conflict. Consequently, because it is important for the pastor and the congregation to know how to appropriately handle the conflict, they should receive training in this regard before any major changes are introduced to the congregation. Many pastors do not take the time to implement such training, possibly because they have had little to no formal training in conflict resolution themselves. This author interviewed a number of business professionals to ascertain the training they received in conflict management and compared it to pastors. After discussion of the findings, this chapter suggests ways to better prepare congregations to face the conflict that results from leading change in a church.

Pastoral Training in Conflict Resolution

In preparation for this dissertation, I interviewed eight people to learn of their training in conflict resolution and their present practices. Rev. Bonnie Eastlack serves both as the pastor of Jersey Life Wesleyan Church in New Jersey and is a supervisor in the Premium Services Department of the Philadelphia Phillies. Mr. John Tooley served as the superintendent of South East Schools in Wayne County, Ohio and also on the Wayne County Board of Developmental Disabilities. Dr. Charles Arn serves as the Missional Church Professor at Wesley Seminary in Marion, Indiana. Mrs. Chris Wall is a clinical supervisor for Aroostook Mental Health Center in Presque Isle, Maine. Rev. Alan Cullen is co-pastor of Mt. Pleasant Community Church in Mt. Pleasant, Michigan. Mrs. Penney

Siddiqui is a licensed clinical social worker that serves as a consultant to other clinicians and teaches graduate school at the University of New England. Rev. Scott Ritz pastors Northridge Wesleyan Church. Prior to that he was a manager at Polymer Technologies, a plastics factory in Ohio. Rev. Dr. Wally Hostetter, previously an undercover detective in Miami, is now Co-pastor of Mt. Pleasant Community Church.

I interviewed people from three different fields: pastors, human resource personnel, and counselors. My intent was to compare the levels of training in conflict resolution among the different professions. My suspicion was that counselors would have received the most extensive training in this area, followed by those in human resources, and finally, pastors. Though the scope of this survey is small and does not represent a true sampling, my suspicions were anecdotally confirmed.

I asked the same series of questions to each interviewee:

1. Have you ever received formal training in conflict resolution?
2. Do you use a particular model for conflict resolution? And if so, what particular model do you use?
3. What did the training look like? Was it a course, or something more extensive?
4. Can you walk me through the basic steps you use when leading people through conflict resolution?
5. Do you believe conflict resolution is different in the church than in the business world? And if so, in what ways is it different?
6. If you served in both the business world and in the church, how did your training in the business community differ from your training in the church?

7. If giving advice to a new pastor, what would to tell him or her about dealing with conflict?
8. What are the most important principles to practice when dealing with conflict?
9. What is the most important thing a leader should avoid when dealing with conflict?

I used these questions to try and get to the heart of pastoral preparation in regard to conflict resolution. My hypothesis was that there is little formal training in this arena. That seems out of balance when so much in terms of pastoral leadership is about initiating change, which inevitably produces conflict. Conflict in pastoral ministry is a way of life.

Training

I began by examining the level of training each interviewee had in conflict management. I wanted to compare the amount, degree, and content of training between the business professionals and pastors, curious to know if the training for pastoral ministry was similar to that of the business professionals, or if there were gaps in their preparation. I was also curious to learn the kinds of training they received; whether it was classroom settings only, or if there was supervised mentoring as well.

Those in the business professions experienced more training than the pastors, and their training was more targeted. Superintendent Tooley had forty-four semester hours for training as a school administrator. A section of his coursework focused on conflict resolution, managing staff, and community resolution. Clinical Supervisor, Mrs. Wall was trained through a program titled High Performance Teams. Her training focused on

conflict resolution and involved classroom instruction, role-playing, supervised coaching, and mentoring. Professor Siddiqui's training focused on the principles of relationships, including conflict resolution. She participated in role-playing with supervised debriefing sessions. The trainings for each of these professions were similar.

The pastors, however, had varying experiences. Rev. Eastlack had no formal training in conflict resolution, though she has taught the topic as a motivational speaker for many years. What she learned was gained through experience and reading books. Similarly, Dr. Hostetter had no conflict resolution training in seminary. Rev. Ritz also received no conflict training during Bible college. Instead, prior to becoming a pastor, he received his training from a course he took from Kepner-Tregoe—an organization that teaches leadership and problem-solving—when he worked at Polymer Technologies. Rev. Cullen has two masters' degrees in Biblical theology: one from Grace Seminary in Indiana and one from Liberty University. Of all his coursework, he only had two classes that touched on conflict, and he felt they were poorly taught. Thus there is little attention on conflict management in the preparations and training for pastoral service. This was further emphasized when I interviewed Professor Arn about the conflict management classes taught at his seminary. He teaches a class focusing on change and empowerment, which includes one section on conflict resolution. According to Professor Arn, this was the only class at both Indiana Wesleyan University and Wesley Seminary that focuses on conflict resolution.

Clearly pastors received far less formal training than did the business professionals. Some of those from the counseling and human resource backgrounds have also worked within the church, and have stated that conflict in the church is far more

difficult than in the business world. This reality raises a concern as to why the pastoral training in this area is so minor when the challenges are so great?

The Approach Used in Conflict Management

The approach used in conflict management for the business professionals was fairly consistent. Superintendent Tooley worked to include as many people in the decision-making process as possible with as much transparent communication as possible in an attempt to diminish as much conflict ahead of time as possible. When there was conflict, he brought the individuals together and sought to objectify everything, looking for the facts and defining them in a behavioral way. He then explained the mission of the school, which focused on the education of the children. He gave the responsibility back to the parties to determine their own resolution in light of the school's mission. Superintendent Tooley said as soon as he was aware of a complaint, he immediately dealt with it. Comparatively, Clinical Supervisor, Mrs. Wall uses dialectical behavioral therapy when addressing conflict. This includes creating a safe space, inviting everyone involved into the conversation, explaining why everyone is present, setting ground rules, thanking everyone for coming, and gathering the facts. She seeks to clarify so that everyone is heard and understood. Professor Siddiqui's methods are similar as she emphasized face-to-face conversations.

The approach of pastors was all over the board, depending on the books they read or the experiences they have had. Rev. Eastlack focuses on tests that identify personality types, like the Meyers-Briggs, or temperament analysis, to understand the "difficult personality." She then teaches communication skills to understand how to deal with

"difficult" people. She developed her own model of leadership, which she said was a part of her approach to dealing with conflict. She summarized it in four phases: ask, persuade, demand, and threaten. She first asks for something to be done. If it is not done and a conflict arises, she then persuades by explaining the reasoning behind the decision. If the issue is still not resolved, she demands by giving specific directives. The final step is to threaten termination. Rev. Eastlack said this final step is only used at her work with the Phillies organization. She did not have a clear idea on what to do at this point when working in the church.

Rev. Cullen said as soon as he hears of any disunity, he chases after it. He described himself as being a "hardcore Matthew 18" person, meaning he follows Jesus' directive to go immediately to the one we are in conflict with and talk to them face to face. Rev. Ritz said that when he is in conflict with someone, he seeks to talk with them one-on-one. Before meeting, he said he reviews the issues, tries to anticipate the other person's position and any objections to his position they may have so that he can counter them with a well-thought out response.

The training the business professionals received seems to have directed their efforts toward listening in an attempt to discover understanding and common ground. The goals for the business professionals were focused on the people and where they were in the process. The pastors, however, indicated that conflict was something to be dealt with in order to move the mission and vision forward. Their approaches seemed to indicate a desire for conformity and agreement, rather than understanding and reconciliation.

Difference Between the Business World and Church

Everyone agreed that conflict in the church is much harder than in the business world because parishioners are volunteers, whereas employees are more invested because their livelihood depends on it. They also agreed that dealing directly with conflict in the church feels unloving—though each believed it was the most loving thing to do. As a result, the pastors expressed that people in the church are reluctant to address conflict. The business professionals also agreed that expectations within a church community may cause people to be reluctant to deal directly with conflict.

Those in ministry received the least amount of training in conflict resolution, yet church seems the more difficult place to deal with it, and the necessity to introduce change guarantees that it be a major part of pastoral ministry. One of the key factors in leading a congregation through change is helping the congregation process conflict in a healthy manner. Taking time to process conflict is part of nurturing change, as opposed to driving change. Nurturing change is about ministering to people during the tension, realizing that relationships are a higher priority than the accomplishment of the proposed changes. In fact, change, and the conflict that inevitably results, is more than a goal for congregational progression. Instead, it is an opportunity to build and reinforce relationships.

Engaging in healthy conflict has several components. This chapter seeks to explore each of these. First, the leader needs to prepare his or her own heart to ensure he or she is in an emotionally healthy state. Second, the leaders need to understand how conflict can escalate into a fight. Finally, the leader needs to practice rules for healthy engagement.

The Need to Attend to One's Own Heart

Before a leader can nurture peace in the hearts of his or her congregants, she or he must work to make sure their own heart is at peace: "If we are going to find lasting solutions to difficult conflicts or external wars we find ourselves in…we first need to find our way out of the internal wars that are poisoning our thoughts, feelings, and attitudes toward others. If we can't put an end to the violence within us, there is no hope for putting an end to the violence without."[1] When our heart is at war with ourselves or with others, it makes conflict resolution nearly impossible. Research suggests that parents, for example, who are in a state of war with a spouse, "tend to have poorer relationships with their children."[2] Therefore, conflict in one relationship affects the ability to successfully navigate through conflict in another relationship.

When a person is in conflict with him or herself, their way of being predisposes them to continued conflicts. Philosopher Martin Buber described the orientation of such a person as an "I-it" or "I-Thou," meaning they regard others as either people or objects.[3] When others are viewed as objects, they are depersonalized so that they represent obstacles to overcome or challenges to win. In this state, objectivity is obscured.[4] In fact, until a leader sees the person on an opposing side as a person, he or she will not be able

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[1] Arbinger Institute, *The Anatomy of Peace: Resolving the Heart of Conflict*, 2nd ed. (Oakland, CA: Berrett-Koehler, 2015), 66.

[2] Stefanos Mastrotheodoros and Jolien Van der Graaff, "Interparental Conflict Management Strategies and Parent-Adolescent Relationships: Disentangling Between-Person From Within-Person Effects Across Adolescence," (2018): DOI:10.1111/jomf.12528.

[3] Arbinger Institute, 32.

[4] Ibid., 37.

to enter into the other person's concerns, nor empathize with their feelings, both of which are necessary if one is to successfully talk through conflicting issues.[5]

Researchers at the Arbinger Institute refer to this state of mind as being in a box. A person is boxed into a myopic view of the world and themselves, which hinders any objectivity. A leader may have been "boxed in" in an entirely different relationship, but unless they are set free from the box, they will take their preconceived notions with them into other relationships.[6] In the narrative drama The Arbinger Institute used to explain the concept, they wrote,

> To the extent I'm in the box toward others, my beliefs about their need to change might actually be mistaken. Maybe my spouse isn't as unreasonable as I've been thinking, for example. Or maybe I've been overreacting toward my child. Or maybe the other team at work actually has some things right. I won't be able to tell the difference between what changes would be helpful and what changes would simply be helpful to my box until I get out of the box.[7]

Deliverance from "the box" requires a combination of steps. One must first understand how they got into the box. Often when faced with options to behave toward another in a particular way, if one chooses the non-loving posture, they will have an innate drive to justify their choice. That justification often involves denigrating the other. One can recognize those tendencies in themself when they are sensitive to self-justifications, and blaming and criticizing others.[8] Self-honesty is necessary to reorient one's perspective. Repentance for dehumanizing another is another crucial step in getting out of the box. Commitment to understand their position and emotions as another fellow

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[5] Arbinger Institute, 37.

[6] Ibid., 134.

[7] Ibid., 209.

[8] Ibid., 201.

human being is crucial. Such overtures toward one on the opposite side of an issue require a high level of self-differentiation. When faced with conflict it can be easy to get caught in the emotional vortex of the situation. A self-differentiated leader is one who can engage with those in a reactive state by staying emotionally connected enough to maintain relationship, while staying distant enough to avoid taking on the other person's anxiety.

A Leader Must Understand How Conflict Escalates into a Fight

Stephan Proksch examines the process through which opponents pass as tensions escalate to the point of war. It begins with both sides being entrenched in their positions: "The parties are no longer prepared to relinquish their points of view when they are confronted with new arguments."[9] The next phase is debate, with each side trying to convince the other to their point of view. The other side is seen as an opponent to be beat. From that point forward, the parties try to enact their will without the cooperation of the other side. The people on the other side of the issue are no longer seen as people, but as problems and hindrances to the goal. They must be conformed or removed. The steps degenerate from there to the point of seeking harm toward the other side.[10]

Though these steps were outlined for the business world, they are not unlike the conflicts that ensue in churches fighting over proposed systemic changes. The pastors I interviewed characterized conflict as a contest that needed to be won. Though it does not

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[9] Stephan Proksch, *Management for Professionals* (Vienna, Austria: SpringerGabler, 2014), 7.

[10] Ibid.

seem "Christian," such reactions are a part of human nature: "When I violate the sensibility I have about others and how I should be toward them, I immediately begin to see the world in ways that justify my self-betrayal. In those moments, I am beginning to see and live crookedly, which creates the need within me to be justified."[11] Such a state will easily escalate into hostilities because people respond to another's regard of them, whether they are being seen as a person or an object, even more than the words or actions the other person is sharing. If someone is at war internally, then even if they say "the right things," their objectification can be sensed and will create barriers to any resolution.[12] The Arbinger narrative explains,

> Generally speaking, we respond to others' way of being toward us rather than to their behavior. Which is to say that our children respond more to how we're regarding them than they do to our particular words or actions. We can treat our children fairly, for example, but if our hearts are warring toward them while we're doing it, they won't think they're being treated fairly at all. In fact, they'll respond to us as if they weren't being treated fairly."[13]

A Leader Must Practice the Rules of Engagement

Once a pastoral leader begins the negotiation process, there are certain "rules" that aid him or her in navigating through the conflict. All conflicts arise from unmet expectations. The apostle James asked, "What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you? Is not the source your pleasures that wage war in your members? You lust and do not have; so you commit murder. You are envious and cannot obtain; so you fight

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[11] Arbinger Institute, 132.

[12] Ibid., 139.

[13] Ibid., 39.

and quarrel. You do not have because you do not ask."[14] The expectations of others fall into four general categories. Picture a square with four quadrants. The upper left square represents expectations that are both known and realistic. The upper right square represents expectations that are unknown, but realistic. The bottom left square represents expectations that are known, but unrealistic and the bottom right square is expectations that are both unknown and unrealistic.[15] The right-hand column represents expectations that are unknown. The first goal in negotiations is to move to the left-hand column, so that all expectations are known, regardless if they are realistic or not. That means that the initial goal in negotiations is to seek understanding over agreement. With such a goal, the conversation should be more about listening and asking than telling and convincing.

This approach suggests the importance of doing some preliminary work before the negotiation. A leader might benefit from taking the time to analyze their motives, their expectations and what they hope to achieve via the conversation. It is also important to consider the expectations and motives of those on the other side of the negotiation.[16]

Another important "rule of engagement" is face-to-face confrontation. When Jesus spoke of confrontation, he prescribed a private encounter between opposing parties: "If your brother sins, go and show him his fault in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother."[17] The phrase, "in private," is alternatively translated, "between you

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[14] James 4:1–2.

[15] This graph was shared with me by my District Superintendent, Rev. Peter Moore. I asked him the source of the graph and he said he has used that material for over 20 years and has no idea of its source.

[16] Proksch, 4.

[17] Matt. 18:15.

and him alone."[18] Aside from the courtesy of sparing someone the embarrassment of a public encounter, face-to-face engagement stimulates "the prefrontal cortex," thus diminishing the threat of limbic reactivity.[19]

When having the difficult conversations that often attend conflict, it will help the pastor to remember to use "I" statements, rather than "you" statements: "An I-statement has the advantage that you are not blaming your counterpart, but are speaking about yourself. You are not telling your colleague how to behave or encroaching on their autonomy."[20] "I" statements allow one to express their feelings in a non-inflammatory way, whereas "you" statements are accusatory and perceived as judgmental.[21] "I-Statements show that your statements come from you—your thoughts, feelings, and concerns—and are much easier for the listener to receive and respond to than finger-pointing, accusatory You-Statements, which are often expressed and received as flames."[22]

When discussing the topic at hand, it is important for the leader to stay objectively focused on the issue, and not allow the conversation to veer into focusing on the individual. When stating one's views, it is helpful for the leader to be objectively descriptive regarding the items that concern him or her. The leader should avoid general

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[18] Strong, 49.

[19] Richard Chambers and Margie Ulbrick, *Mindful Relationships: Creating Genuine Connections with Ourselves and Others* (Wollombi, Australia: Exiles Publishing, 2016), 9.

[20] Proksch, 8.

[21] Bento C Leal III, *4 Essential Keys to Effective Communication in Love, Life, Work—Anywhere.* (N.p.: Amazon Digital Services, 2017), chap. 7, Kindle.

[22] Ibid.

observations or conclusions about the topic. Rather, the leader is best served to stay focused on his or her experience and how the situation affected him or her specifically.[23]

It is also important not to interrupt the other person. Interrupting indicates the leader is not listening to gain empathy, but rather to identify talking points to rebut an argument. This behavior escalates tension, causing the reptilian brain to redirect blood flow away from the neo-cortex and into the extremities of the body, thus preparing the individual for a flight or fight response. This also indicates one is making assumptions: assuming the listener knows what the speaker is going to say, or assuming the listener knows the motives of the speaker. Such behavior is condescending and escalates conflict.

It is also important to keep the volume level conversational. Elevated levels raise tension, which exacerbates limbic reactivity. A reasonable volume level demonstrates respect and shows sensitivity toward the other person:[24] "A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger."[25]

One of the most important rules of engagement when walking through conflict is to practice active listening. Active listening reframes the motivation of the listener. The goal is not to hear enough to form a response, but rather to listen for understanding and empathy. Before the conversation begins, an active listener centers him or herself to ensure they are prepared to listen at a level deeper than the mere words that are exchanged. The active listener seeks to view the situation from the speaker's perspective, to listen beyond the words and focus also on emotion, feelings, tone, and intent.[26] Active

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[23] Proksch, 8.

[24] Leal, chap. 7, Kindle.

[25] Prov. 15:1.

[26] Leal, chap. 5, Kindle.

listening means reiterating what the listener thinks they heard the speaker say. Rephrasing the other person's statement clarifies if the listener heard what the speaker meant to say, and gives the speaker insight as to how they are being perceived.[27] It also slows the pace of the conversation in that the listener is not focused on mentally assembling a rebuttal. Instead, it assures that the listener is present in the moment, seeking emphatic understanding.

Active listening is a discipline that takes intentionality. The mind is easily diverted into many activities that mitigate active listening. The mind processes faster than the ear can hear, so there is a danger of trying to conclude the other person's thoughts and formulate a response before they actually finish speaking. The listener can quickly make assumptions about what the speaker trying to say. Also, if one is not intentional about listening, the mind can filter out the information one does not wish to hear. In addition, it is tempting to make judgments about the other person instead of seeking to understand.[28] There are many diversions that seek to derail effective communication. Therefore, the pastoral leader needs to be intentional about actively listening to the other. In the face of limbic reactivity, this takes discipline and maturity.

Aside from aiding communication, active listening serves to validate the other person. Validation is a significant tool in helping to decrease reactivity: "Validation (in the context of interpersonal skills, anyway) is the act of recognizing and affirming the validity or worth of a person's emotions…Effective validation has two components: It

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[27] Leal, chap. 5, Kindle.

[28] Ibid., chap. 6, Kindle.

identifies a specific emotion, it offers justification for feeling that emotion."[29] It is not necessary to agree with the other person in order to validate them. Rather, validation is about understanding the emotion someone is feeling and justifying their feelings. This goes deeper than a reiteration of words, which alone can feel inauthentic. Validation seeks to empathize with the other person and acknowledges that whatever emotion they are feeling, their feelings are legitimate.[30]

Imagine a pastor eats lunch with a parishioner. During the conversation, the congregant shares that they are disturbed because of the recent change in the church's schedule, moving the worship service from 11:00 a.m. back to 10:30 a.m. The natural tendency might be to offer reassurance: "I'm sure in time you'll get used to the new time. After all, it's only a half hour adjustment." Another approach might be to suggest some kind of advice: "Maybe you could start a new ritual with your family. Go to breakfast on Sunday mornings. About the time you finish up, it would be time to go to the worship service. The time change could end up being a win-win for your family." Though both of those approaches may be true, they do not serve the individual who is struggling with the changes.

Instead, the pastoral leader can seek to validate the individual by acknowledging the parishioner's emotional state and justifying how they feel: "I don't blame you for being upset. It is going to require you to alter your long-standing routine." The leader has not "solved" the problem of the congregant but does demonstrate that he or she

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[29] Michael S. Sorensen, *I Hear You: The Surprisingly Simple Skill Behind Extraordinary Relationships* (Lehi, UT: Autumn Creek, 2017), 25.

[30] Sorensen, 51.

understands how the other person is feeling. This is the first step to nurturing change, because it helps the congregant feel heard, and also serves to limit reactivity. In fact, a 2011 study demonstrated that validation serves to reduce reactivity, more than reassurance or advice:[31]

> Participants were asked to complete a number of difficult math problems during a short period of time, and then asked to report their emotional state (e.g. stressed, embarrassed, confident, etc.). The facilitator then responded with either a validating or invalidating comment. If the participant expressed frustration, for example, the researcher would respond with a comment such as, "Whoa, other people were frustrated, but not as much as you seem to be" (invalidating), or, "I don't blame you—completing math problems without pencil and paper is frustrating!" (Validating). Participants were then asked to complete a second round of arithmetic and once again report their feelings. Their emotions were once again validated or invalidated, and the process was repeated a third and final time. Researchers measured participants' response to the stress and feedback by tracking their heart rate and skin conductance levels (SCL), common measures of physiological response. When the experiment was complete, the data was gathered and analyzed, and trends, correlations, and insights recorded. Perhaps unsurprisingly, participants who received invalidating responses showed a gradual increase in SCL, a prolonged stress response, and a steady increase in heart rate. They also reported regular increases in negative feelings after each round, despite being told, "not to worry." In other words, they were worrying, and they really weren't enjoying the experiment. Participants who had their emotions validated, however, had entirely different results. These individuals showed a significantly lower trajectory of SCL, reported non-significant changes in negative feelings, and actually showed a steady decrease in heart rate over the course of the experiment.[32]

Another way to lesson reactivity is to pursue one's curiosity by asking meaningful questions. One of the first tempting questions, however, is "Why?" Though it seems like a question that will cut to the heart of a matter, it instead places barriers in the relationship as it connotes judgment and accusation. It takes one out of family systems thinking and into analysis, which will serve to raise tensions:[33] "The focus is lost because

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[31] Sorensen, 26.

[32] Ibid.

the question assumes that the cause of the person's behavior exists within that person. The question shifts the 'locus of control' from the relationship to one person. One person does not withdraw because the other pursues anymore than the other pursues because one withdraws. It is a process that transcends a 'why' explanation that is contained within either individual."[34] There is an innate desire to have an answer to the question "Why." Forcing that question, however, will not lead to resolution or understanding. It will only serve to erect barriers.

A coaching model that asks open-ended questions serves to aid the leader in exploring the perspective of the other individual in the conflict. How, when, where, what, and who questions open the dialogue. They also interrupt the tendency to seek quick solutions or formulate objections for the purpose of persuasion. Looking back to the example of the parishioner who is upset about the time change in worship, the line of questioning could go in two different ways. First, the pastoral leader could ask why the person is upset, indicating that the problem is with them and that they need to find a way to adjust their disposition. The parishioner would likely feel that the leader is condescending. It would serve the leader better to ask questions that follow one's natural curiosity: "In what ways will your routine have to change with the new schedule?" or "How will these changes inconvenience you?" These kinds of questions open the parishioner to share their feelings and get to the heart of their struggle. Often the difficulty with the changes is not really about the specific change, but rather the anxiety that change introduces into the nuclear family and church family systems.

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[33] Kerr and Bowen, 61.

[34] Kerr and Bowen, 61.

Active listening and thoughtful questioning also has the additional benefit of creating pauses in the dialogue. Chambers reminds the reader that when reactivity is detected in the speaker or the listener, a pause in the tempo of the conversation can help to slow down reactivity.[35] Reactivity has natural patterns of escalation. Breaks in the pattern can disrupt escalation and allow one to make wiser decisions in the face of reactivity.[36] Pausing to anchor also allows one to stay emotionally present in the conversation, and reminds the listener to seek empathy. Even when resolution cannot be achieved, research has shown that mindfulness aids the two individuals in the conflict to stay connected.[37]

A Pattern for Negotiations

The Arbinger Institute outlines a model for negotiating through a conflict using a triangle divided into six layers, each representing a strategy in the negotiation process. The bottom layer of the triangle is the first item to be addressed, then the next layer up, and so forth:

1. "Get out of the box," or "Obtain a heart at peace."[38] This is the first work that must be done by the pastoral leader, as described earlier in this chapter.
2. "Build relationships with others who have influence." Investigate the connections and relationships the other person holds dear. The implication is that one is interested in the person's life beyond the negotiations. In order to

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[35] Chambers and Ulbrick, 9.

[36] Ibid.

[37] Ibid.

[38] Arbinger Institute, 208.

work at this level, one must see the opponent as a person, rather than an object or a barrier to be overcome.

3. "Build a relationship." Here one seeks to develop friendship with the individual in the conflict. Self-differentiation is vital here.
4. "Listen and learn." This is where active listening plays an important part.
5. "Teach and communicate." Often this is the first strategy a pastoral leader initiates. He or she may begin by seeking to instruct the congregation concerning the need for change. However, this pyramid demonstrates that a great deal of foundational work needs to be done before this step. In fact, it might be beneficial to engage in the previous layers before the changes are proposed, as will be seen in the practical application that will be proposed in the conclusion of this work.
6. "Correct." This stage is when resolution is sought.

The theory of this approach is that if a leader is stuck at any level, the appropriate strategy is to go back down to the previous level and rework that level. For example, if the "listening and learning" level is at a standstill, the agenda at that point is not to try harder to convince the other person. Rather, it is to step back to the previous level and work harder at "building the relationship."[39]

Safe Space to Allow Room for the Grieving Process

Another important component of leading through change is to create safe spaces that allow people to process through the grief that normally accompanies change. When

[39] Arbinger Institute, 218.

Jesus drove change, he intentionally provoked reactivity. His ultimate objective was not only to introduce systemic change, but also to bring about his death. However, when Jesus nurtured change, he took on a pastoral role. He worked with his disciples in private, safe environments to give them time to process, deal with their emotions, and learn. Pastors will find the change process easier if they can also create safe spaces for their congregants to process the changes.

Creating the category of "social space," can provide opportunity for congregants to freely share their thoughts and views. In her book on leadership, Dr. MaryKate Morse writes, "It is in social space where the potential for deep change can occur because everyone's true character is observed and engaged."[40] Safe settings of "social space" are invaluable, especially if the leader is present, because reactivity from proposed changes will often spiral to a place where the leadership's motives and intentions are cast in a negative light, if there is no place for the people to process their feelings.

In her book, *Making Room for Leadership*, Dr. Morse presented a table that categorized the positive and negative effects of social power. There are specific positive effects of each kind of power: expert power results in shared knowledge and mentoring; character power results in caring for others and justice; role power results in encouragement and networking; and culture power results in an openness to growth and change. Those are often the very motives of leaders who are seeking to guide their people through change. However, when change is resisted, those opposing the changes tend to interpret the leader's actions according to the negative effects that are listed by Dr.

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[40] MaryKate Morse, *Making Room for Leadership: Power, Space and Influence* (Downers Grove, IL: International Varsity Press, 2008), 72.

Morse. For example, a leader may hope to share knowledge and is motivated to mentor, but those opposed to the change may interpret his or her actions as controlling and judgmental. Instead of caring for others and justice, the leader may be seen as manipulative and motivated by personal advancement. Rather than being encouraging, those opposing him may feel like they are being punished, or excluded from the center of church life.[41]

Those kinds of suspicions will likely degrade into harmful behaviors. Often members of a congregation who oppose the changes will employ a divide and conquer strategy, seeking to gain allies. Some result in bullying others into compliance. Often there will be "secret meetings; petitions meant to split the congregation; a few speaking for many (as in, 'lots of us think'); dissemination of false information, rumors, and innuendo; and a host of other less than Christian behaviors."[42] The temptation is to judge those engaging in such reactivity as carnal or as "bad people."

Reactivity is painful, but often these behaviors are driven by grief as a result of congregational change. People are trying to manage the grief process. In his book *Thinking Fast and Slow*, Daniel Kahneman identifies a heuristic that he calls "loss aversion." Kahneman writes, "System 1 thinking [thinking driven by instinct] compares the psychological benefit of gain with the psychological cost of loss and the fear of loss

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[41] Morse, 47.

[42] Anita L. Bradshaw, *Change and Conflict in Your Congregation (Even If You Hate Both): How to Implement Conscious Choices, Manage Emotions and Build a Thriving Christian Community* (Woodstock, VT: Skylight Paths Publishing, 2015), introduction, Kindle.

usually wins."[43] The struggle over change is not because people resist the new way of being or doing, but rather because they mourn the loss of what was.

Elisabeth Kübler-Ross identified five stages of grief people go through when facing loss, focusing on the trauma associated with death. To a lessor degree, people process through those same stages when congregational change results in loss: "denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance."[44] The temptation when leading change is to suppress these emotions for fear that it will spread limbic reactivity. However, if safe spaces are created where people can process their grief, it helps congregants move toward healing as "Grief is our reaction to a loss; it's our way of healing."[45]

Part of the grieving process is to ask many questions. Often when people lose a loved one, they want to know how it happened; why did it have to happen; was there any way to have stopped it; did they have any responsibility in the matter; could they have done anything to have altered the outcome.[46] These are the same kinds of questions that congregants ask once change is underway. The pastor can mistake such questions as repeated attempts to go back to the way things once were leading to avoidance on the part of the leader, or elevated stress if the pastor seeks to overcome the "objections." Often, however, the repeated questions are simply a coping mechanism for people dealing with

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[43] Erik Johnson, "Book Summary: Thinking Fast and Slow," accessed October 13, 2018, https://erikreads.files.wordpress.com/2014/04/thinking-fast-and-slow-book-summary.pdf.

[44] Elisabeth Kübler-Ross and David Kessler, *On Grief and Grieving: Finding the Meaning of Grief Through the Five Stages of Loss* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2005), 7.

[45] Stephanie Jose, *Progressing Through Grief: Guided Exercises to Understand Your Emotions and Recover from Loss* (Berkeley, CA: Althea Press, 2016), part 1, chap. 1, Kindle.

[46] Kübler-Ross and Kessler, 10.

the emotional trauma of loss. Empathetic listening in a safe space does more to bring about healing than trying to answer questions and swiftly move people forward.

Similar to asking questions, people often reminisce about the past. Reminiscence is a form of denial.[47] The first stage of grief is denial, which helps the grieving survive the loss: "Denial helps us to pace our feelings of grief. There is a grace in denial. It is nature's way of letting in only as much as we can handle."[48] Eventually the denial fades and the reality of the loss settles in.[49] Pastors can get annoyed at the people who insist on clinging to the "traditions of the past." In reality, their reminiscence is an indication they are still struggling emotionally with the sense of loss. Providing a safe space for people to process is a wise step in helping people deal with their emotional pain. Opening up such conversations is not a threat to forward momentum, but rather an important step in aiding the healing process. Those who drive change may see this as a hurdle, but the leader who seeks to nurture change can view this as an opportunity for further healing in his or her people.

Another stage of grief is depression. For those suffering the loss of a loved-one, it can express itself as apathy. It is a chore to get out of bed; "Life seems pointless."[50] In a church setting, once change has been initiated, an apathetic pall can also descend on the congregation. For example, People lose motivation to serve in the church, and pastors can mistakenly interpret this as backsliding. This was this author's congregation's own

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[47] Ibid.

[48] Kübler-Ross and Kessler, 10.

[49] Ibid.

[50] Ibid., 21.

experience. People lost motivation. It seemed like people were stubbornly digging their heels in to fight the changes they previously approved. In retrospect, it appears they were struggling with loss aversion.

The most effective approach to this reaction is time. People need to have time and space to process their grief: "Being open to grief means you acknowledge that it's in your life right now, and you are allowing yourself to react however you need to. In doing so, you do not try to avoid it or fit it in a specific mold of what grief should look like. You just accept what you are thinking and feeling."[51] This author's current church underwent significant changes prior to my hire. People were struggling with the new reality. In response, we scheduled a "listening tour" and recruited twenty individuals to open their home for a gathering of ten to twenty people. Congregants were invited to attend one of seventeen scheduled meetings where they could share their heart. We laid some ground rules, such as "We can talk to people, but not about people." Space was provided for people to share their feelings, while the pastoral staff engaged in active listening, without seeking to resolve issues or defend past actions. Instead, we listened and validated their feelings. The result was catharsis and healing. The simple act of being heard in a safe space by the pastoral leadership proved a significant step in the healing process.

We learned that the more people talked, the more they healed. Jose writes, "The emotional pain you are feeling will actually become less intense the more you acknowledge it. By not discussing it, you are giving the painful feelings more power over you. For long-term success, it is best to make the choice to experience your grief now."[52]

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[51] Jose, part 1, chap. 1, Kindle.

[52] Ibid.

Thus is it important for pastoral leaders to make room for people to process and express their feelings and thoughts. A non-anxious presence can help to make room for people to process, which is vital to the healing journey.

Another stage of grief often evident in limbic reactivity is anger. Christians are often reluctant to openly express anger because it is associated with sinful behavior. The apostle Paul wrote, "Be angry, and yet do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger."[53] His statement acknowledges that anger can be felt without sinning. His statement, "Be angry," is an imperative, meaning there is an expectation that one feels anger. Anger is uncomfortable for others, but it is necessary if one is going to heal from loss because anger covers a host of other emotions, which cannot be properly processed until the anger has been dealt with.[54] Kübler-Ross writes of anger, "The more you truly feel it, the more it will begin to dissipate and the more you will heal."[55]

When facing anger in his or her parishioners due to the loss that results from change, a pastor would be wise to keep the following in perspective:

> Anger might very well be a projection of the emotional pain you are feeling but are unable to express. Often it will come out directed at the family and friends who are your most supportive allies, and this can cause rifts in your relationships. When people feel vulnerable, they gravitate toward expressing anger, which they believe demonstrates their strength instead of their vulnerability. On the other hand, while trying to hold in all the other emotions you are having, you may become increasingly tense or agitated. When you are consumed with anger, little things might bother you and you may find yourself increasingly impatient, frustrated, and overwhelmed.[56]

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[53] Eph. 4:26.

[54] Kübler-Ross and Kessler, 12.

[55] Ibid., 1.

[56] Jose, part 2, chap. 5, Kindle.

Such outbursts can feel very personal. If a leader does not understand the dynamics of loss, expressions of anger, blame, resentment, and hate, can feel like personal attacks. If misinterpreted, one may be tempted to lash back or to avoid—both tactics that lead to disaster. If a leader understands the dynamics of the grieving process due to loss from change, then he or she can proceed with a greater level of understanding. Such knowledge may help the pastor behave in a more self-differentiated way. Giving people space to process their grief; providing a safe, judgment-free environment to express one's feelings; and learning to guide people through conflict in a healthy manner serves the pastor who wishes to nurture his or her congregation through change. This paper will conclude with some possible steps forward in helping churches to achieve that goal.

CHAPTER 6:

MOVING FORWARD

In chapter one, it is seen that pastors often lead adaptive change in a technical manner, which only serves to exacerbate limbic reactivity in the congregation. This can lead to resistance that, at times, becomes hostile in nature. People are physiologically affected by anxiety that is introduced into the system. As a result, they often resist the change by seeking to halt or, sabotage it or by attacking the leader. Limbic states can spread between people so that reactivity can rapidly affect many within a congregation. Pastors who do not understand the dynamics of change resistance can mistakenly view such resistance as carnality or stubbornness. In such cases they may be tempted to avoid those who are hostile or fight back; neither of which helps nurture their people to a place of health.

Chapter two examined the methods Jesus used to lead change. Jesus appears to have led change in two different ways. At times, he drove change. It was seen that in these cases, his motives were twofold: he wanted to introduce systemic change, but also, he intentionally caused limbic reactivity in his opponents, the purpose of which was to provoke his ensuing death. At other times, Jesus nurtured change. He introduced systemic changes, but in a manner that shepherded his disciples. He would introduce the change and talk through the process in a safe environment with his disciples in order to help them navigate the change. The implication of this chapter was that when following Jesus' model for change, it would be wise to adapt Jesus' method of nurturing change, rather than driving change.

In chapter three, there is an examination of how change was often driven throughout the church history and that it resulted in hostile reactivity; many times, the resistance was violent. Martin Luther's story epitomizes the violent reactions that often accompany systemic changes. Reactivity is universal in that those who proposed changes during the Reformation were resistant to changes that were later proposed by the Anabaptists. This author's own Wesleyan faith tradition was borne out of change and yet, that same group of people resisted change at the turn of the century and are currently in a battle over proposed social changes. Resistance to change seems to be a common human trait, regardless of the issue, culture, or time period.

Chapter four examined some proposed solutions, ways to prepare the leader and congregation for change, and to nurture the congregation through change in a healthy manner. The first proposal was to understand how internal family systems work. Congregations are family systems, and understanding the inner dynamics of how a system functions aids the pastoral leader in knowing how to navigate the reactivity that will occur when systemic changes are introduced. It is important to understand how relational triangles form, how to disentangle a triangle, and how to avoid the formation of triangles. A leader must be self-differentiated and such a position on the part of a leader does more to bring balance to a disturbed family system than almost any other approach. It is also vital to be a non-anxious presence and operate in a non-anxious manner.

Chapter five explored the dynamics of healthy conflict. It is important for the leader to make sure she is at peace in her own heart first before addressing an issue. Leaders will benefit when they can resolve in their hearts that conflict does not have to be a fight, yet keep in mind how it can easily escalate into one. It will also be invaluable if a

leader can master the skills of healthy engagement such as face-to-face encounters, using "I" statements rather than "you" statements, staying focused on the issue rather than the person, to practice active listening and to seek validation when listening to another. Safe spaces are needed for people to process their grief over change in a safe environment and in a healthy way.

There are some practical steps moving forward. Before a pastor introduces change in his or her congregation, it is helpful for the pastor to do her or his own work, ensuring they know the condition of their own heart first. Is the pastor's heart at war? Is he or she functioning within a box that most likely will provoke opposition? Working through those issues is a necessary step in becoming a self-differentiated leader.

It may be helpful for a leader to teach his or her congregation about internal family systems so that people will understand the dynamics of change and how it affects a congregational system. Pastors should train their people how to engage in healthy conflict. Establishing safe environments for honest conversation is also recommended so that people will have a place to interact once changes have been introduced. Leaders need to give people time to process the grief that attends change, allowing ample time and space to work through the cycles of grief. This may also be a challenge to seminaries and Bible colleges and denominational organizations responsible for pastoral training, to augment their curriculum with teaching and training in the areas of conflict management, grief counseling, and the dynamics of internal family systems.

Change is necessary if an organization is going to continue to grow. However, the changes that are proposed in a church are never as important as the people who are being asked to change. Pastors are called to lead and develop people. A leader can see

congregants as a means to change, or they can see change as a means to nurture and build people. Change is almost always painful, but it can be beneficial, not only for the organization, but also for the individuals—as long as it is approached in a healthy manner.

Though the research is completed, my journey is not yet finished. I have grown as a leader in this process but am still in formation. It is my hope to continue my research. I plan to study further the means of developing self-differentiation. How does one become a non-anxious presence? Part of the process is in doing our own work, as Shitama had stated. What specifically does that work look like? What realities need to be explored? What truths need to be incorporated into a leader's life? One of the areas I believe will need to be explored is an understanding of a leader's identity in Christ. Self-differentiation will require one to know who they are and how God sees them so that their confidence rests in God's approval, rather than man's. My hope is to push further down that road to explore the practical steps to take in developing a self-differentiated style of leadership.

In terms of immediate practical application, I intend to take this material and develop it into a curriculum to teach church leaders and pastors these important concepts. If through the teaching of this material someone can avoid some of the heartaches I have walked through, then I feel like this work will accomplish a measure of what I had hoped it would. Also, once I complete the research mentioned in the paragraph above, I hope to eventually take that information and the research that backs this dissertation and turn it into a book. It would be my joy to write something that could help pastors lead change in a healthy manner.

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